

Tip 7

Develop your system with secure passwords

A password is a string of numbers and letters used to verify your identity when you log into a computer system or access websites or other computers on the Internet.

If your business does not use passwords at all, or uses passwords that are easy to guess or easy to crack, then an intruder to your office, or someone who steals a laptop left in your car, will have access to your files, email, personal information, and business details. The intruder may modify or destroy your files, send email in your name, or subscribe to unwanted services which you would have to pay for.

You are responsible for securing data in the computer you use. The use of strong passwords acts as a deterrent against password guessing. The security of each individual user is closely related to the security of the whole system. Creating effective passwords can provide additional means of protecting the information on your computer.

What you can do

Develop a password protection system for your business. You and your staff should:

- avoid passwords that would be readily identifiable or easy for anyone to guess (such as family names, birth dates)
- use a mix of upper and lower case alpha, numeric and special characters
- memorise your passwords and make sure that you do not write down your password or store it in easy to find places or file on or near your computer
- use a completely new password every time you change your password and never reuse old passwords
- avoid using dictionary or foreign words because hackers have many tools, such as dictionary programs, to assist them. A hacker will launch a dictionary attack by passing every word in a dictionary (which can contain foreign languages as well as the entire English language) to a login program in the hope that it will eventually match the correct password
- never share your password with anyone
- never send your password via email
- change your passwords regularly, at least every three months.

What is password cracking?

Password cracking is the process of breaking passwords to gain unauthorised access to a computer system.