All About Passwords
Creating Unique Passwords, Keeping Them Secure and Finding Lost Passwords

Why Are Passwords Required?

While you might consider them a pain to use, could you imagine if your Internet service provider didn't require them? If they didn't, anyone could log on to the Internet using your user-name. While that doesn't seem too dangerous at first thought, it could lead to you being blamed for something you didn't do, such as breaking user agreements and even doing something illegal. Certain Websites also require user names and passwords for services such as email and forums. If they didn't, then anyone could read your mail or assume your identity

Problem With Creating Easy To Remember Passwords

The passwords that you create should be something that no one could ever guess. Because you have to remember your password, the temptation to make passwords easy to remember is there and often leads to trouble. Creating passwords that contain your name or nickname, your dog's name or something that is commonly known are too easy for someone else to guess. Some people think that other people would never guess an easy password but you would be surprised how easy it is. I remember one time a co-worker was bragging that no one would be able to guess her password. It only took me two guesses - it was her dog's name. I knew her enough that, I knew it had to be her daughter's name or her dog's name because she talked about them so often.

General Rules For Creating Passwords

When passwords are required there may be different rules for each application. Generally passwords are:

- Case Sensitive - This means that the upper-case letter a (A) is not the same as the lower-case letter a (a).
- No Spaces Allowed - Most applications do not allow blank spaces in the word.
- Special Characters - Characters such as a tilde (~) may or may not be allowed. You will need to check the rules.
- Length - Most applications will tell you a minimum and maximum length of the password. Although you may be allowed to create a password that is four characters long, for security reasons it is recommended that the minimum length be eight characters.

Creating Passwords That Won't Be Easily Cracked

Here are some general guidelines to keep in mind when you create a password:

- Should be more than seven characters long
- Mix letters and numerals
- Use upper-case and lower-case letters
- Do not create a password that contains a single word that is in the dictionary
- Use phrases

Making Hard-to-Crack Passwords Easy To Remember

- Make passwords like the vanity plates on cars. For example: passwordsREZ (passwords are easy)
- Create a pattern when you create your passwords such as using upper-case letters for vowels and lower-case for consonants, so it would be easy to remember but hard to crack. The word "candy" would then be "cAndy". Or you could substitute letters for numbers. For example 1=I, 5=S, 0=O. Some people do not recommend creating these patterns but it will make it easy for you to remember. Remember though, that if you use a pattern and then someone finds out your password, you should then change your pattern for your new password.
- Use a phrase instead of a single word to make it a more secure password, such as "candy for you" which would be "cAndy4U" (contains capitalization from the above example).

Keeping Your Passwords Secure

- NEVER give out your passwords to anyone, including representatives from companies that call you. The only time you will have to give them a password is when you initially create a password or when you want to change it.
- Instruct your children to NEVER give out passwords and continue to remind them to do so. Children have a hard time keeping a secret; in fact, one time my daughter shared ours because it was such a neat combination! Also, one of my friend's children gave out their ISP user name and password to their friends so they could get Internet access (they thought they were being helpful). My friend was double-billed by her ISP for services because two computers were logged in on the same account, at the same time.
- Do not keep a list of passwords on your desk or in a file on your computer. There are however, some shareware programs that you can get that will store passwords for you but they use encryption technology so they can't be accessed.
- If you think someone might know your password, have your password changed.
- Change you passwords periodically. Some people recommend every six months.
- If someone is sitting near you when you have to enter a password, be sure to cover your fingers while typing it.

What To Do If You Forget A Password

Nothing can be more frustrating than forgetting a password! Here are some tips for what to do if you have forgotten a password.

- At Websites look for a link that says, "password reminder".
- Sign up for a new account at the Website if you can't access it.
- Contact their support department. Often they can reset your password.
- If you have forgotten your password for your ISP, contact their support department.
- Download a password recovery program. To get one, go to wwwzdnet.com and then search for "recover lost password" in PC Downloads.

Choose a Good Password

Choosing a good password is your first line of defense against password guessing and cracking programs. When selecting a new password DO

- Make the password at least 8 characters long. Shorter passwords are easily cracked.
- Intersperse upper and lowercase letters throughout the password.
- Include numbers and punctuation in the password.
- Choose a password that you can remember.
- Choose a password that you can type quickly. This step guards against someone finding your password by watching you type it.

DON'T

- Use any word in the dictionary.
- Use two short words separated by a symbol or numbers. This used to be recommended as a good way to choose a password, but many cracking programs now check for it.
- Use any proper name especially the name of a geographical location or famous person.
- Use a sequence of letters from the keyboard like "qwerty" or "ujmnhy".
- Use a sequence of numbers like "3456".
- Use the first letter of each word in a phrase from a published book, song or poem. This used to be recommended as a good way to choose a password, but many cracking programs now check passwords against famous literary passages.
- Use personal information in your password like your social security number; birthday; address; phone number; employee or student ID; or the first or last name of yourself, your family, friends or pets.
- Use a password related to a favorite hobby, TV show, movie, song or celebrity. Avoid any topic that people know you enjoy.

One good way to choose a password is to create an acronym that only means something to you. For example, use "*There are 03 paths to Dive into Work*" to get a password like "T03pDiWk".

How Can You Protect Your Password?

Never Tell Anyone Your Password

You should never need to tell anyone your password. One common trick people use to get passwords is to contact a user via phone or email, claim to be the system administrator and ask for your password to complete system maintenance or to simulate your working

environment. Your system administrator NEVER needs to know your password. They can completely reproduce your working environment using their root password.
Make sure no one is looking over your shoulder while you type your password.
If you work with someone it can be tempting to give him or her your password to make sharing files easier. In addition to being insecure, many companies will punish or fire employees who share passwords. Instead, contact your system administrator for a solution. The administrator can give the user a restricted account on the system if he doesn't have one already. Once you both have accounts on the system, the administrator can create a group and make you both members. Members of the same group can easily share files.

Take Precautions When Writing Down Your Password

Your system administrator will probably tell you to never write down your password. However, if you feel that you must, use the following precautions:

- Do not record the password in a computer file or program especially on the computer with the account, a computer from which you connect to the account, a computer that is connected to a network or in an email message.
- Do not identify the account with the password. In other words, the scrap of paper with the password should not include the machine name, your username, your real name or phone number, etc.
- Don't tape the password under the keyboard or anywhere else on the computer, the computer's desk or in an unlocked file cabinet. Ill-intentioned people will look for your password in these places like a thief looks for a key under the front door matt.

Change Your Password Often

On some systems your password will expire, forcing your to select a new one. On other systems, the same password will work forever; however, it is still a good idea to change your password regularly. You should change your password:

- Every three months or less.
- Anytime you suspect security has been compromised. For example, if you think someone saw you type the password.
- If you shared your password with someone who no longer has a need for it. (Note: I am NOT recommending sharing passwords.)