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Experts provide advice, important steps in selecting secure passwords

by Gabby Christensen

Securing sensitive information is always a top priority for business owners and strong security starts with strong passwords, according to experts.

Robert LaMagna-Reiter, senior director of information security at FNTS, formerly First National Technology Solutions, said there are both common and easy tips users can utilize to ensure they've selected a secure password.

LaMagna-Reiter said passphrases are typically composed of multiple words and are much longer than typical passwords, making it near-impossible for someone to randomly guess a password or launch a brute-force attack against it.

According to LaMagna-Reiter, a password manager, which manages all passwords so the user only needs to remember one strong password, is also recommended.

In addition, LaMagna-Reiter said one should never reuse passwords and should always change passwords every 90 days.

"You should also remember to enable Multi-Factor, also known as Two-Factor or 2FA, authentication wherever offered to add a second layer of authentication to all your logins," he said.

LaMagna-Reiter said businesses need to

understand that information security affects the entire organization, and it's important to foster a culture of security-awareness.

"When a strong information security program succeeds in reducing risk to acceptable levels, it allows the business to focus on more value-add activities," LaMagna-Reiter said. "A strong information security program also enhances the organization's reputation, enables compliance achievement and reduces the impacts of a breach of security incident."

Dave Koopmans, solutions engineering manager at Scantron Tech, also stressed the importance of Two-Factor Authentication.

According to Koopmans, security is not a product, but rather an attitude and a series of layers.

"The more sensitive the data, the more layers," Koopmans said. "The first layer must be email security, plus active web filtering. Then, you have the more traditional anti-virus and anti-malware software, plus a next generation firewall that actively filters all packets and has intrusion detection/intrusion protection features."

Koopmans said security compliance is a moving target and regulations are changing

based on the threats.

"Don't think that because you passed a vulnerability test or an audit that you are good for a long time; the opposite is true," Koopmans said. "Security compliance typically involves outsourcing to someone who is well-versed in the changes and knows how to remediate the findings."

When it comes to selecting the safest password, co-owner of Knights of Bytes, Hallie Talley, said she recommends using a password over 12 characters that uses letters, numbers, uppercase, lowercase and special characters.

Additionally, she said training staff is an absolute must and she recommends a mix of online and in-person training.

Talley said it is also helpful to have an IT support company that performs security assessments on the network at least annually.

"Being hacked is no longer a matter of if, but when," Talley said. "Many titans of the IT industry have said that cybercrime is the greatest threat that businesses will face from now until it becomes clear that cybercrime will no longer 'pay.'"

Along with multi-factor authentication

and password managers, Jeff Gustafson, network engineer at Computer Systems, Inc., also emphasized a major component: length.

"A lot of current research is saying to use a long phrase to create a password and push password length out much further to 25 or 35 characters," Gustafson said. "The thought is that these types of passwords will not only be more secure but easier to remember."

In the future, Gustafson said he is hoping to see more push to multi-factor solutions with no password required.

"For example, maybe you use a combination of your finger print plus a two-factor code from your phone," Gustafson said. "For now we are going to be stuck with passwords for some time but hopefully down the road we can have more options that are even more secure and don't require us to remember anything."



Koopmans

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