

Passwords and Dogs That I Have Known

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Let me preface what I am about to say by confessing that I am “technologically challenged!” Yes, I have come a long way in the last 10 years and have learned to function at a somewhat acceptable level on the computer. At least I can do most of the things I need to, which is basically handling e-mail and Word documents!

A new challenge (at least for me) arose several years ago with the advent of the password. With the ever increasing use of technology and the ability to do more and more things “on-line”, we were bombarded with “User IDs” and “passwords.” For me, it started out slowly back when I worked for the federal government and used the IBM System 36. My challenge – I COULD NOT REMEMBER MY PASSWORDS!

In the beginning, all that was required was a simple four-letter password that we had to change periodically. My memory system involved using either a body part or my most recent ailment – simple enough. Examples include “cold” or “flue” (sometimes I had to misspell the word to make it work), or I might use just plain “sick”. It was particularly easy for me to remember my password when a body part was ailing. After neck surgery, I used “neck.” After cataract surgery, I used “eyes”. After wisdom teeth surgery, I used “hurt” because teeth had too many letters. Then there was the password after hemorrhoid surgery, but we won’t mention that one.

Next came the implementation of the PC at work and Web-based programs. Passwords became a bit more complicated but were still manageable. Then we added more on-line databases, and User ID’s came onto the scene. Ever notice how User IDs are even more difficult to remember than passwords? There have been times that I knew my password but couldn’t use it because I had forgotten my User ID.

Now take the governments affinity for acronyms, mix it with technology, and the following came on like gangbusters. (“Gangbusters” makes a good password, so make note of it!)

At our agency, computer applications were given acronyms. There were COPS, TACACS, NITC, CAMS, SORS, ADPS, and SCIMS. And in the infinite wisdom of the government, they assigned User IDs we could never have come up with on our own! I think I remembered that my CAMS ID would work for my SCIMS ID. This would have been fine if I could’ve kept my acronyms straight.

And if keeping up with 15 User IDs and corresponding passwords wasn't enough (a true count by the way), there was a list of rules for the length of each password and what had to be included in them. Oh yeah, I forgot to mention that some had to be changed every 90 days, some every 60 days, some every 30 days, and some not at all. Some had to be 8 characters in length and some had to be 9. I will admit that increasing the number of characters above 4 did increase the choice of body parts and illnesses that I could use.

In a short period of time, I was up to a legal-size "yellow sticky" note full of User IDs and passwords, which I carefully stuck on my computer screen. Unfortunately, this method didn't work too well. I couldn't see my computer screen, and I was repeatedly told that placing my "sticky" note posed a serious security issue. So, I decided to devise another plan to help me remember my passwords.

I remembered that many years prior (before I decided to use body parts and illnesses as my four-letter passwords) I had used the name of my dog, Spot. I was elated to come up with such a brilliant plan. I would use the names of my dogs as passwords! Nobody can forget his or her dog's name!

I have a Heel-a-poo (red heeler-poodle cross) named Miss Lillie, so WHAM, in she went as a password. I quickly picked up two more dogs, Twister and Choco, and also used the name of my neighbor's mongrel, Chaos.

I was off and running – never to have a problem with passwords ever again! My system worked great until three things happened. First, more passwords came along, second, passwords had to be changed and couldn't be reused, and third, some passwords had to include numeric characters and even include !, @, #, \$, %, &, *, or ().

I handled the additional password requirements by simply getting more dogs. Let's see... there was Tiger, Sandbagger, Spike, Buster, Puddles, Dadgummit, Slickwillie, Beauracrat, Twospots, Threespots, Fourspots, and Nospots. Nospots was solid black, and I later changed his name to Blackie after 90 days when it was time to change my password. Ninety days later, I changed his name to Charcoal. I don't know what ever happened to this dog. I went out one night to call him home, and he never did respond. I think he had an "identity crisis".

I tried adding a cat, but Twospots didn't like cats. At least it gave me another 4-letter password for the System 36. I could use "gone" or "dead." I tried using "deadcat" but didn't like it. It was too morbid!

When the passwords that required numeric characters came along, I changed Twospots, Threespots, and Fourspots names to 2Spots 3Spots, and 4Spots. It didn't make them any difference, they still came when called.

The real problem came with the password that had to be 9 characters in length, include one character that was a number, one character that was a symbol, and one capitalized letter. This was the last dog I ever got. I named her M944!228?. She was a sweet dog but never did learn her name. And sad to say, she was never petted. Maybe it was because I couldn't remember her name, and therefore never called her.

When I decided to retire, I began to find good homes for all of my dogs. I have done rather well, and we are now down to two dogs – Miss Lillie and M944!288?. Miss Lillie was the first, so she was a natural to stay, plus she and I enjoy eating chocolate chip cookies and Blue Bell Ice Cream together. I couldn't break up a team like that! And I am happy to report that M944!228? will come running to me anytime I say a cuss word. She sure has been spending a lot of time in my lap lately – mostly when I am at the computer trying to keep up with the barrage of User IDs and passwords I use to log in to manage accounts with banks, credit cards, utilities, on-line retail accounts, on-line bill paying, and my government retirement account.

I have decided against using dog's names for passwords in the future. I'm too old to exercise any more dogs. I have reverted back to the big, yellow "sticky" on my screen. It still works for me!