



## January Newsletter: Organize your passwords and finances

We know it's already mid-January, but it's never too late to add a few New Year's resolutions to your list.

This year, we're focusing on organization: passwords and finances are at the top of our must-keep resolutions. Read on to get some of our best password security and memorization tips, and learn about our favorite site for keeping track of your finances online.

Good luck!

Your friends at Cartwheel

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## Secure your passwords, once and for all

It seems like there's a new website to register for every week. Online banking, social networking sites and news sites like nytimes.com, email, and shopping sites: all require unique usernames and passwords, and even so called "Security Questions". Remembering everything is almost impossible... not to mention trying to ensure that the passwords you choose are secure: easy to remember and hard to guess.

Below, we share a technique that quite a number of us IT folks use. We think you should use it too, and never feel insecure about your passwords again.

Step 1: Create two strong passwords. Here are the guidelines:

- a. They must be 8 characters or more (otherwise some websites will reject them, and you'll just need more passwords)
- b. They can't contain a whole word, name, birthday, phone number, home address or any other information that can be guessed or obtained
- c. They must contain at least 5 letters, at least 2 numbers, and at least 1 special character (again this is so that some websites don't reject them)

Strong Passwords	Weak Passwords
i@hn*\$is	johnsmith99
h!2kroo\$	hello123

Step 2: Now that you've got your two strong passwords, choose the strongest one, and call it your "secure" password. Call the other one your "regular" password. You'll use the regular password for sites that don't house much personal information (like news sites, Twitter, etc.) and the secure password for sites that have your most personal information (email, banking, etc.).



Step 3: For each username / password combination you have, create an address book entry (e.g. in Outlook). You can do this elsewhere too, but something that can synchronize with a PDA (iPhone, BlackBerry, etc.) is ideal.

As you visit websites, change your existing passwords to one of your new passwords. Then, instead of writing the password in the Contact Notes field (where snooping eyes might find it), simply write the username and then "regular" or "secure" for which password you used. So the Contact Note for chase.com might be "joe @ yahoo.com / secure." And the note for twitter would read "JoeK / regular"

That's it. You're now secure! And if you're having a senior moment when trying to log in somewhere, just go to your contacts list to remind yourself which password you used for the site. Here are some last reminders for passwords:

Do:

- Always use strong passwords
- Use an entry code for your PDA
- Use a password on your computer and a hard drive password on any traveling laptop
- Shred your used hard drives

Don't:

- Write passwords down on paper
- Keep your passwords in a file on your computer
- Throw hard drives in the trash (without shredding them)
- Share your secure passwords, even with those you trust (they may write them down)

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## Protect your data from theft

As painful as it may be to look at our finances after last year, it's a great time to start tracking things, or track them better.

While many users opt for Quicken (which we've used for years), we've become fans of Mint.com – which was recently purchased by Intuit, the same company that makes Quicken. In fact, Intuit announced this week that it would be phasing out its Quicken Online service and replacing it with Mint. The new service will be called "Mint.com from Quicken," and will combine elements of both programs in what Intuit hopes will be an improvement on both. No word yet on whether current Quicken Online users will be able to import their existing data to the new Mint service, though. So if you're a current user, now might be a good time to act early and start the transition before it's forced on you. Mint.com makes it easy for you to consolidate all your online banking activities in one place, manage several accounts from a single interface, and – best of all – access the data from anywhere you have an internet connection.



Like Quicken, Mint.com doesn't allow you to transfer money in or out of accounts, so the site basically just acts as a window into your banking accounts. You can set and track budgets, and break down expenses by category so that you can micro-manage your spending.

The initial set-up is easy: just enter each of your bank accounts using their existing usernames and passwords (first, see our password article above!), and mint.com logs into each of them on your behalf. Be patient; it can take quite a while for to complete the process.

The online interface allows you to interact with your money in a few interesting ways. It automatically categorizes each line item; and was surprisingly accurate. From there, it's easy to modify a category or adjust a seller's name for better clarity. You can also add tags to each item – for instance, if you spent \$100 at Banana Republic, but you did that while on vacation in Barbados, the category would be "Shopping" and then you could add the tag "Vacation" to indicate that it was also a trip expense.

You can easily set budgets, and create budgets for specific expenses or wider groups (for instance, a specific "Food and Dining" budget vs. an "Around the Town" budget). Mint will track trends in your spending over time, using data from your credit card statements, so that you can break expenses down by category, merchant, or tag. You can also track income vs. spending over time; and this falls into Mint's larger "goal" of using data-rich graphics to help users develop responsible habits and plan for the future.

The one tab we weren't huge fans of was the "Ways to Save" tab. It's basically a collection of credit card offers, free credit report offers, savings account offers, IRA offers, auto insurance offers, and... more offers. We guess if you were shopping around for any of these services, the tab might be useful. But we can't see ourselves clicking into it very often. On the upside, since Mint is a free service, having the "Ways to Save" page keeps them from having to put ads anywhere else. So thankfully, the rest of the site is generally ad-free (for now).

The Mint iPhone app is intuitive and easy on the eyes. While you can't interact with it or make changes as much as you can with the online interface, you can view your Accounts, Budget, Cash Flow, and Investments in four simple tabs. You can drill down as far as individual expenses, but you can't make changes to categories or tags the way you can with the online application. It's basically just a mobile viewpoint for your accounts – it's useful and pretty, but might be improved if it gave you some control to make changes directly. The app also has an Alerts tab that displays any important warnings for your account (such as a low balance or account hold). It feels relatively secure, allowing you to set a 4-digit passcode to protect the app from unwanted eyes. You can also log out at the end of a session to delete any data the app has downloaded to the iPhone for temporary use.

All in all, Mint is a good alternative to Quicken (and soon, its replacement), with a smooth iPhone app for mobile management (none for BlackBerry, yet). Just don't forget to set one of those secure passwords like we mentioned above!



As always, if you have any questions or would like help setting up secure passwords or figuring out which programs can help with keeping your books in order, don't hesitate to call us at 212 206 9619. We'd be happy to help you keep those New Year's resolutions... any time of the year.