



On-line Passwords

Keep them OFF-line and SAFE

Passwords are essential to ensure Internet security, but when they are used frequently in other areas like banking there tend to be so many that it's easy to forget which gives access to what. The general advice regarding the creation of these "words" is to make them as long and complex as allowed, ideally a mix of numbers, upper and lower case letters, and intersperse these with dashes and symbols. The method is complicated and the end result is never likely to remembered, so people choose something familiar - birthdates, names of relatives, actual words that have a connection and are less likely to be forgotten. Unfortunately, hackers find this kind of password easier to crack than a string of random characters.

Something like 2FXt-p9W17-5s-3N64 is a lot harder code to break than "Joanne1983"; but it doesn't exactly spring to mind in a flash. The only way to remember any password for sure is to write it down. That's fine provided it is treated the same way as a PIN (Personal Identification Number) and the credit or bank card it is allied to – never keep the two together in the same wallet or purse. Neither should a password used on-line be stored on the computer that links to the Internet; not in a file, folder, or on the desktop. The safest place is an old-fashioned piece of paper or notebook kept somewhere handy.

Another thing to avoid is ticking that box which asks if you wish the website you are on to remember your password. It is easy, certainly, especially if it's a place you visit regularly; but to my mind it's a bit like hanging the key to your apartment on a hook outside the front door – anyone can get in. My suggestion is to decline the offer and stick with the handwritten notebook in the drawer of your workstation.

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