



OTTAWA PC NEWS

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The newsletter of the Ottawa PC Users' Group

December 2001

FEATURE

You and your passwords *by David Burnside*

In today's society, we all use passwords as our first line of defence to protect our valuables and our personal information. We use them for bank accounts, bank cards, internet access, workplace computers, etc. But how secure are your passwords???

If you are like most people, they aren't secure at all. Why? Because in order for you to remember your passwords, you pick passwords that are easy to remember. Most probably, your passwords are one of the following:

- the name of your spouse, child, grand-child, pet, friend, etc
- your favorite sport, sports figure, personality, etc.
- your favorite TV show
- your favorite type of vehicle or other possession or desired possession
- your license plate number or part thereof or that of a relative
- your phone number or part thereof or that of another phone number you know
- a word that can be found in a dictionary, regardless of the language
- your favorite place for traveling,
- something else related to you and your life

However in so doing, you are also making it easy for anyone who wants access to your assets to get your password. They can do this by:

- guessing your password because they know you and details about you
- using a computer program to "break" your password. Today such programs are easily available on the internet for free. And a typical home computer can try several hundred thousand possible combinations per minute in trying to break your password.
- getting access to your password that is written down. I've seen passwords at work written on sticky notes and stuck to the monitor, on a piece of paper under the keyboard, in an open drawer, etc.

So how do you choose a strong password and still be able to remember it?

First, your password should be at least eight characters long, contain a combination of upper and lower case letters, numbers and special characters (those symbols that appear on your keyboard that aren't



PASSWORD
MST1Rts4u

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Next meeting: **WEDNESDAY, December 12th, 2001**

'Tis the season by Tim Mahoney

Wondering what to buy for Christmas for the computer person who has "e"verything?

Well Bloom Microtech may be able to help you at our December OPCUG meeting.

Harley Bloom and Luc Laplante are back, as they were two years ago, to show us a large assortment of computer entertainment products. After the presentation you'll have a chance to try out some of the products out on one of the many computers they will bring.

Please feel free to invite your family and friends too. Because for those of you who remember, it was a blast the last time we had the Bloom boys do a games and entertainment demonstration!



OPCUG elections soon! by Chris Taylor

Iwould encourage anyone to come forward and stand for election to the Board of Directors. It can be a lot of fun and you can influence the direction the Group takes. If you think you might be interested, you can talk to any of the current Board for more information.

If you *know* you are interested, let Election Committee head Claude Jarry know. You can contact him by phone at 526-9318 or by email at al689@freenet.carleton.ca. Please provide your name, address, phone number and membership number (if known).

The deadline for nominations is December 31, 2001.

If there are more than nine nominations, an election will be held at the February OPCUG general meeting. Candidates will have an opportunity to include an article in the February issue of *Ottawa PC News*, outlining why they feel they should be elected to the Board of Directors. Candidates will also be given an opportunity to speak to the membership prior to the vote at the February meeting.



CALENDAR

Meetings	Date	Time and venue
OPCUG General Meeting	Wednesday, Dec. 12 th	7:30 p.m. Auditorium of the National Museum of Science and Technology, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd.
Internet SIG (I-SIG)	Wednesday, Dec. 12 th	Come and join our discussions!
Developers SIG	Wednesday, Dec. 12 th	Immediately following the main OPCUG presentation, and occasionally at other locations in the region.
Delphi User Group		8:00 p.m. at Chapters Store in the Pinecrest Mall (at the Queensway)
Ottawa Paradox Users Group	3 rd Thursday each month	6:00-8:00 p.m. — Corel Bldg 1600 Carling Ave
PIG SIG (i.e., Wing SIG)	Dec. 12 th (after SIGs)	NEW LOCATION!!!! Good Times Cafe - corner of Baxter & Iris

Please note that unless otherwise noted, SIGs meet at 9:00 p.m. (immediately following the OPCUG General Meeting).

You and your passwords ...continued from page 1

numbers or letters) and NOT be a name, place, or a word in any language that would be found in a dictionary.

Second, you can use substitutions for some letters, numbers or characters. For example, you can replace a word with a similar sounding letter or number, replace a letter with a similar looking number, a number with a similar special character, etc.

For example:

Original	Substitution
you	u
S or s	\$
three	3
Why	Y or y
L	1 or !
Smile	)

To create a secure password, instead of using a word, you create your password by using a phrase that you can remember. **DON'T** make the phrase too personal or it also may be easy to guess if someone knows you. For example, if you own a red corvette, don't use the phrase "My red corvette is the love of my life".

Using any one of the millions of phrases you could remember (e.g., My big head is really too big for me), you then use the first letter of each word, and using some of the substitutions as mentioned above, to create your password. Using the phrase in the example above, my password could be:

Mbh!r2B4M or mbh1r2BFM or MBHiRtb4m or any other combination.

Make sure that the resulting password is not a real word, name or place. You remember the password by remembering the phrase instead of trying to remember the individual characters in the password.

If you need more than one password, you can use the phrase and change at least two or three words in it to make a second password. For example, my second password phrase might be "My small toe is really too small for you". The second password could be:

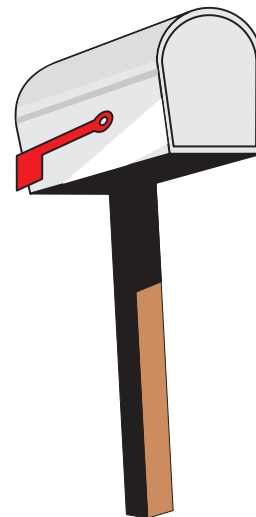
Mst!r2S4Y or mst1r2SFU or MSTiRts4u or any other combination.

When it is time to change your password, **DON'T** simply take the previous password and add a number or change one word in the phrase. As time passes, your password becomes weaker as the possibility of someone gaining access to it or part of it increases. Use a new completely different phrase or set of phrases.

Be safe! Your password is the first and possibly most important line of defense in protecting your assets and information. Use secure passwords.

REMINDER

Ottawa PC Users' Group has a new domain name! To access electronic services (Web, email, FTP, Listserv, etc), please use **opcug.ca**, rather than opcug.ottawa.com.



Hide in plain sight *by Chris Taylor*

Everyone knows at least something about encryption. If you have something you don't want others to know about, the best thing to do is encrypt the data. Very sophisticated encryption routines are available that would take very powerful computers a very long time to break.

But, just as banks attract bank robbers, the very existence of obviously encrypted data may draw attention to those holding or exchanging the encrypted data. Often, those who employ encryption are accused of shady or illegal activities, just because they are trying to hide something.

What if you could hide things in plain sight, such that nobody would even realize they are looking at your secret information? A systems administrator friend of mine used to use this technique to hide his many passwords. He had a chalk board that was always full of various pieces of information. Hidden amongst the directory names, planning concepts, product names, etc., were his passwords. Of course I don't know what he would have done if someone had erased his chalk board!

While hiding information on a chalk board may work to keep some information readily accessible, yet hidden from the casual observer, it does have its limitations. If my friend wanted to communicate his secret information to a colleague half way around the world, he could hardly ship his chalk board. Enter the world of steganography.

Steganography is taking one piece of information and hiding it within another. The container object continues to appear and act as the original, unaltered object. As such, it does not raise any suspicions to the casual observer.

The objects that can be used as containers are almost endless, but there are some containers that lend themselves to the job better than others. Graphic and sound files seem to be the most commonly used containers. Due to their nature, the introduction of a small amount of "noise" spread throughout the image or sound is not likely to be detected, let alone interpreted. There are also steganographic tools available that will hide messages in plain text, unused space on floppy disks, slack space at the end of files, and more.

Often encryption and compression techniques are used along with steganography. That way, even if someone discovers that a file contains steganographic data, they still have to deal with the encryption before they can discover the hidden message.

Is steganography popular? It would appear so. An analysis of graphics of on E-Bay turned up a huge number that contained steganographic data. Think of it — you need to get a hidden message to someone, but you want absolutely no trail that you are communicating. You hide your message in a steganographic image and post it as an item for sale



Original Water.JPG image



Water-with-steg.JPG image.
Can you spot the difference - nope!

on E-Bay. The other person searches for your item for sale, finds the image and retrieves the hidden message.

There are lots of Steganography programs available on the Internet. A quick search at Goggle.com turned up one interesting resource site that listed dozens of programs; <http://members.tripod.com/steganography/stego/software.html>.

I have placed a couple of interesting programs on PUB II for the convenience of members. They can all be found in file area 68 – Miscellaneous Utilities.

JPHS05.ZIP – JPHide and JPSeek, DOS and Windows programs that hide data in JPG images and uses encryption. These are very small programs that easily fit on a diskette.

MP3STEGO.ZIP – MP3Stego has Windows command-line and GUI programs to

compress, encrypt, and hide information in an MP3 audio file.

PLAYMAKR.ZIP – Sam’s Big Play Maker takes text as input and creates a little play. Your message is hidden within the text of the play. This is truly a “hide in plain sight” method. There is no encryption and anyone who recognises the “plays” generated by this program could easily use the same program to obtain the secret message. But it is interesting.

S-TOOLS3.ZIP – S-Tools is a Windows program that can hide information in WAV audio files, BMP graphic files, or in unused space on a floppy disk.

I tried out a couple of these programs and was amazed at how easy they are to use and just how effective they can be. In one example, I used JPHide on a 60K Jpeg graphic. JPHide recommended a maximum of 6K of text to hide. I selected a 5K text file (to get a copy of this file send a message to listserv@opcug.ca and in the body of the message, put “get security” – without the quotes) and JPHide produced a 58K Jpeg file that I could not distinguish from the original.

So, if you want to hide information and easily transmit it to someone else without being accused of illegal activities, try out steganography. Fascinating stuff!



HUMOUR

Heavenly Gates

submitted by Paul Cooper; article from The Independent

Bill Gates eventually found himself in Purgatory being sized up by God. “Well, Bill, I’m really confused on this call. I’m not sure whether to send you to Heaven or Hell. After all, you enormously helped society by putting a computer in almost every home in the world and yet you created that ghastly Windows 95. I’m going to do something I’ve never done before. In your case, I’m going to let you decide where you want to go!”

Bill replied, “Well, thanks, God. What’s the difference between the two?”

God said, “I’m willing to let you visit both places briefly if it will help you make a decision.”

“Fine, but where should I go first?”

God said, “I’m going to leave that up to you.”

Bill said, “OK, then, let’s try Hell first.” So Bill went to Hell. It was a beautiful, clean, sandy beach with clear waters. There were thousands of beautiful women running around, playing in the water, laughing and frolicking about. The sun was shining and the temperature was perfect. Bill was very pleased. “This is great!” he told God, “If this is Hell, I REALLY want to see Heaven!”

“Fine,” said God and off they went. Heaven was a high place in the clouds, with angels drifting about

playing harps and singing. It was nice but not as enticing as Hell. Bill thought for a quick minute and rendered his decision.

“Hmm, I think I prefer Hell.” he told God.

“Fine,” retorted God, “as you desire.” So Bill Gates went to Hell. Two weeks later, God decided to check up on the late billionaire to see how he was doing in Hell. When God arrived in Hell, he found Bill shackled to a wall, screaming amongst the hot flames in a dark cave. He was being burned and tortured by demons.

“How’s everything going, Bill?” God asked. Bill responded - his voice full of anguish and disappointment, “This is awful, this is not what I expected.

I can’t believe this happened. What happened to that other place with the beaches and the beautiful women playing in the water?”

God says, “That was the screen saver”.



Flash animations on the Web: an introduction *by Steve Coffin*

What is Flash?

Flash is a software package from Macromedia that offers a whole new dimension to web-based content. A common use of Flash animations can often be seen on a website's opening page. One basic technique of animation in Flash is called tweening, which applies actions between two objects over time to make an animation. So when you see a square morph into a triangle you can be pretty sure that you are watching a Flash animation and that a shape tween is being used.

Why use Flash?

Flash uses vector-based animation as opposed to bitmapped or raster-based animation. This allows for a greater amount of information to be streamed across the net to the user. Simply put, a vector-based graphic is a series of mathematical dimensions and commands whereas a raster-based graphic is an ordered collection of dots or pixels. Vector-based files tend to be smaller in file size than raster images. In theory, this makes the download quicker.

What it offers

Flash offers an evolution in the interactivity level available to people surfing on the net. Its applications are almost endless — from a shopping cart application to online games and beyond. The main thing that drives the current popularity of Flash animation sites is the programmer's creativity and the increasing accessibility of broadband Internet.

Note: Most modern browsers already contain a plug-in to allow you to view Flash files. You may find you need to upgrade your plug-in — get the latest Flash plug-in (version 5) at www.macromedia.com).

What is Action Script?

Action Script is the programming language of Flash. It is accessed by a series of presets in the actions palette or, in expert mode, the programmer can hard code. This will be a familiar interface to anyone who has ever worked with Macromedia's web page layout software, Dreamweaver.

Flash examples on the Web (see next page too)

home of Flash and plug-ins www.macromedia.com

cool flash animations www.toddgallina.com

Flash experiments www.yugop.com

interactive entertainment (radio hosts)

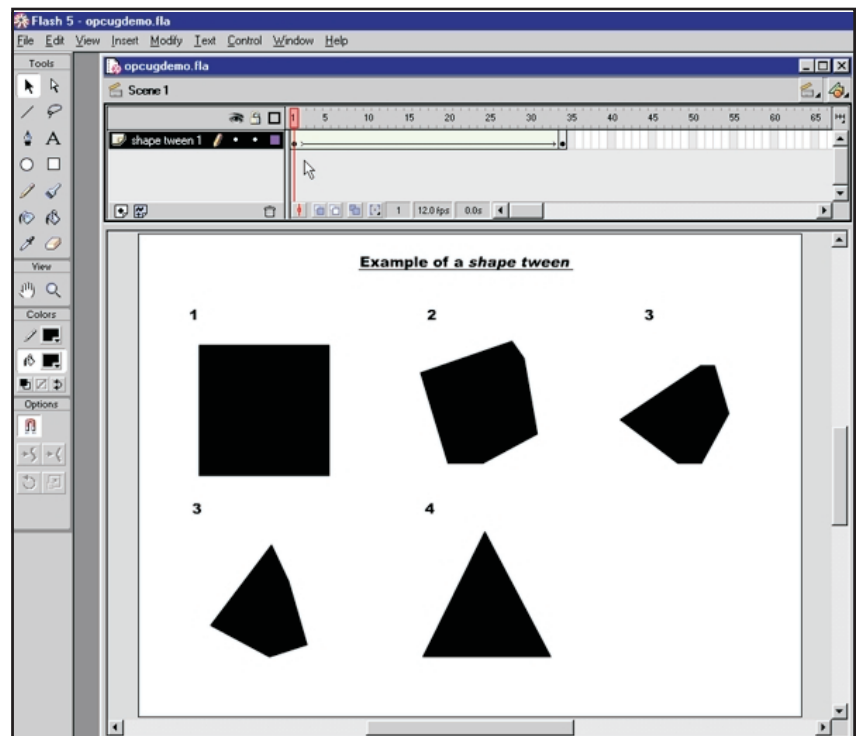
www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/markandlard/home.shtml

www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/chrismoyles/moyleshome.shtml

Flash animations (cartoon series) www.icebox.com

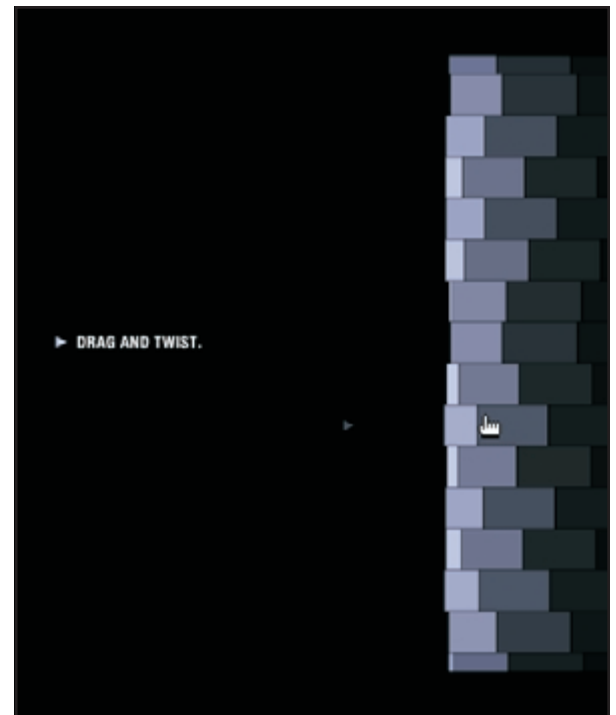
Flash in music site www.gorillaz.com

*Steve Coffin is an Ottawa-based Web, Flash and music producer.
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Radio 1 UK radio host page



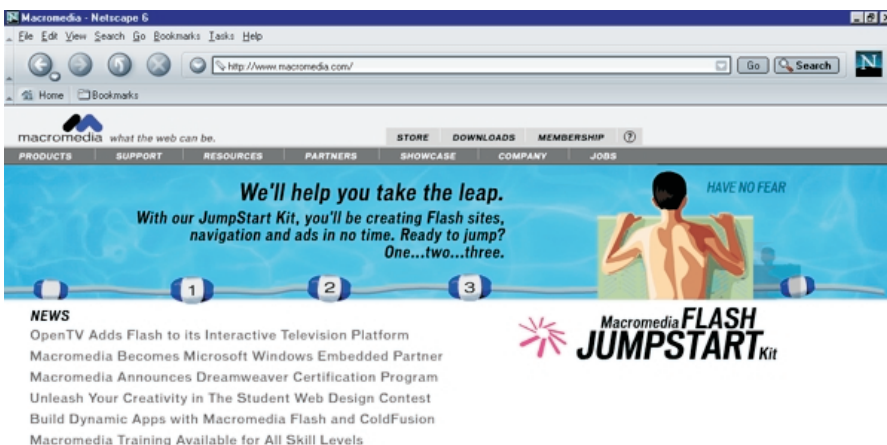
Flash experiments - try them!



Funny Flashes from Todd Gallina



Cartoons from the Icebox



OTTAWA PC NEWS

Ottawa PC News is the newsletter of the Ottawa PC Users' Group (OPCUG), and is published monthly except in July and August. The opinions expressed in this newsletter may not necessarily represent the views of the club or its members.



Member participation is encouraged! If you would like to contribute an article to *Ottawa PC News*, please submit it to the newsletter editor (contact info below). Deadline for submissions is three Saturdays before the next General Meeting.

Group Meetings

OPCUG meets on the second Wednesday in the month, except July and August, at the Canada Science and Technology Museum, 1867 St. Laurent Blvd, Ottawa. Meetings are 7:30–9:00 p.m. and Special Interest Groups go until 10 p.m.

Fees

OPCUG annual membership: \$25 per year.

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To subscribe to the Announcements List, e-mail listserv@opcug.ca. Leave the subject blank. In the body of the message put “subscribe announcements” (without the quotes). Within a couple of minutes you will receive a confirmation message from the listserver.

“Announcements” is a low volume list that the Board of Directors can use to get in touch with the membership. Subscribers can expect at least one message per month – the meeting reminder that goes out a few days in advance of the general meeting. Other than that, the only time it is used is when the Board feels there is some important news that should be brought to the attention of all members.



CLUB LIFE

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Bring your old computer books, software, hardware, and paraphenalia you want to **GIVE AWAY** to the General Meetings, and leave them at the table near the auditorium's entrance. *Please limit magazines to publication dates of less than two years old.*

You may **TAKE AWAY** any items of use to you. Stuff left over at the end of the meeting will be sent to the recycle bin.

