NETWORKING 101

Worst Passwords of 2015: Is Yours On the List?

123456 is tops again, but lots of new entries are longer or Star Wars themed.

If any of your account passwords contain sequences like "qwerty" or "123456," now's a good time to change them.

Those are just a few entries on a list of the 25 worst passwords that can expose individuals to being hacked or having their identities stolen, according to SplashData's annual "worst password list."

The Los Gatos, California-based company, which makes password management software, compiles the annual list from the most common passwords leaked online each year – more than two million in 2015.

Just like in past years' lists, simple numerical passwords were on the top 10 of the 2015 list. Sports remain increasingly popular among passwords themes, with "football" and "baseball" also on the top 10 of the list. In contrast, new Star Wars-themed passwords appeared for the first time since SplashData began monitoring commonly used passwords in 2011.

"When it comes to movies and pop culture, The Force may be able to protect the Jedi, but it won't secure users who choose popular Star Wars terms such as 'starwars', 'solo', and 'princess' as their passwords. All three terms are new entries on this year's list", according to SplashData's website.

So how can you try to protect yourself?

While passwords are never completely immune from hackers, the best passwords are long combinations of letters and numbers with random punctuation. Common phrases, words, or short strings of digits are extremely vulnerable, and it's always unwise to use the same password across multiple services and devices.

Steven White, Manager of WVNET Systems, says the list highlights the importance of creating a robust password to help protect individual and organizational information.

"Choosing a child's name or mother's maiden name as a password, for example, is the equivalent of locking the front door and placing the key under the welcome mat. With minimal effort, even an amateur hacker can determine basic personal information and use it to obtain private data," White says. "Strong, complex passwords, on the other hand, are more likely to withstand attempts at cracking them, especially when combined with two-factor authentication." *(Guest article by WVNET staff members Steven White, Randall Long and Barbara Long)*

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MICROSOFT OFFICE "MACRO MALWARE" IS BACK

Malware authors have rediscovered their love for VBA – Visual Basic for Applications

For the past several months, security experts have detected a surge in cyberattacks based on Visual Basic for Applications (VBA) macro malware. The most popular macro malware targets are Microsoft Office documents, especially Word files.

Microsoft Office includes the ability to add a programming code to its files through Visual Basic for Applications. VBA is an implementation of Microsoft's discontinued event-driven programming language, Visual Basic 6. This allows Office documents to execute code similar to .EXE programs.

WVNET mail filtering software blocks email with .EXE file attachments. Legitimate software is rarely distributed through email and typically .EXE file attachments tend to be dangerous to the recipient.

Office users add VBA code to Word and Excel documents for many legitimate reasons (so blocking all Word files with macros isn't acceptable by our customers). However, the code can also be used by cyber criminals as a method to distribute malware.

Until around the year 2000, 'macro viruses' using VBA were common. Mostly due to the Microsoft Office software security enhancements, after that .EXE malware began to take over.

History seems to repeat itself. VBA macro viruses have evolved from self-replicating viruses to trojan malware.

Here's how you can defend yourself against macro malware:

According to Wikipedia, "Using VBA, most of the security features lie in the hands of the user, not the author."

- **Microsoft Word has disabled VBA macros by default in newer editions. Don't fall for the attempt to convince you into enabling macros for an unexpected attachment.**

In versions of Office 2007, and later, all macros from untrusted sources are disabled by default and their code will only execute if the user explicitly enables them. To overcome this limitation, authors of malicious VBA code have to use Social Engineering techniques to trick users in to running their macros. Don't be tempted to reduce security (e.g., by enabling VBA macros) because a document tells you to. Malware may even tell you that macros need to be enabled "for security purposes." VBA malware authors often use the presence of macros in their documents as an excuse to suggest that the document is more secure than usual, claiming that the document is somehow "protected" until you enable macros to decrypt or unscramble it.

- **Exercise vigilance and always be suspicious of emails from unknown/unexpected sources.**

Security experts warn: "there is no justification as to why the content of a document can only be displayed properly if the execution of macros is enabled. If you receive a document with this advice, be aware: you are probably being attacked."

(Guest article by WVNET staff member Randy Long)

Happy (belated) 2016!

Thank you for your patience as the Applications Corner took a brief hiatus. We are back, ready for another fantastic year of technology updates! These technology changes are a constant factor for all of us and here on the WVNET Administration Applications team, we are committed to keeping you informed so that you can prioritize your projects on campus.

We have made some significant plans surrounding the deployment of Ellucian Banner XE for 2016 that I'd like to share with you in this month's article.

Since the introduction of Ellucian Banner XE (aka Banner 9), institutions have been faced with the challenge of embracing Banner XE products while maintaining their Banner 8.x environment. With Banner XE, Ellucian implemented a radical deployment strategy of releasing components of their enterprise resource planning (ERP) system as they are built instead of waiting for the entire system to be developed. This has provided institutions more flexibility. Rather than following forced processes and calendars for upgrades, institutions can choose which Banner XE applications (e.g., Attendance Tracking, Faculty Grade Entry, Registration) they want to install and still operate within the existing Banner 8.x environment.

WVNET has made the roll-out of Banner XE applications a top initiative. We are happy to announce our new implementation strategy to navigate this dynamic Banner XE environment. Similar to our customized Banner job submission process (aka Polaris), we are confident you will find our new solution helpful in ensuring a smooth transition to Banner XE.

Manage your Banner XE applications with ease
We have tackled the problem of submitting requests for Banner XE installations by creating a new web interface that integrates with our OZ ticketing system. Designed for our hosted institutional Banner administrators – you now have the ability to request, monitor and quickly review the status of Banner XE components deployed on your databases. This interface provides order to the sometimes hectic, always time-consuming process of tracking where and what version of the Banner XE software has been requested and installed on your databases (production, test and pre-prod).

Streamline Installations
Behind the scenes, WVNET has automated the process of installing Banner XE applications. Our first installations of Banner XE applications consumed massive blocks of time – we were averaging 8 to 10 hours from start to finish. To meet the demands of our customers, we have restructured the installation process. Once a new Banner XE application is released, WVNET now utilizes a software tool to generate a deployment file which can be applied to all WVNET hosted Banner databases (currently we manage 30 Banner databases). Instead of requiring hours, the installation of Banner XE application has been automated and can occur in less than 60 minutes.

As we evolve to Banner XE, we look forward to another year of collaboration and partnership with you, our customers.

(Guest article by Dana Keith, Manager of Applications/Datawarehouse)

As we move into the New Year, WVNET begins its 41st year of service to our customers. WVNET is the oldest, continuous statewide regional education network in the country, and we are proud of our long record of service.

Speaking of important anniversaries, my wife, Dr. Kathy, and I are celebrating our 40th wedding anniversary and entering our 41st year of marriage. Coincidence? I don't think so!

Some things were just meant to be and I have long felt that my being at WVNET at this point in its history was one of them.

Lot of stuff going on at the legislature regarding broadband. And WVNET is right in the middle of it all. We are the first statewide network for higher education, then began offering services to K12, the libraries and all other state agencies.

Now, WVNET is a provider of Internet2 services. This is the new high-speed education network being built across the country. Thanks for your 40 years of being our loyal customers. You are the reason we get up each day, come to work, and strive to do an outstanding job.

Continued from page one...

SplashData's "Worst Passwords of 2015" with their ranking from 2014 (in brackets):

123456 (Unchanged)
password (Unchanged)
12345678 (Up 1)
qwerty (Up 1)
12345 (Down 2)
123456789 (Unchanged)
football (Up 3)
1234 (Down 1)
1234567 (Up 2)
baseball (Down 2)
welcome (New)
1234567890 (New)
abc123 (Up 1)
111111 (Up 1)
1qaz2wsx (New)
dragon (Down 7)
master (Up 2)
monkey (Down 6)
letmein (Down 6)
login (New)
princess (New)
qwertyuiop (New)
solo (New)
passw0rd (New)
starwars (New)

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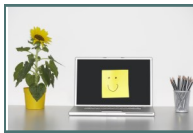
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CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY
And this month's winner is...

A statewide blizzard at the end of January wasn't enough to knock WVNET off course. As we move along into February, even though *Punxsutawney Phil* didn't see his shadow, I don't think winter is ready to let go of its grip quite yet. For WVNET though, it's business as usual, and even though we went through a State of Emergency situation with the blizzard conditions a few weeks ago, there is always someone here at WVNET ready to assist 24/7. We make that commitment to our customers, and we follow through on it every single day.

Each month, WVNET recognizes a customer who took the time to complete our Customer Satisfaction Service Survey to let us know how we are doing. We thank everyone who takes that extra few minutes to give us advice, kudos, or criticisms that will help us improve our service.

This month we would like to congratulate our winner, Harold Weller, a student at Marshall University who is enrolled in the WVROCKS initiative. Harold called in when he was unable to log into WVROCKS on his Mac system and spoke with Kim Jenkins on the Help Desk. When Kim used our remote tools to see his screen and try and figure out the problem, it became an issue that needed to be pushed up to Tier 2 Blackboard support, so Kim transferred the ticket to Blackboard Support Specialist Cory Morrison. Cory was able to work with Mr. Weller, ultimately assisting him in logging into WVROCKS and getting to his online class.

Harold was appreciative of the prompt assistance, stating, *"They said they would call back and they did, and Cory walked me through and it is now fixed. I'm happy with how they worked with me and got me back into my lessons. Thanks WVNET!"*

You're welcome, Harold, and WVNET appreciates your trust in us. This also provides me an opportunity to elaborate on the West Virginia Remote Online Collaborative Knowledge System (WVROCKS) initiative. This is a Blackboard-based system that helps students complete their Regents Bachelor of Arts degree from home. In just three years, WVROCKS has grown from offering three courses to over 50 and has awarded more than 5,000 credit hours to participating students. Constantly growing, WVROCKS has more than 600 students enrolled in the current semester. For more information, please contact Dr. Mary Stewart at (304) 293-5192, x231. You may also email her at
mstewart@mail.wvnet.edu

As always, at the end of each month, we will draw a winner, contact them by email and then send WVNET memorabilia in appreciation. Please complete our survey by looking within the incident email of any interaction that you have had with us. All comments are taken seriously and help to improve what we do on a daily basis. Thank you, Harold, and thanks again to all our customers who continue to shape and improve WVNET. *(Guest article by Booker Walton, III, Customer Resource Specialist, pictured.)*

HIGHER ED DAY AT THE LEGISLATURE 2016

On January 19, 2016, a WVNET team exhibited some of our services for Higher Education Day at the Legislature held at the State Capitol in Charleston, WV. Along with many other higher education entities, WVNET gave attendees a taste of what we are about using a display, a slideshow and lots of human interaction. We were delighted to meet with people from many of the institutions who work with us to make higher education better and more cost effective. While members of state government and the general public toured the displays and learned more about the institutions represented, it was also a great opportunity for networking and camaraderie among exhibitors.