The IT Geek's
"Tip of the Week"

Dealing With The Password History

From a network security standpoint, it is important to require users to change their passwords periodically. It is human nature, however, to revert back to the password we were previously using. Admittedly, toggling between two passwords is more secure than not changing them at all… but the best strategy is to restrict repetition. Thus, many colleges and universities have implemented password histories which prevent users from reusing their last ten passwords.

How can you remember your password when faced with changing them frequently—and not being able to use previous ones? One suggestion is to use a base or root word (in other words, a string of characters common to all of your passwords) and then change the prefix or suffix when creating a new password. You could even use the prefix to designate a particular system or website and vary the suffix to create a new password.

For example, if my base password is plank, I could use YHplank1 as my first Yahoo password. When required to change it, I could then use YHPlank2, YHplank3, etc. If my Windows password is currently, XPplank4, my next password could be XPlank5. Whether you increment or decrement the suffix, swap the suffix and prefix, or other scheme is entirely up to you… but using a technique such as this makes it easier to recall what your passwords are.

We'd love to hear from you! Please send questions and comments to HelpDesk@csum.edu. Previous tips are online at: http://www.csum.edu/IT/tipoftheweek.asp