Microsoft’s Project Bali Seeks to Give You Control of Your Data

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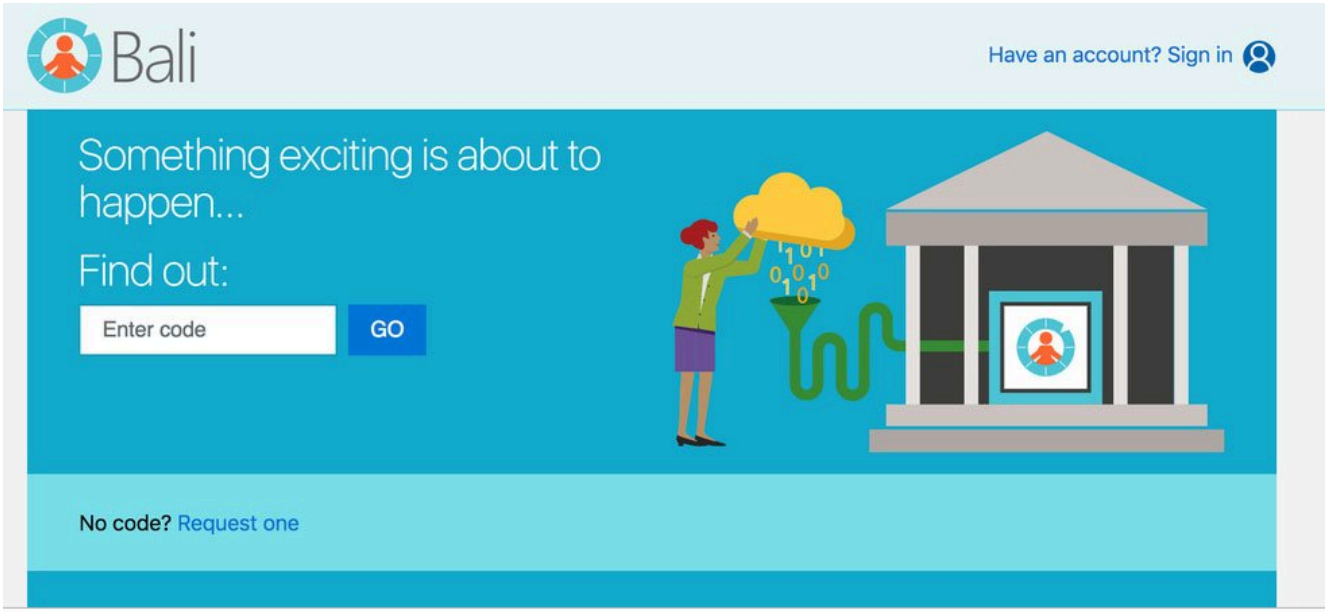
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Managing your personal data is hard. When the information is in the hands of dozens of websites and businesses, it can be difficult to know who knows what, and how it’s being used.

But Microsoft may have a solution. The company’s researchers appear to be piloting a new project that’ll let you control the personal data companies have on you through a single platform: a so-called “data bank.”

“With Project Bali, we propose a new personal data bank which puts users in control of all data collected about them,” the project’s website says. “The bank will enable users to store all data (raw and inferred) generated by them. It will allow the user to visualize, manage, control, share, and monetize the data.”

The project was initially spotted by a Twitter user who goes by the handle @never_released. But so far, Microsoft hasn’t officially commented on it.



The website for Project Bali simply states the effort is an "incubation project" from Microsoft Research, which has historically come up with technological innovations that were later offered as actual Microsoft products.

Project Bali is based on a paper Microsoft computer scientists published in 2014 about the problems of today's digital privacy landscape. Often times, people have no idea what data websites and businesses have on them, nor do they have a convenient way to find out, the authors wrote at the time.

The paper proposed changing this by creating an ecosystem that would allow consumers to see the data a given company had on them. Businesses actually have a good reason to do this, the authors wrote. Customers prefer dealing with companies that handle their personal data with transparency, rather than those that keep it confidential and shrouded in secrecy.

"As sharing back personal information gains ground, the need will arise to mine large amounts of customers' personal data on their (the consumers') behalf," the paper added.

Enter Project Bali. Currently, the platform is invite-only, but it proposes acting as a bank that will give you full transparency into how your data is used. Of course, there is a catch: you'll have to give Microsoft researchers' access to

some of your personal information, such as email addresses, so they can help manage it.

“We are still in initial stage,” the website for Project Bali reads. “In this stage, we are focused on helping the user aggregate personal data from various websites and have an ability to view the data.”

Not everyone may like the idea of Microsoft or another third party mining your personal information. But living in ignorance about your digital footprint isn’t a great solution either.

“Today hackers are in a much better position to find your inversely private information about you than you are,” the authors of the paper originally wrote. “Sharing that information with you should improve the situation.”

Ideally, the same access will also let you correct, rescind, or delete your personal information from a business or website. But time will tell if Project Bali can actually act as an antidote to today’s privacy woes.

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