Radio Days – 2014-03-15

Tip of the Week – Remembering Passwords

I often meet people who cannot remember important things like passwords. Passwords, of course, are not the only things which often manage to escape from the primordial soup of important information stored in your head. This sort of loss can be devastating for most users so I have patented a very simple method of avoiding the problem.

This simple solution to your needs involves storing your passwords on your computer. This, at first, may sound like a bad idea but, as with all revolutionary (and thus subversive) ideas, it becomes more obvious the more you think of it.

The Solution

The solution is simple: just create a simple *notepad* file with all sorts of useful information. Notepad is a simple text editor (like a very simple word processor) which creates .txt files. These .txt files can be read by many programs and are one of the earliest life-forms found on a computer. This means that they can always be read in the future.

A simple example would look like this:

```
Email
Username:    penny@wise.com.au
Password:    W1seP3nny

Banking
Username:    98765432
Password:    w1spny

Mobile
Number:      0456-789-321
Provider:    Videophone
Unlock key: 8520
```

You would then save this information in a text file by clicking on **File » Save** and giving it a name like *top-secret.txt* or, perhaps better, *favourite.txt*. If you can think of a better name for your passwords file then please use it.

This is a much better solution that trying every password that you can think of only to find that you are still locked out of your emails or banking.

Possible Problems

There is, of course, the problem that would occur if your computer (or, more accurately, this text file) should fall into the wrong hands (your children, for example!). That is a risk that you will have to work out for yourself: which is greater, the risk that I will forget my password or the risk that my password will fall into the wrong hands.

Only you can decide this. Life is a continual balancing of risk and reward, and using your computer is no different in this regard.

I suspect that, for many people, the default solution of doing nothing because it is easier than making a decision will be taken and yet another password will bite the dust in yet another person's only-too-fallible memory.

The Perils of Tech Support

I have had two incidents where I have been called out to see a client and help them with email problems. The first client could not send emails and the second could not receive them. At least this had some symmetry so that the sending and receiving balanced each other out!

Unable to Send

The client who was unable to send emails rang in distress because the need to send emails was great. I went round to her place and found that she had done nothing to her computer. Her email settings were just the same as they always had been. I can be sure of this because I had set her email up about a month before and everything had been working when I left.

Her ISP (Internet Service Provider) was Bigpond and they have had, for literally years, the same settings and I know them by heart. Recently, however, for reasons known only to them, they have decided to change the settings for their emails, and this is causing havoc for far too many people.

Step 1

It was obvious what had changed, but not so obvious was what the new settings were. I then did a google search for the email settings as this usually manages to find the answers.

Not this time.

I found settings which purported to be correct but, when I entered these settings into her email program she still could not send emails. I tried a few obvious variations on the theme which might work but to no avail.

Step 2

I needed to ring Bigpond's tech support to get things sorted out. A very helpful tech support rep (TSR) answered and asked to be allowed to change the settings on my client's computer. I downloaded the necessary program and entered the magic password (which changes with every access) and, in a very short time, everything was up and running.

Summary

The TSR was both pleasant to deal with and competent. This is what I would expect from tech support for an organisation like Bigpond / Telstra.

Even better would be if Bigpond notified its customers about such major changes to their email settings. This is just not good enough!

Unable to Receive

Later in the week I had a call from another client, this time he could not send emails using his Bigpond email account. Everything email had been working until that morning so obviously Bigpond had changed yet some more settings in its email setup without letting clients know.

This is just so frustrating!

Step 1

As before, the obvious answer was to search the internet to find his email settings. I could not find the needed information on the internet to see which settings had been changed so I could not get his emails to come down. I used Bigpond's webmail to check to see that there were emails on Bigpond's servers and, sure enough, there were more than enough to allow one or two to trickle on down to my client's computer.

Some of them were even test messages which both he and I had created!

Step 2

Ring the number on my client's little grey card to get technical support and was told that I had the wrong number. Given the number to ring. Rang that number, and was told that I had the wrong number and that the first number that I had rung was the correct number and to ring them again.

Step 3

Rang the first number for the second time and this time I got through to someone who was prepared to accept that this was the correct place to be.

This tech support rep (TSR) gave me the settings that I needed to change to make everything work the way it was supposed to. The only problem was that I could not get everything to work the way it was supposed to.

Again, I was asked download the program which allowed Bigpond's TSR to access my client's computer from afar. I then watched in amazement while this TSR made change after change to email settings to no avail. Some settings were repeated time and time again to no avail.

This was akin to watching grass die or paint grow.

After a total of two hours it was decided that this problem would be escalated to second-level tech support. She then arranged for another TSR to call the following day.

All this took two hours!!!

Step 4

Another TSR rang the following day and fixed the problem quickly. As before, Bigpond had changed its settings without informing it customers that they would need to make the corresponding changes to their email program's settings.

This TSR knew what he was doing.

Summary

~~This second-level TSR knew what he was doing and was able to do it quickly and efficiently. If only the first-level TSR had had the knowledge to just fix the settings as the second-level TSR had.~~

~~The final result was good but~~ the journey around the mulberry bush was most frustrating.

I had found the settings on the internet on Friday night so assumed that this good result had happened. Unfortunately this good result has not happened and I cannot find the settings on the internet again. This has been one of the most frustrating tasks that I have tried to complete.

Further Information

Nothing this week.