8 Ways to Protect Your Online Presence

Although the security opportunities available today are much more abundant than the days of the original internet, the online world is still a very dangerous place and can cause bad headaches for even the biggest companies that spend millions of dollars on security. This is partly because, with the popularity of social networks and increased creativity on the part of hackers, more people than ever are exposed to malicious viruses and spyware. Thankfully, there are some simple steps to protect yourself from the internet bad guys.

Follow these guidelines to prevent data theft:

1. **Don't Share.** One of the simplest and most obvious ways to protect your passwords is to simply not share them with anybody. Keep them a secret even from loved ones, especially children who have a tendency to pass them on to other people. If for some reason you have to share a password, be sure to change it as soon as that reason has passed.

2. **Diversify your Portfolio.** Protect yourself by using multiple passwords. Although most people do not do this due to the difficulty of remembering them, it is right at the top of important things you can do to increase safety. If you have to, write your passwords down somewhere and put them under lock and key, or add them to a simple spreadsheet and password-protect the spreadsheet. This way you only have to remember one password to get to all the ones you need. Be sure to keep your master password committed to memory and make it a strong one! See our first article in this series for effective **password creation techniques**.

3. **Keep it Encrypted Locally.** Whatever you do, don't store your passwords in a plain text file on your computer. It's one of the first places hackers will look when trying to break into your bank accounts. If your laptop is stolen, there is essentially no protection if your passwords are contained in an unencrypted text file.

4. **Keep it Encrypted in Transit.** Sometimes a password must unavoidably be sent or shared. Under these circumstances, use an encrypted method, such as **WordSecure** to send the password. Do not use standard email or even supposedly encrypted web-based email such as Gmail that uses an encrypted connection. Most webmail programs are only encrypted on your end of things. When you send the email, it goes to the recipient in plain text that can easily be read over the wire.

5. **Know Who You're Talking to.** On the internet there are some scams out there called "Phishing". This process entails hackers who send fraudulent emails trying to get you to respond and reveal your username and password.

6. **Don't be Lazy.** Saving usernames and passwords in your browser so they automatically are submitted to websites may be convenient, but it is not what you should be doing if you want to ensure the security of your information. If you walk away from your machine for a little while, or it is ever stolen, those sites, and your personal data may be accessed just by visiting those websites and clicking "Login"! Always be sure to password-protect your initial logon to your computer account as well.

7. **Strength in Numbers...and Special Characters.** Make sure to use at least eight characters when coming up with a password. Include some letters (both uppercase and lowercase), numbers, and special characters to decrease the likelihood of the password being revealed. (**Read more in Part I**)

8. **Personal Info Not So Secret.** NEVER, EVER include any personal information in the design of your password. People have a tendency to try to include personal information in their passwords because it's easier to remember. The name of your spouse, child, or pet should be considered off limits. Hackers are very good at guessing these or researching about you on Google to obtain clues, and you could be opening yourself up to identity theft. Try not to use common or simple words either.

With today's virus protection software and the proper use of password protection, you should never have a problem online. Sometimes people just forget to be safe until something bad happens, but through prevention you can save yourself many headaches later on, including lost hours, money, and time.