

# Listen, Do You Want to Know a Secret?

Happy New Year! I think now is a great time to revisit the topic of my first ever "Ask the Expert." The topic was passwords, and since passwords need to be changed from time to time, perhaps a periodic reminder is in order.



There are a few key ingredients to great passwords. One of the most important aspects is that passwords need to be changed from time to time. Even with an excellent password, there is the possibility it could fall into the wrong hands. Changing your password from time to time limits the amount of exposure if your password is surreptitiously acquired.

Good passwords are also strong. There are some misconceptions about what makes a great password and even how to handle them. The length of the password is far more important than the amount of funny characters you put in it. You might think that X1@5#.rQz is a better password than "Listen, Do You Want to Know a Secret", but the truth is, that line from the Beatles song will keep your secrets far more secure than X1@5#.rQz. Where the special characters are important is when you have a very limited length password. If all you have is 8 characters, or even 15, be sure to use numbers, upper and lower case letters, and special characters like the # \$ % ^, and so on. Also, remember that the space character is valid for most passwords. Some websites will not allow good passwords, so you need to change those ones more often. When you change a password, incrementing a number is not a good idea... it is too easy to guess.

Another important aspect of a good password is secrecy. If your secret is "I'm in love with you" and you tell the world, as the Beatles did, then the password is useless. Nobody should ever be asking you for your password. An interesting trick to get people to reveal their passwords is when a person calls, claims to be from helpdesk, and asks the user to change their password to one provided by "helpdesk". If you change your password to one that someone told you to change it to, then you have revealed your secret.

It is also important that you do not use the same password for multiple things that are important. For example, your banking account and your computer log on should not share the same password. This is for damage control. Identity theft is much easier for the bad guys when one password buys them the keys to the kingdom.

For more tips on good passwords, or other security questions, feel free to email me at [askeset@eset.com](mailto:askeset@eset.com)



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