

Passwords - How to Create a Great Secure Password for Everything!

by Ross Hendry

In the past month two disturbing reports have been made. Apple users have been advised that it is possible to crack Apple's password-storing keychain, break app sandboxes, and bypass its App Store security checks. Attackers can exploit these bugs to steal passwords from installed apps, including the native email client, without being detected.

Six university researchers were able to upload malware to Apple's app stores, and passed the vetting processes without triggering any alarms. That malware, when installed on a victim's Mac, raided the keychain to steal passwords for services including iCloud and the Mail app, and all those stored within Google Chrome.

Lead researcher Luyi Xing told El Reg he and his team complied with Apple's request to withhold publication of the research for six months, but had not heard back as of the time of writing. They say the holes are still present in Apple's software, meaning their work will likely be consumed by miscreants looking to weaponise the work. Apple was not available for immediate comment.

The second report in a security article on entrepreneur.com (www.entrepreneur.com/article/247387)

'On 16th June LastPass, a popular password manager program, just admitted it's been hacked. In a blog post published today, LastPass's Joe Siegrist writes, "The investigation has shown ... that LastPass account email addresses, password reminders, server per user salts, and authentication hashes were compromised." It's important to note that this breach does not mean that hackers have full access to the passwords of every LastPass user. What it does mean, however, is that if users use a weak master password or have used the same password for another website, there's a likelihood that hackers could gain access.'

So what are the most hacked passwords?

SplashData the company who provide SplashID, another password management application, have compiled a list on the most hacked passwords of 2014 and here it is :-

| No. | Password | No. | Password | No. | Password |
|-----|-----------|-----|----------|-----|----------|
| 1 | 123456 | 9 | dragon | 17 | access |
| 2 | password | 10 | football | 18 | shadow |
| 3 | 12345 | 11 | 1234567 | 19 | master |
| 4 | 12345678 | 12 | monkey | 20 | michael |
| 5 | qwerty | 13 | letmein | 21 | superman |
| 6 | 123456789 | 14 | abc123 | 22 | 696969 |
| 7 | 1234 | 15 | 111111 | 23 | 123123 |
| 8 | baseball | 16 | mustang | 24 | batman |

Ironically the 25th most hacked password was 'trustno1'.

Sadly having a weak password does not only affect the person whose created it, but potentially exposes those in their contacts list to the attention of the hackers. Having a weak password exposes all of us. Even if we do not get hacked, we could be the target of spam emails looking like they have been sent from the hacked account! I have seen examples of this, where the hacked person's very young grandchildren received pornographic emails, totally undesirable.

There are many web pages that will tell you how to create a secure password, See the full Microsoft page here windows.microsoft.com/en-gb/windows-vista/tips-for-creating-a-strong-password

or have a look at my password solution . .

One password for everything but it's simple to remember and to use and very tough, if not impossible, to crack. Here's how I do it

I like the idea of creating a secure password that forms the core of all of my passwords, let me give you an example:-

I chose a favourite poem, song or something only I am likely to know, for example, I like this from dear old Will Shakespeare ..

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day

I will take the first two letters of each word and exclude single letter words and the preposition - "to"

sh co th su da

This would probably do, however, they insist that you have to have capital letters, numbers spaces and even special characters on some sites, so we need to tweak it some more.

Lets substitute some letters with numbers so that...

sh co th su da becomes 5hC0th5uda

add a space for effect...

5hC0t h5uda

and you get a nice strong password, 10 characters plus 1 space.

You can then use this for all of your accounts simply by adding a prefix or suffix denoting to you which account or email etc you are accessing, this also gives you the opportunity to add a special character such as a '/' or '-' or '?'.

Let me show you some examples:

- For my bank account - 5hC0t h5uda/lyd - I am with Lloyds so I miss off the vowels and one of any double letters
- For my email account - 5hC0t h5uda/ggl - my email is with Google and the same rules above apply
- For my Amazon account - 5hC0t h5uda/AMUK or 5hC0t h5uda/AMFR - here I have a different password for my UK Amazon account than my French one.

The principle is quite simple. Create a really strong core word that you can remember, then use rules for the suffix or prefix that are consistent and you can have a different "un-crackable" password for every account without having to have a brain the size of a planet to remember them all.

I hope this helps, just remember to be consistent with your substitution and prefix/suffix rules and you will not have to worry about a password ever again.

Ross Hendry is the proprietor of Interface Consulting and Engineering, who has over 42 years experience in Communications, Computer Technology and Direct Marketing. (See advert below).

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