

COMPUTER GURU

By Don Benjamin

More Better Passwords

Passwords continue to vex us. Forgetting your password locks you out of your email, Facebook page, or online bank account, and recovering your password can be a daunting task if you haven't set up a recovery option. (Read on). On the other hand, you should never write down your passwords in a notebook.

Unfortunately, most online accounts require passwords with upper- and lower-case letters, numbers, and symbols, and folks have trouble coming up with memorable combinations that fit these requirements. I used to suggest passwords that use these combinations to create memorable words or phrases. For example, "Eye8aG00se!" ("I ate a goose") is 11 characters and (maybe) easy to remember, unless you don't recall whether the animal is a G00se or a M00se. A sophisticated computer program could figure this one out in a couple of days, which is pretty secure.



M00se



G00se

But how many of these clever combinations can we invent? It's not easy. There's a better way.

I recently subscribed to a password manager¹, which suggests passwords comprising strings of real, but normally unrelated, words separated by hyphens. Example: monkey-hotdog-vine.

The point is that this is a long password and not

hard to remember if you can picture a monkey with a hotdog swinging from a vine.



Monkey-hotdog-vine8

You can add an upper-case letter and number if needed: Monkey-hotdog-vine8 Now you have an 19-character password of real words that should fit most website requirements. And it's secure because there are a bazillion ways to assemble combinations of real words. Other possibilities: "ball-tango-relish" or "mailpost-doctor-teal." You can use words that relate only to you: "husband-don-incompetent" is one my wife uses, though some would argue this is a common phrase. You don't want to use "dogs-shed-profusely" because it's a sensible word combination that could be guessed. The article "How to Create a Strong Password (And Remember It)"² provides more information.

Password Recovery

Many websites (and most email sites) allow you to reset your password IF you've provided secondary contact information ahead of time. For example, if you add your smart phone number or another email address³ to your Gmail account, resetting your password initiates a text or email message from Gmail with a code that you enter on line to prove you're you. But you have to set up these options now. Then you can provide a new password, such as Pickle-bosco-charm⁹.

If you need help with your passwords, or anything related to "tech," simply stop by PSRC's Technology Lab on Tuesdays from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m., Wednesdays from 1:30 to 4, or Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.

¹ I use 1Password, but there are several other good services. Some are free.

² Hoffman, Chris. "How to Create a Strong Password (and Remember It)" May 29, 2015. www.howtogeek.com

³ A good reason to set up a second email account, even if you seldom use it.