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What is OAuth?

OAuth is an open-standard authorization protocol or framework that provides applications the ability for "secure designated access." For example, you can tell Facebook that it's OK for ESPN.com to access your profile or post updates to your timeline without having to give ESPN your Facebook password. This minimizes risk in a major way: In the event ESPN suffers a breach, your Facebook password remains safe.

OAuth doesn't share password data but instead uses authorization tokens to prove an identity between consumers and service providers. OAuth is an authentication protocol that allows you to approve one application interacting with another on your behalf without giving away your password.

OAuth Explained

OAuth is about authorization and not authentication. Authorization is asking for permission to do stuff. Authentication is about proving you are the correct person because you know things. OAuth doesn't pass authentication data between consumers and service providers – but instead acts as an authorization token of sorts.

The common analogy I've seen used while researching OAuth is the valet key to your car. The valet key allows the valet to start and move the car but doesn't give them access to the trunk or the glove box.