



I previously mentioned that the most common password used on computers is “password” as many users never bother to set their own. The bad guys know this. We need to worry far more for our security. Why?

Identity theft aims to steal money from your bank account. Even if you have little money, thieves could run up bills on your credit cards. The more you could lose the more care you should take about security.

Just as you wouldn't leave cash, valuables or your passport lying around at a holiday hotel, so you should keep your computer secure to prevent any access to personal information. You might visit web sites that require a username and password. You should use a different one for each site and another for your computer.

Naturally this raises a problem. How do you make good passwords that you can remember? Actually, that's two problems. What makes a good password and how do you remember them all?

What makes a bad password? One that can be guessed. Guessers can be surprisingly good at it. This eliminates birthdays, anniversaries, nicknames, pet names, favourite colour, and so on – including spelling them backwards and obvious derivatives. Your facebook profile should not provide any clues. (Housename, favoured holiday town or pastime.) Avoid any dictionary words as the baddies can use a computer to try them all.

So what makes a good password? One that can't be guessed. There are many password generators available and they will provide good ones that are not words and will mix in numbers and special characters including upper and lower case.

Unfortunately such passwords are impossible to remember, especially if you have many of them. There are applications that will remember them for you. You will need a good password for that program and you must be able to remember it or you will lose access to them all. And you need to remember a good one for your computer. If you “lose” your laptop, ensure it's useless.

Some users are satisfied that they can depend on their own system to construct and remember good passwords. Some ideas are in our website press archive for 2009 and you will no doubt be able to devise one that is appropriate to you personally.

One thought to bear in mind is that the programmes used to crack passwords have improved and are still improving. The best way to make life more difficult for those with evil intent is to use a longer password. Sometimes there are restrictions on the characters that can be used or rules such as a minimum number of characters.



Share passwords with no-one. Do not write it on a post-it note and stick it in your desk drawer. That's the first place they will look after checking the side of your monitor.