
WORKING SECURITY-SMART ON YOUR COMPUTER

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INTRODUCTION

An extremely-knowledgeable, highly-placed computer security source has announced that the recommended way to use one's computer is to "run all software as a non-privileged user (one without administrative privileges) to diminish the effects of a successful [hacking] attack." While I am precluded from sharing the source of this advice, it is obvious to me, a computer professor emeritus, that this is a brilliant, relatively easy-to-implement enhancement to computer security.

Specifically, this is a great way to help protect yourself and your computer records (including your passwords and documents) from hacking. Why? If the criminal takes over your computer while you are using it, whether you are aware of the takeover or not, he or she will have significantly stronger roadblocks to getting to your privileged, valuable, saved information.

Oh, I know, this brief article could get a little "techy," but if you want the protection, working through it could pay off handsomely. If it looks too hard to do, maybe offer a computer-geek friend free lunch to do it for you. You have my permission to show this article to him or her.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

First, if you haven't created passwords for your computer account(s), do it now. A computer account without a password is an open invitation for anyone who can reach the keyboard to go through your stuff, much of which may be quite personal. There are tons of ways to see what you've been doing, where you've been going, your pictures, your banking information, your secrets, and the list goes on and on.

The method to create passwords for your computer account(s) varies with the computer platform and software, and it's beyond the scope of this article to show how to do it, but the documentation that came with your computer (or an internet search) will show you how to do it.

Similarly, if there is only one account on your computer, you will want to create at least one non-Administrator account, and you can learn how to do this with your computer documentation or on the net.

In either case, if you do a net search to find out how to do these rather simple tasks on your equipment, include the platform and system software in your search. For example if you're running Windows 7 on a PC, a search for how to create a new user account might look like this: *CREATE NEW ACCOUNT WINDOWS 7 PC*.

DIFFERENT COMPUTER USER ACCOUNTS

An Administrator account has access to the juicy parts of the computer: An Administrator can make changes to the registry (which controls most of the computer's operations), can install or delete software/programs (including malicious software), and can do lots of other very powerful and potentially deleterious stuff. A non-Administrator account is blocked from doing this kind of modification.

For purpose of this article, I'll refer to non-Administrator accounts as *standard accounts*.

You can tell how many accounts you have on your computer when you sign on. If you see more than one choice, you have more than one account.

People whose computers have just one account by default have an Administrator account. People with multiple accounts on their computers may or may not be using an Administrator account.

If you use an Administrator account to work with your computer, you may want to create a new standard account, then use it almost exclusively. If you do this, you'll be taking the advice of the cognoscenti about whom I write in the introduction. After creating the new standard account, you would log onto your Administrator account only when you need to make systemic changes to the machine.

If you are using a standard account and you try to do something that requires an Administrator account, the computer will inform you that you need either to supply the Administrator account password, or to log into that Administrator account.

A SMALL PRICE TO PAY

If you have been using an Administrator account for a long time and then create a new standard account to use for its safety value, you might have to re-do some things within your standard account. Some special tweaks that you created in your Administrator account, like the nice picture you put on your desktop, may not carry over to your new standard account. It's probably worth the extra work.

THE END