# Passwords and Human Authentication

15 May 2025 Lecture 7

Some Slides Credit: Steve Zdancewic (UPenn)

# **Topics for Today**

- Human Authentication
  - Password basics
  - Multi-factor authentication
  - Password storage
  - Password alternatives

## Human User Authentication

### How do you:

- Know you're talking to a human?
- Allow a human user to identify him or herself to a machine?

### Machine

- Good at authenticating other machines
- Good at mathematical manipulations, etc.
- Can handle keys, secrets, etc.
- Very good memory of things stored in it

#### Humans

- Good at identifying people
- Use small clues that when combined yield an unmistakable picture
  - Voice
  - Height
  - Stance
  - Shared history

# Identifying Any Human

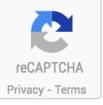
- Problem:
  - How does a machine establish that it's talking to a human?
  - Why?
    - Prevent SPAM, abuse of web accounts, foil bots and web crawlers,...
- Answer: Challenge / Response
  - Challenge is something that only humans can do (quickly):
  - Example: deciphering obscured text



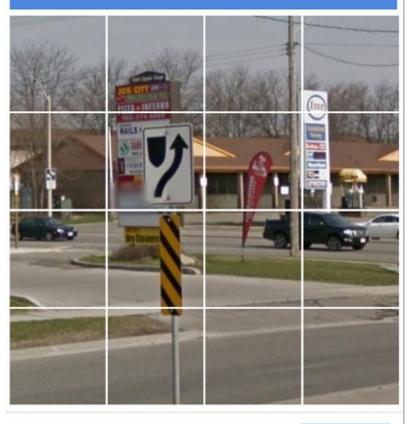
- Read: "Telling Humans and Computers Apart" (von Ahn, Blum, and Langford) <a href="www.captcha.net">www.captcha.net</a>
- Counter strategies:
  - 'Grandmaster chess attack' : get humans to do the decoding

# ReCaptcha

I'm not a robot



Select all squares with street signs. If there are none, click skip.





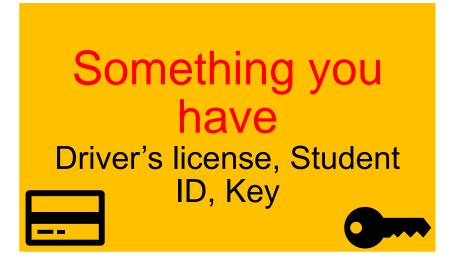


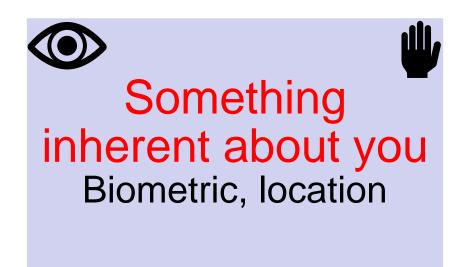


SKIP

# Identifying a particular human

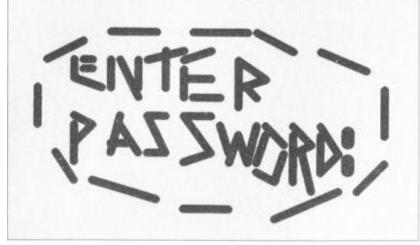
Something you know
Password, etc.





## **Passwords**

- Shared code/phrase
- Client sends to authenticate



SOURCE: NASA

- Simple, right?
- How do you…
  - Establish them to begin with?
  - Stop them from leaking?
    - Stop them from being guessed?

### Prime Mover Problem

- Set up password: out of band
  - -Physical mail







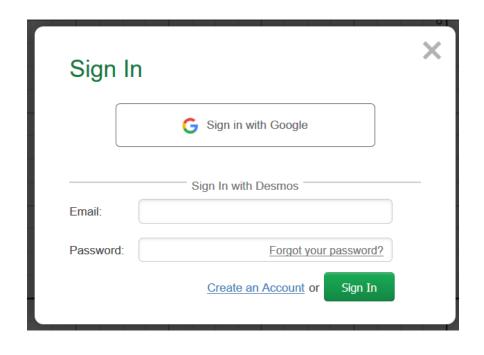
- Attached to the box
- -SMS
- Piggybacking
  - -Swipe ID Card to make Password
  - But where does the chain stop?
    - ID Card → TZ→ birth certificate

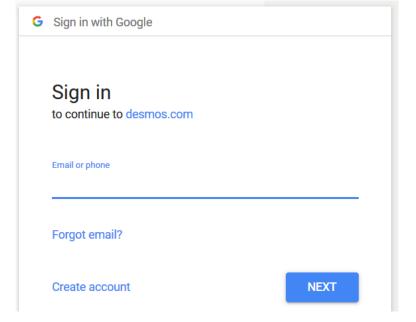


## On the box

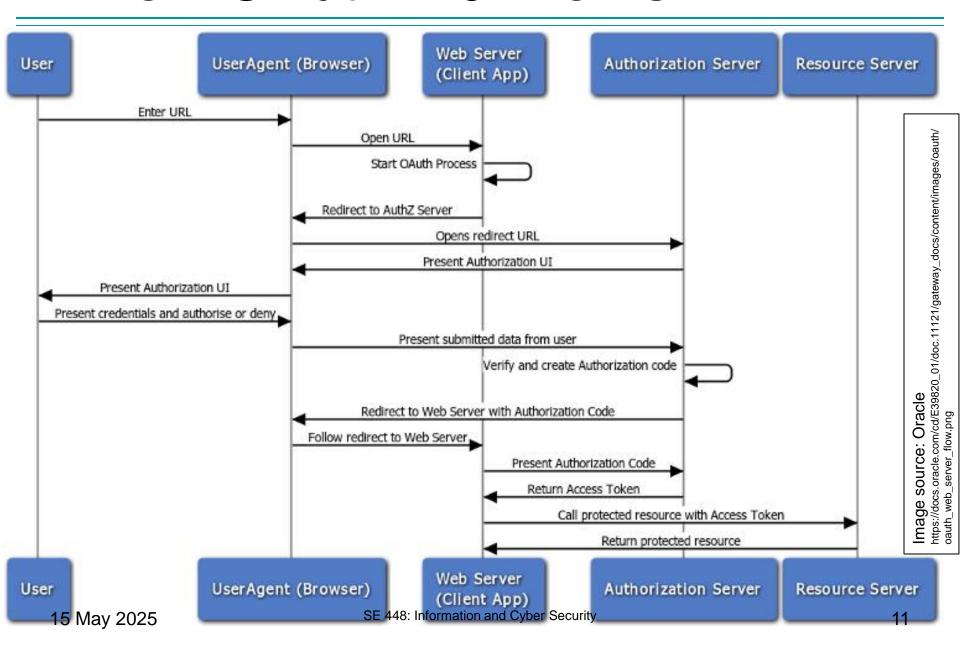


# Federated ID (Oauth)





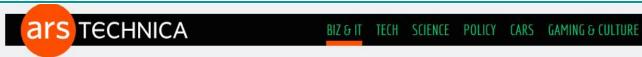
# How OAuth 2.0 Works



# Leaks & Challenges

Social engineering

- Managing large numbers of passwords:
  - Writing the password down on paper
  - Storing it in an electronic "safe"
  - Using a web browsers 'remember this password' feature
- Legal and responsibility
  - Shared password == shared liability



TRANSLATES TO "THE PASSWORD OF DUM-DUM" -

# Hacked French network exposed its own passwords during TV interview

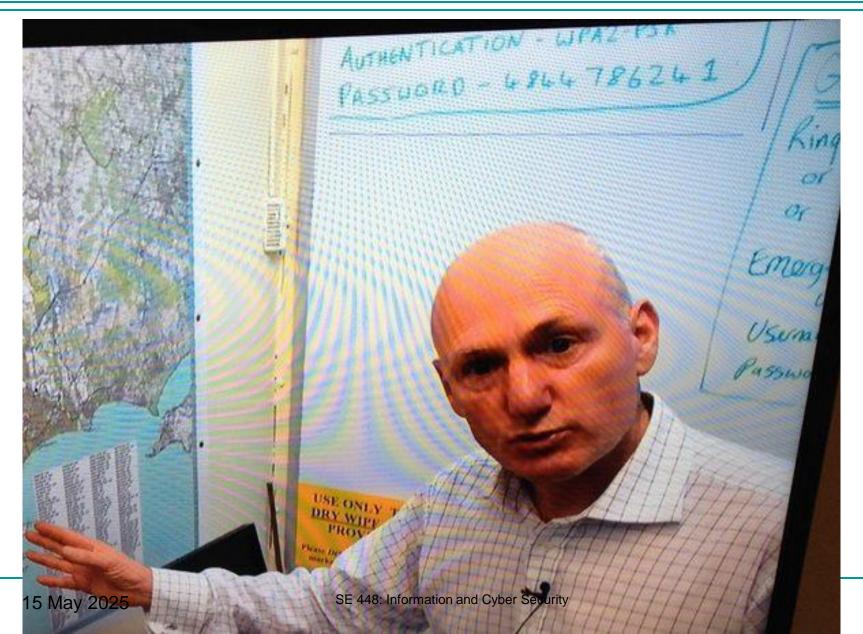
Post-it note on wall revealed network's passwords for YouTube, Instagram.

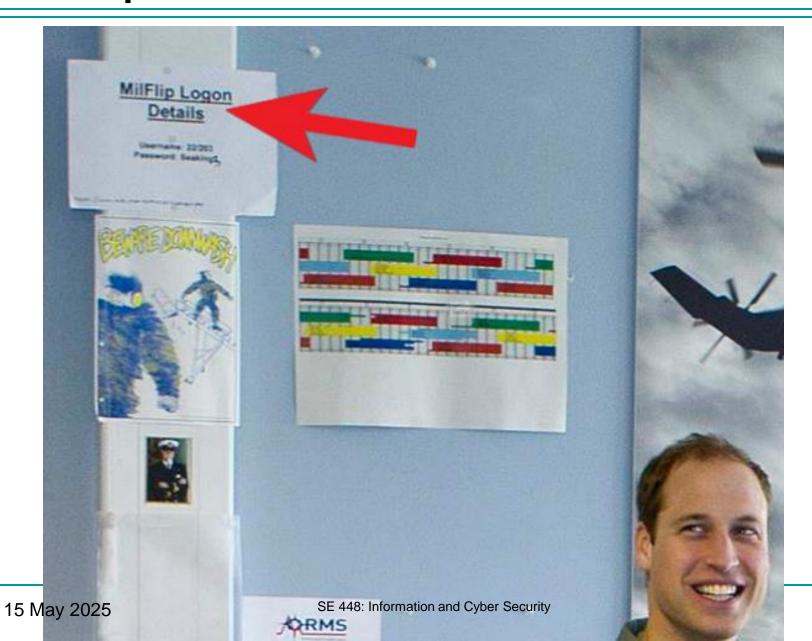
SAM MACHKOVECH - 4/10/2015, 4:37 AM



15 May 202







BUSINESS

# WATCH: Sen. Ted Cruz tells Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal to change his iPhone passcode after he enters it in on live TV

#### Sonam Sheth

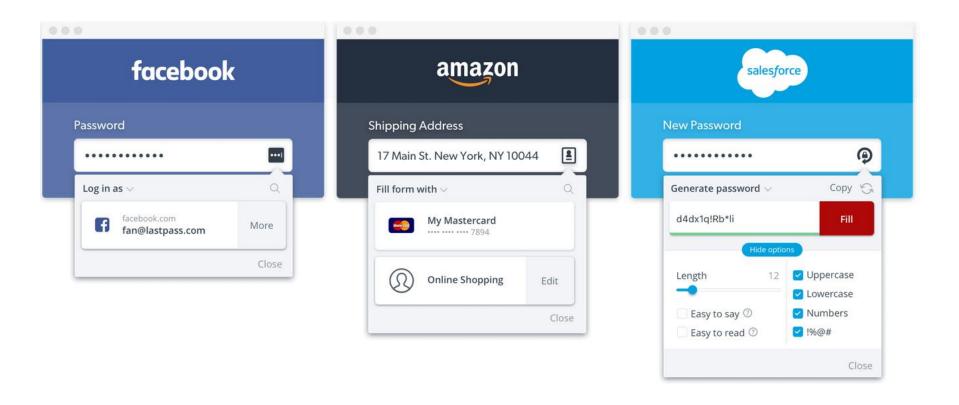
Wed, May 26, 2021, 12:05 AM · 2 min read





Sen. Richard Blumenthal holds up his iPhone during a subcommittee hearing on gun violence. Screenshot/C-SPAN

# Password Safe (LastPass)



# Unless this happens

Home / Software / How-To

### LastPass was hacked: Here's what you have to do

LastPass had the worst thing happen, but don't panic: You're still in the clear and your password is likely not cracked.







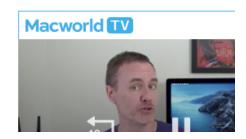




#### PRIVATE I

By Glenn Fleishman, Senior Contributor | JUN 16, 2015 9:19 PM PDT

The password-storage maker LastPass announced the worst possible news for a company in its business on Monday: its password database was breached and user account information stolen. Because LastPass allows central storage and synchronization of your data store—the "vault" of passwords and other information you use with its app and website—someone being able to suss out your master password would seemingly have access to all your secrets.



# Unless this happens (again)

Sep 16, 2019, 04:25am EDT | 249,736 views

### Google Warns LastPass Users Were Exposed To 'Last Password' Credential Leak



Davey Winder Senior Contributor © Cybersecurity

I report and analyse breaking cybersecurity and privacy stories



Google Project Zero has found a credential leaking vulnerability in the LastPass password manager GETTY IMAGES

But don't worry, it's not that bad really

# Unless this happens (again!!)

INDUSTRY NEWS • ( ) 2 min read • \[ \]

# LastPass Master Passwords Compromised in Mystery Attack



Ad One product to protect all your devices, without slowing them down.
Free 90-day trial

https://www.bitdefender.com/blog/hotforsecurity/lastpass-master-passwords-compromised-in-mystery-attack/

Company claims it was a mistake

# Unless this happens (again!!!)



Deep Dive Library Press Releases

Strategy

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Cyberattacks

Threats

Leadership & Careers

# What we know about the LastPass breach (so far)

The blast radius from a breach at LastPass grew from bad to worse during a fourmonth period. Most of the data held by the password manager is now compromised.

Published Jan. 5, 2023



Matt Kapko Reporter







# **Summaries**



# LastPass breach timeline: How a monthslong cyberattack unraveled

A threat actor evaded detection for months and blended in with legitimate activity after targeting 1 of 4 engineers with access to keys to the kingdom.

Published March 2, 2023 • Updated March 3, 2023







BACKCHANNEL BUSINESS CULTURE GEAR IDEAS SCIENCE SECURITY



### Yes, It's Time to Ditch LastPass

The password manager's most recent data breach is so concerning, users need to take immediate steps to protect themselves.

# It's not over even 3 years later



CISO STORIES

**TOPICS** 

TOPIC HUBS

**EVENTS** 

PODCASTS

RESEARCH

REC

Identity, Threat Intelligence, Application security

# LastPass hack leveraged to facilitate \$150M crypto heist

March 10, 2025



By SC Staff



# **Guessing Passwords**

### **User Problems**

- "No such user" error
  - Gives an attacker information about usernames
  - "User or password are incorrect"
- "Here's who we are" mistake
  - Gives an attacker information about usernames

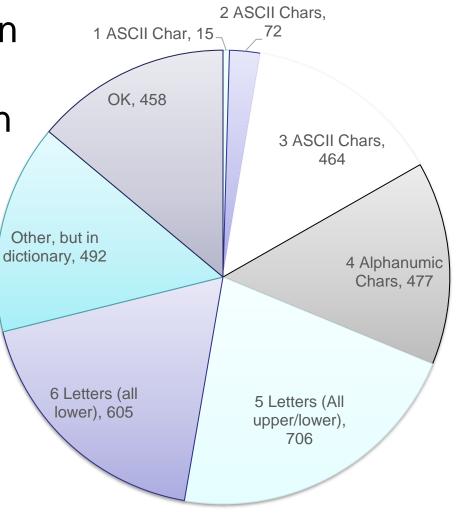
### **Password Problems**

- Common words, phrases for passwords
- Null passwords, "password", username, backwards, etc.
- Dictionary attacks
- How bad is it?

# 1979 Survey of 3,289 Passwords

 With no constraints on choice of password, Morris and Thompson

got:



# Other Surveys of Passwords

### Klein (1990) and Spafford (1992) of 15*K* passwords

- 2.7% guessed in 15 minutes, 21% in a week
- Sounds ok? Not if the passwords last 30 days

# Adobe (2013) "survey" of 153,000,000 passwords:

- <u>Top 100 passwords</u>
   (http://www.whatsmypass.com/top-100-adobe-passwords)
- Top 10: 123456, 123456789, password, adobe123, 12345678, qwerty, 1234567, 1111111, photoshop, 123123

### Schneier (2006) survey of 34,000 MySpace passwords

- 65% eight characters or less
- 28% lower case letters followed by a single digit
- Top 11 passwords: password1, abc123, myspace1, password, blink182, qwerty1, f\*\*\*you, 123abc, baseball1, football1, 123456
- 23% could be cracked in 30 min, 55% in 8 hours

# Other Surveys of Passwords

NordPass (2020) survey of Israeli cracked passwords

1	123456	167,776
2	123456789	53,971
3	1234	38,537
4	12345	35,581
5	123123	32,526
6	12345678	23,238
7	password	19,667
8	1234567	14,561
9	111111	13,298
10	1q2w3e4r	13,188



HACKERS RECENTLY LEAKED 153 MILLION ADOBE USER EMAILS, ENCRYPTED PASSWORDS, AND PASSWORD HINTS.

ADOBE ENCRYPTED THE PASSWORDS IMPROPERLY, MISUSING BLOCK-MODE 3DES. THE RESULT IS SOMETHING WONDERFUL:

USER PASSWORD	HINT	
4e18acc1ab27a2d6 4e18acc1ab27a2d6	WEATHER VANE SWORD	
4e18acc1ab27a2d6 a0a2876eblealfca	NAME1	
8babb6299e06eb6d	DUH	
8babb6299e06eb6d a0a2876eb1ea1fca		
8babb6299e06eb6d 85e9da81a8a78adc	57	
4e18acc1ab27a2d6	FAVORITE OF 12 APOSTLES	
1ab29ae86da6e5ca 7a2d6a0a2876eb1e	WITH YOUR OWN HAND YOU HAVE DONE ALL THIS	
a1f96266299e7a2b eadec1e6a6797397	SEXY EARLOBES	
a1F96266299e7a2b 617a60277727ad85	BEST TOS EPISODE	
3973867adb0b8af7 617ab0277727ad85	SUGARLAND	
1ab29ae86da6e5ca	NAME + JERSEY #	
877ab7889d3862b1	ALPHA	
877ab7889d3862b1		
877ab78 <del>89</del> d3862b1		
877ab7889d3862b1	OBVIOUS	
877ab78 <del>89</del> d3862b1	MICHAEL JACKSON	
38a7c9279cadeb44 9dcald79d4dec6d5		
38a7c9279cadeb44 9dcald79d4dec6d5	HE DID THE MASH, HE DID THE	
38a7c9279cadeb44	PURLOINED	
200574527170F70 9dc01d79d4derLIS	FAVILIATER-3 POKEMON	

THE GREATEST CROSSWORD PUZZLE
IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD

### Password Hacks



### **Tricks**

- Letter substitutions, words backwards, common names, patterns, etc.
- Anything you can think of off the top of your head, a hacker can think of too

### Lazy users!

- Weakest link is always the way of the attack
- One weak password is enough to give access

# Heuristics for Guessing Attacks

### Dictionary

- Words spelled backwards too
- Israel bonus: Hebrew words spelled in English
- Sample dictionary: https://www.scrapmaker.com/vi ew/dictionaries/rockyou.txt

### Names (upper + lower)

- First names (best obtained from some mailing list). (Upper + lower)
- Last names
- Street names
- · City names.

License plate numbers in your area. (About 5 hours work in 1979 for New Jersey.)

Room numbers, social security numbers, telephone numbers, etc.

## Password crackers

John the ripper

Hashcat

Medusa

THC Hydra

RainbowCrack

And many more. And these are just the public ones.

# What makes a good password?



### Password Length

- 64 bits of randomness is hard to crack
  - About 20 common ASCII characters
- But... People can't remember random strings
- Longer not necessarily better - people reuse or write passwords

### Pass phrases

- English Text has roughly
   1.3 random bits/char.
- Thus about 50 letters of English text
- Hard to type without making mistakes!

# What makes a good password?



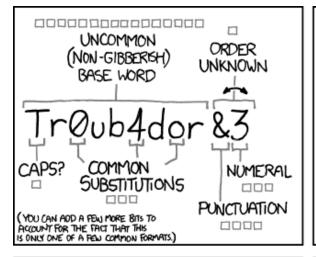
### In practice

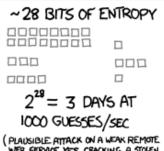
- Non-dictionary, mixed case, mixed alphanumeric
- Not too short (or too long)
   8 12 characters
- Tools that check password strength
  - https://howsecureismypass word.net/
- Enforce non-reuse and expiration

### Infographic

 https://digitalguardian.co m/blog/uncoveringpassword-habits-areusers-password-securityhabits-improvinginfographic

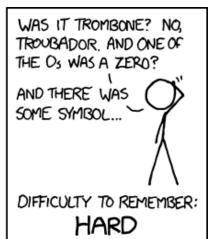
# Password Entropy





( PLAUSIBLE ATTACK ON A WEAK REMOTE.
WEB SERVICE, YES, CRACKING A STOLEN
HASH 15 FASTER, BUT IT'S NOT WHAT THE
AMERICE USER SHOULD WORKY ABOUT.)

DIFFICULTY TO GUESS:

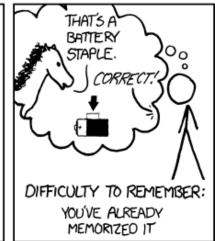


correct horse battery staple

FOUR RANDOM
COMMON WORDS

$\sim$ 44 BITS OF ENTROPY
0000000000
00000000000
2 <sup>44</sup> =550 YEARS AT 1000 GUESSES/SEC

DIFFICULTY TO GUESS: HARD



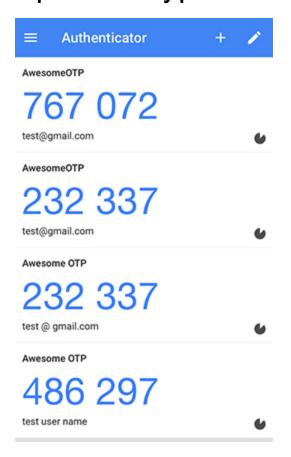
THROUGH 20 YEARS OF EFFORT, WE'VE SUCCESSFULLY TRAINED EVERYONE TO USE PASSWORDS THAT ARE HARD FOR HUMANS TO REMEMBER, BUT EASY FOR COMPUTERS TO GUESS.

# So Far

- Human Authentication
  - Password basics
  - Multi-factor authentication
  - Password storage
  - Password alternatives

# Multifactor Authentication (MFA)



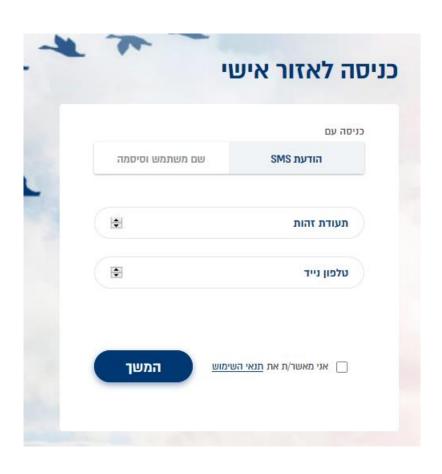




Principle: Smart card online public key



## Aside: SMS for MFA



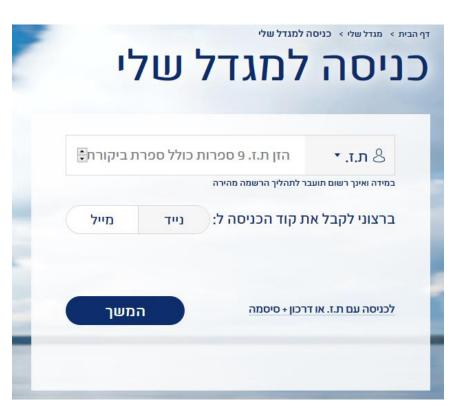
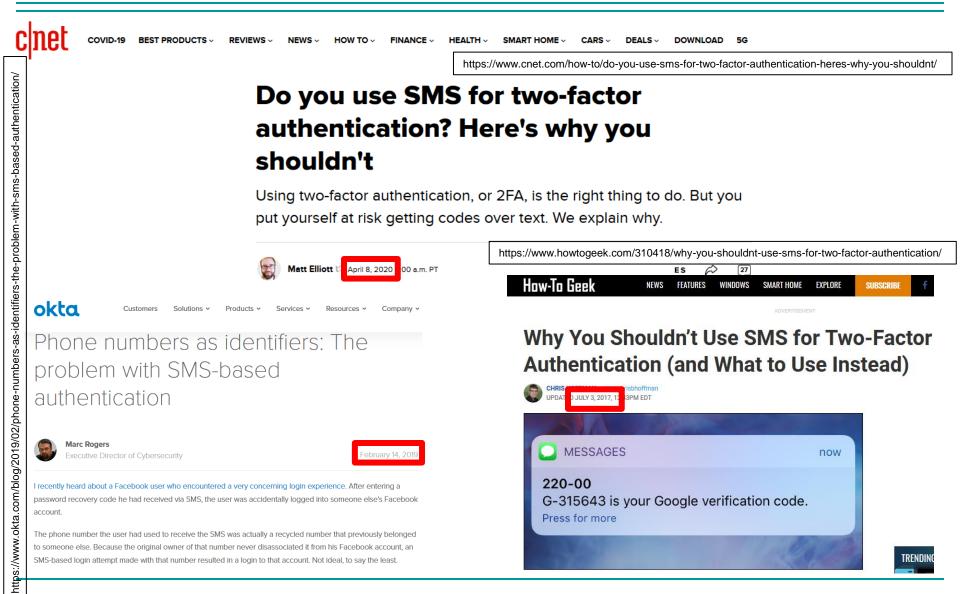


Image sources: <a href="https://www.yl-invest.co.il/">https://www.yl-invest.co.il/</a>, <a href="https://www.yl-invest.co.il/">https://www.migdal.co.il/mymigdal/process/login</a>

# Not such a good idea



# Not such a good idea

Session: Short Papers

RESEC'18, June 4, 2018, Incheon, Republic of Korea

https://dl.acm.org/doi/pdf/10.1145/3203422.3203426

#### Cracking IoT Device User Account via Brute-force Attack to SMS Authentication Code

Dong Wang University of Electronic Science and Technology of China jgj212@gmail.com

Jiang Ming The University of Texas at Arlington jiang.ming@uta.edu Ting Chen
University of Electronic Science and
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### Time Is Running Out For This Popular Online Security Technique



https://fortune.com/2016/07/26/nist-sms-two-factor/

# So Far

- Human Authentication
  - Password basics
  - Multi-factor authentication
  - Password storage
  - Password alternatives

# How does the system store them?

- Is the password file readable by the OS?
  - Then if I break the OS...
- Can privileged users see the file?
  - ... and make copies
- Is the file backed up somewhere
  - … insecure?
- Is the file/password in plaintext somewhere in memory?
  - Core dump or memory scan (Windows)
- Fool the user
  - A program that masquerades as the authentication program
- Similar problems for database Username / Password tables

## Counter-hacks

# Control-Alt-Del for logging in

- Establishes a "trusted path" in hardware
- Prevents trojan horses from intercepting passwords

# Slow down / restrict number of tries

- Make guessing take too long
- e.g. 3 tries and you're blocked for 30 seconds

#### Encrypt the password file and hash the passwords

- System admin doesn't know the password!
- Use one way hashes or encryptions on the passwords
- "Salt" to prevent duplicate passwords showing as duplicate codes

## Add Salt



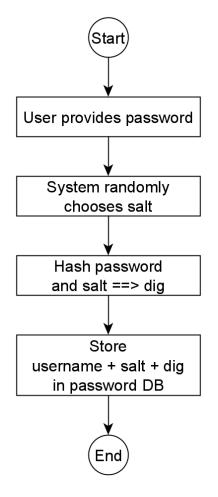
- "Salt" the passwords by adding random bits.
  - Decreases the likelihood that two identical passwords will appear as identical entries in the password file.
- 12 bit salt results in 4,096 versions of each password.
- Unix: /etc/passwd entry:

- Modern implementations of Unix/Linux use so-called shadow password files /etc/shadow that aren't world readable.
- Most use longer salts now too (48 bits to 128 bits)

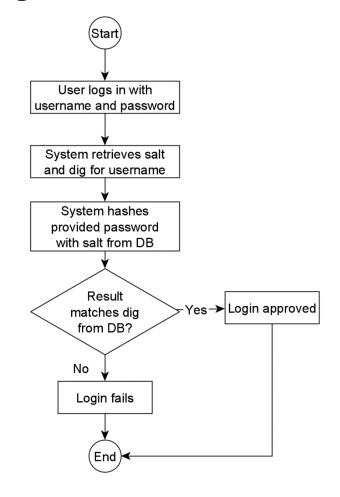
# Using Salt



#### Registration



#### Login



# Password File Hardening



- What if an attacker steals the password file (or database table)?
  - Simple hashes of passwords can be attacked using Rainbow Tables (precomputed hash chains)



- Harden the password file: Make the password + salt → code calculation hard:
  - Old: Encrypt with DES using password and salt 25 times
  - Newer: 5,000 rounds of SHA-2 on the password and salt
    - Minimum 1,000 rounds
- More rounds and large salt make Rainbow Tables unfeasible
- Also make guessing attacks longer
- Read more: crypt(), PBKDF2, John the Ripper (https://www.openwall.com/john/)

## NYTimes Breach Lessons

**► SECURITY** 

# The New York Times source code leaked by a 4chan user

An anonymous user has published a torrent file with 270GB worth of data.



Here are some other findings we can confirm:

- The leak does have the original source code of the game Wordle, which the Times acquired in 2022.
- The leak includes a WordPress database of 1,500 NY Times Education site users. The database contains names and surnames, email addresses, and hashed passwords.
- Several folders contain internal communications from Slack channels.
- Many exposed authentication methods exist, including authentication URLs and their respective passwords, secret keys, and API tokens. The majority are well protected, but plenty of such secrets need immediate attention. We have also seen private user keys used for authentication.

https://stackdiary.com/the-new-york-times-source-code-leaked-by-a-4chan-user/

Blog / Product news

# A recent security incident involving Dropbox Sign



by Dropbox Sign team

May 1, 2024 • 6 minute read

On April 24th, we became aware of unauthorized access to the Dropbox Sign (formerly HelloSign) production environment. Upon further investigation, we discovered that a threat actor had accessed Dropbox Sign customer information. We believe that this incident was isolated to Dropbox Sign infrastructure, and did not impact any other Dropbox products. We're in the process of reaching out to all users impacted by this incident who need to take action, with step-by-step instructions on how to further protect their data. Our security team also reset users' passwords, logged users out of any devices they had connected to Dropbox Sign, and is coordinating the rotation of all API keys and OAuth tokens. Please read on for additional details and an FAQ.

On April 24th, we became aware of unauthorized access to the Dropbox Sign (formerly HelloSign) production environment. Upon further investigation, we discovered that a threat actor had accessed data including Dropbox Sign customer information such as email addresses, usernames, phone numbers and hashed passwords, in addition to general account settings and certain authentication information such as API keys, OAuth tokens, and multi-factor authentication.

Home » Firewall Daily » Dark Web News » 'IntelBroker' Claims Access to Database Belonging to England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB)

## 'IntelBroker' Claims Access to Database Belonging to England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB)

The dataset contained various user account information, such as email addresses, hashed passwords, and dates of registration and last login.

by Ashish Khaitan — March 26th, 2024

## Password Reuse

PASSWORD ENTROPY IS RARELY RELEVANT. THE REAL MODERN DANGER IS PASSWORD REUSE.



SET UP A WEB SERVICE TO DO SOMETHING SIMPLE, LIKE IMAGE HOSTING OR TWEET SYNDICATION, SO A FEW MILLION PEOPLE SET UP FREE ACCOUNTS.



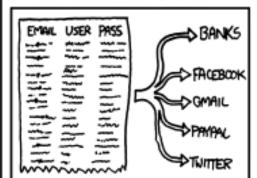
BAM, YOU'VE GOT A FEW MILLION EMAILS, DEFAULT USERNAMES, AND PASSWORDS.



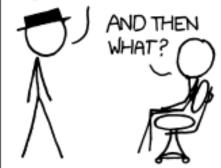
TONS OF PEOPLE USE ONE PASSWORD, STRONG OR NOT, FOR MOST ACCOUNTS.



USE THE LIST AND SOME
PROXIES TO TRY AUTOMATED
LOGINS TO THE 20 OR 30
MOST POPULAR SITES, PLUS
BANKS AND PAYPAL AND SUCH.



YOU'VE NOW GOT A FEW HUNDRED THOUSAND REAL IDENTITIES ON A FEW DOZEN SERVICES, AND NOBODY SUSPECTS ATHING.



## Password Reuse: Problem

#### 2011 Study:

- 49% of users on one site reused the password on a different site
- Makes it worse if the site uses email address as login
- Bad if you use the same user name on multiple sites

# 2015 Study (Harris Interactive)

59% of consumers reuse passwords

# 2017 Survey (Digital Guardian):

60% of consumers reuse passwords

## Password Reuse: Problem

Recent(ish) news:

#### 2 April 2014:

 Ars Technica reports 158,000 passwords from Boxee.tv (Israeli startup) published

#### 15 June 2015:

 LastPass password vault website hacked, password hints, salts, and authentication hashes stolen.

#### 7 Jan 2023:

 Israeli researcher reports leak of 235m email addresses linked to Twitter accounts

# From the past year or so

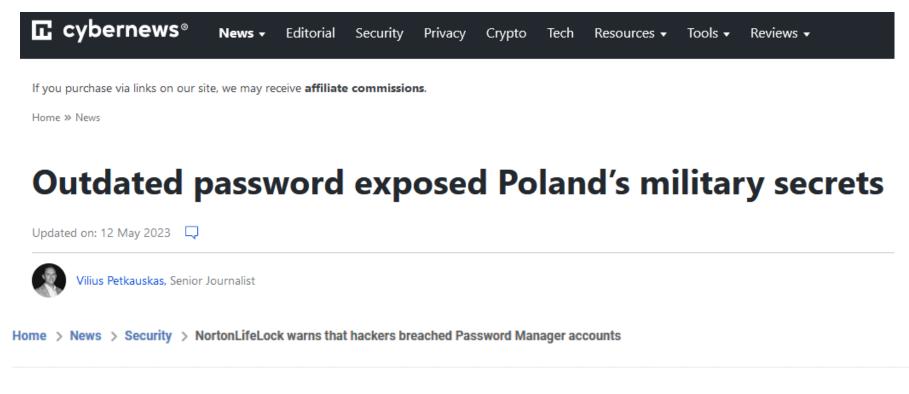


Last updated: 4 July 2024 Q 6





# From the past year or so



# NortonLifeLock warns that hackers breached Password Manager accounts

By **Bill Toulas**January 13, 2023 11:47 AM 7

## Password Reuse Solutions

Don't use the same login or passwords for multiple websites

Single Sign On systems (OAuth, Kerberos)

Host proof password management tools

## Passwordless Future

Google Identity

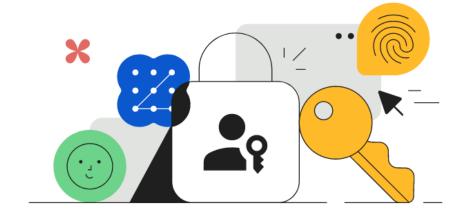
**Authentication** 

# The simplest and most secure way to sign in to your Google Account

Passkeys are an easier and more secure alternative to passwords.

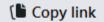
They let you sign in with just your fingerprint, face scan or screen lock.





## Facebook Too

#### Add a security key to your Facebook account



Computer Help

iPad App Help

iPhone App Help

Android App Help

More ▼

In order to add a security key to your account, you'll first need to purchase your own third party Universal 2nd Factor (U2F) or FIDO2 security key.

Some types of keys can be used by inserting them into a USB or lightning port. Other types of keys can be used by holding them near your computer or mobile device. Before purchasing, make sure that your security key is compatible with the browser and the device that you use to log into your account. After you add a key to your account, you can then use that key to log in.

Learn more about security keys and how they work.

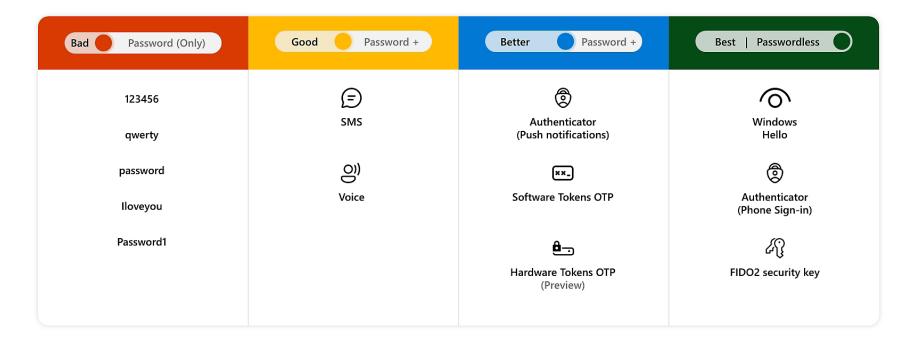
## Microsoft Too

#### Passwordless authentication

Hackers don't break in—they sign in. Protect one of attackers' most common entry points by going passwordless.

#### Take sign-in security from better to best

Minimize the threat of password theft for good with the strongest authentication method available in the marketplace.



# So Far

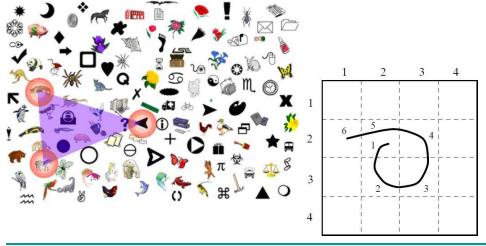
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  - Password alternatives

## Password Alternatives

#### **Graphical Passwords**



Photo courtesy of Philip Greenspoon



#### **Biometrics**

- Finger/Hand print
- Iris
- Cadence (typing, walking)
- Voice print
- Face

#### Challenges:

- Collection/Enrollment
- Theft
- Ambiguity/Uniqueness
- Accuracy of reader

# Biometrics: Fingerprints

- Relatively cheap (\$10 for a simple)
- Can match quickly (2s)
- Data is small (<1KB), so database is small</li>
- Less affected by vandalism/dirt
- Can detect fakes/late

#### Issues:

- Caucasians have best defined prints
- Women have finer prints
- Manual workers, elderly have less defined prints
- Building trusted path to reader

Technique	Size	Cost	Ease of Use	Dirt Affected	Wear Affected	Easily Duped
Optical	Small	Low	Easy	Yes	Yes	Easy
Capacitance	Small	V. Low	Easy	Yes	Yes	Easy
RF	Small	V. Low	Easy	No	No	Difficult
Ultrasound	V. Large	V. High	Easy	No	Yes	Medium
Thermal	V.Small	Low	Difficult	Yes	Yes	Medium
Pressure	Small	V. Low	Easy	Yes	Yes	Medium

Reference: Coventry "Fingerprint Authentication". (2004)

## Other Biometrics

# Voice print: Speak a fixed statement prerecorded

- Issues:
  - High quality recordings of voice
  - Problems with voice cold, cough, etc.

# Retinal scans: Picture of back of eye

- Very high quality
- Issues:
  - Physical proximity
  - Relatively long scan time (15s)

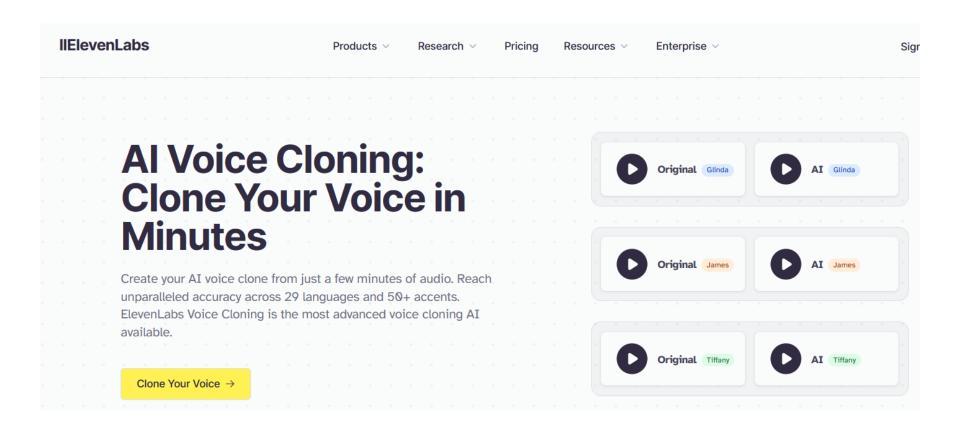
# Iris scans: Scans iris pattern into a barcode

 Similar to retinal scan, but not as accurate

# Facial recognition: Measure facial geometry

- Medium quality authentication
- Issues:
  - Masks, hats, bandages on face, facial hair
  - Reference: Alexander and Smith. "Engineering Privacy in Public: Confounding Face Recognition". 2003

# Al complicates voice



# Al complicates facial recognition

#### **IEEE Spectrum** Hackers Compete to Confound Facial Recognition

Q Type to search

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#### **Hackers Compete to Confound Facial Recognition**

> Def Con challenge organizers hope to spur better security in the industry

BY EDD GENT | 29 AUG 2022 | 3 MIN READ | 🗔



## Conclusion

- Human Authentication
  - Password basics
  - Multi-factor authentication
  - Password storage
  - Password alternatives