Not many of us would leave our houses or cars unlocked, or leave valuables unattended. But when it comes to information we tend to be less careful. Just look at the phone hacking scandal. Many of the victims left their passwords set to the factory default setting of... password which made it easy for hackers. It shows that we need to be more careful with information about ourselves, and that which we handle for others. So this is what you need to know about information security. Most of us, whether at home or at work, have a huge amount of data on computers, smartphones, storage devices, tablets, and on paper. There's so much of it that we can become complacent. Perhaps mixing every day documents with sensitive information, then treating them as if they were all just ordinary files with nothing important on them. But what if these files got into the wrong hands? Embarrassment? Inconvenience? Public scandal and dismissal? A lof ot information security is about being more aware of the risks we're taking. Personal information may seem unimportant to you, but to a criminal, it can be the key that opens doors. We need passwords for everything these days. This is Laura and she uses them a lot. This one looks pretty secure and she knows not to write it down. But here's the thing, she uses the same password for lots of different websites. The same one for her social media as her online auction account, her bank and her Amazing.com account, and for some site and she had to register for... Criminals capture usernames, passwords and personal information from bogus sites it's one of the most common ways that criminals get our details. So using secure passwords is important, but it's also important to use different ones. And passwords are just the first line of defense. For important information encryption makes it almost impossible for criminals to use the data, even if they do get through to it. That's why people often encrypt data on laptops or USB memory sticks. Encryption's also used to make data transfer through the internet more secure. Websites that are using enryption have an h-t-t-p-s address and a padlock symbol. Look for this if you're buying something, or using a bank account or getting a quote for insurance, anytime when personal details and information are involved. But what about information on paper? We can be just as careless with written or printed documents. You may have heard of government officials with confidential documents on display walking passed photographers, or putting correspondence in public litter bins. It seems so obvious, but have you ever left any documents with confidential information lying around, in a briefcase, on a desk, or on a computer monitor where someone could see it, copy it or print it off?Ever hit 'reply to all' on an email and not checked who it was going to? It might just be embarrassing but it could be worse... a lot worse. Sometimes though it's more a case of stopping others gaining access. You wouldn't let a stranger follow you in through your front door, so why do people do this in secure areas at work? It's called tailgating. It might be a little embarrassing to say no, or ask for ID, but look what happened in this case, An imposter went into a bank posing as an IT person come to fix a computer. Instead he installed a small piece of software onto the system which allowed hackers to see what was being typed on the bank's computer, and use this information to transfer money from the bank to their own accounts. Criminals tried to do something similar on Laura's computer at home by trying to install what's called malware. Fortunately, she had her antivirus and protection software up-to date and it stopped the hackers before they did any damage. Credit and debit cards are prime targets for criminals. Some clone them, while others watch over your shoulder as you enter your PIN code, before stealing your card and using it. Look out for these so called shoulder surfers, and make sure they can't see your PIN as you enter it. Organized gangs of criminals are stealing information at such a rate that the cost of a credit card number and bank account details is about the same as the price of the cup of coffee. Criminals are always looking for new ways to get our information and use it for profit. Here are three things that may help to make it harder for them. The first is to be more aware of what information you have, how important it is and how secure it is. Second is to assess what could happen if you lost it or it got into the wrong hands. And third, make sure you have adequate precautions in place to protect it. Although it may be difficult for us to see the value of the information we handle everyday, we need to get into the habit of protecting our own, and others' information, in the same way as we look after our valuables and the things we care about.