Do Your Digital Hygiene Checkup this Year-End!

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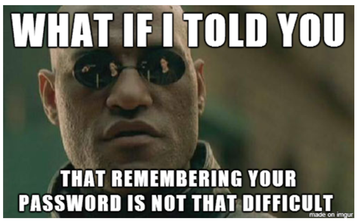
Uli Hitzel
Executive Geek

Updating passwords, creating backups for important stuff, subscribing to a VPN – some things to look at if you really can't stay away from devices over the holidays.

Close your eyes and imagine you've just lost your phone in a taxi. It's gone. What are the consequences? Buying a new device, even though it's usually quite costly, may not be the biggest problem. What data on your phone will you have lost forever? And what information, which photos will now be accessible to strangers? Should you have used a stronger password? Fingerprints? You suddenly remember that somebody recommended to set up 'Two-Factor Authentication" for your accounts and you always wanted to find out how that works.

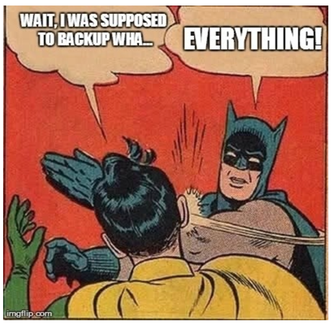
Now – you're back in the room, and your phone is still with you. Even better, you have some time at hand over the long holiday break and decide that you want to be better at these things. More and more aspects of our lives are moving into the digital world so this is probably a good idea. Instead of writing a lengthy post, I'll just give you a few pointers and you'll be able to find detailed How-Tos on the web that work for your choice of devices and services.

Passwords



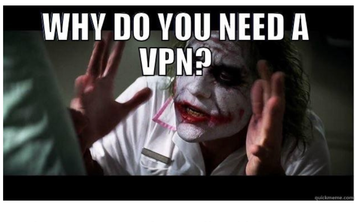
How many times this year have you tried logging in into a service using some of the frequent, simple passwords you keep using here and there? Of course, some websites are more important than others. Change the passwords for key services like Google, Facebook, PayPal, Amazon and so on. No need to think of memorable passwords, let tools like KeePass generate secure, random ones and store them encrypted for you. Enable Two-Factor Authentication where possible, so you'll have to confirm new devices with a one-time SMS or code. It's not too much of a hassle and it does get you to the next security level.

Backups



Your backup strategy might be different from mine, but do make sure you have one. To start with, you could copy the important photos & documents from your phone to your laptop, export the contacts to a text file, create a password-protected ZIP of everything and store it on a USB drive and somewhere in the cloud. For photos and contacts, many people choose to keep those synchronized with iCloud or Google. Personally, I'm relying on the idea that it's extremely unlikely for my USB drive to fail *and* Google, Microsoft, and Amazon going out of business or having severe outages on the same day.

VPN



People are concerned about privacy and online safety – yet, everybody is happily jumping on free WiFi services that are offered at hotels and shopping malls, without protection. It's just not a good idea. The internet is not happening in a parallel universe and it's people like me and your neighbor who operate networks, usually with best intentions but that's not always enough. Tunnel Bear gives you a free, limited VPN plan with apps that are so intuitive that my mum could use them), and you'll find several paid, high-end services like NordVPN as well.

Of course, we could talk about apps, privacy settings, social media, antivirus software and more. Start with these three things.