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THE VIBE

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Keeping Your Passwords Secure

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One of the biggest security issues today is the use of unsecured passwords. Studies have indicated that "password," "123456" and "qwerty" are among the most commonly used passwords - not very secure at all. Here are some suggestions on creating and using more secure passwords.

Guidelines for strong passwords

1. Use a lot of characters: 10-14 at a minimum, 20 or more is best. Your Windows login password can be up to 127 characters.
2. Avoid dictionary words and repeated or sequential characters, especially for shorter passwords (around 8 characters).
3. Use the space character, symbols and numbers. Mix upper- and lower-case letters.
4. Avoid obvious substitutions, like R1ch or pa\$\$w0rd.
5. Use phrases or sentences to create a long password, then add some additional characters and scramble the letters: "I was born in the month of February with no hair" becomes "I was born 00 in the month of yraurbeF with _hair!!" Alternatively, you can use the first character of each word: "lwbitmoFwnh", then add some symbols: "lw0bitmo_Fw\$nh!!"
6. Use a password generator. (Visit VibranceVibe.com for suggestions or search for "password generator.")

Best practices

1. Change your passwords periodically.
2. Don't ever reveal passwords, verbally or electronically, especially in response to an e-mail request.
3. Avoid public computers – there is always a possibility that a rogue program is capturing keystrokes.
4. Protect passwords that you've written down or stored in a document. Written

passwords should be kept in a locked drawer or cabinet. You can store passwords in an encrypted Word, Excel or WinZip file, but if you do this, make sure your "master" password is tough to crack. There are programs available that claim to be able to reveal weaker passwords used to encrypt these types of files.

5. Use different passwords for different services. For example, don't use the same password for all your banking services. *If you must* re-use a set of passwords (not recommended), then make sure the same password is not used for similar services. For example, if you use the same password for your email and CapitalOne account, don't use it for any of your other banking services.

Using complex passwords

The best scenario would be to create wildly complex passwords, such as ^Na28Xy52up4R5E@XVEK2J^oc, that are unique to each site you login to. The drawback, of course, is that it would be nearly impossible to remember passwords like these. Instead, you can create complex passwords and then store them in an encrypted file or a password saver program. I've used both methods: text files containing passwords stored in an encrypted zip file and a password keeper called RoboForm. Lately, I've started using RoboForm more often for two reasons: 1) the risk that the WinZip file can be hacked (see #4 above) and 2) RoboForm logs you into web sites without having to type in (or remember) your username and password. In either case, remember that the important thing with storing passwords electronically is to have a very secure master password!

Visit www.vibrancevibe.com for more information.

Problem Solved!

A medical device company goes from paper-based to paper-less.

Background

Company ABC is a medical device manufacturer. Occasionally, ABC's customers request modifications to their products (called "Requests"). In this situation, ABC works with the customer to modify an existing device so that it meets their needs. When ABC is creating new products derived from existing ones, they keep track of a multitude of information, for internal use and per government regulations.

ABC has rigorous procedures that manage the Request process from inception to implementation: Numerous approvals are required from ABC's department heads, and design and contractual documents must be maintained. Departmental approvals include R&D, Marketing, Operations and Quality. Both the ABC sales representative and customer must approve the final design and cost estimates before the Request moves forward. Currently, the entire process is paper-based and has no centralized management.

Problem

The problems managing this process are typical of paper-based systems:

1. There is too much paper! Forms and documents can easily be misplaced.
2. Because the forms are paper-based, responses are handwritten and often non-standard.
3. Information on the forms is not trackable and no system exists to track and monitor the process.
4. The information is not centralized. The forms may reside in various employee offices; product information and drawings in another area; and customer documents in yet another.
5. As a result of #4, it is difficult to keep the Request in a coherent package and nearly impossible to reference or research older Requests.

Requirements

The overall requirement is to get rid of all paper-based forms and documents and develop a trackable database:

- Create a database for the Requests and their associated forms.
- Retire the paper process: re-create all paper forms on the computer so that users fill out information electronically.
- Implement a way for managers to sign off on documents electronically, recording the manager's ID and approval date.
- Be able to store various product documents: specifications, parts listings, drawings, quote sheets, customer contracts, etc.
- Interface with other existing databases that have common information, specifically the accounting system (Microsoft Dynamics) and the in-house Part Number database.

Implementation

Vibrance is currently finalizing development on this system. The database has been created and all the forms are now electronic. The database links with the accounting system to retrieve information such as the Sales Rep, Customer information, PO# and Vendor. It also links with the Part Number database to retrieve the parts that pertain to the Request. Within the forms, dropdowns have been used where it is important to standardize responses. For example, when a data value relates to another database, such as the PO# from Microsoft Dynamics, the user has to choose from existing POs.

Approvals and data flow are important aspects of this program. Manager approvals work as follows: If the form requires the marketing manager's approval, for example, then the approval fields are only enabled when the marketing manager is logged in. When the manager approves the form, the database stores the ID of the manager and the date of the approval. Once approved, this data cannot be changed, providing a secure record of the approval. Approvals also guide the Request process by disabling certain form fields until a manager has given his/her approval - ensuring that information flows properly and is not entered prematurely.

Document storage is probably one of the best features of this program. Users are able to store drawings and specifications for instruments, customer documents, and contracts. Within each Request, the pertinent documents are available for viewing and can't be deleted or moved from the network folder where they are stored. This feature provides a centralized storage mechanism and ensures that these critical documents will be available for future reference.



ABOUT VIBRANCE

www.vibrancetech.com

Vibrance Technology is a consulting firm specializing in the development of custom software and database applications. Vibrance creates software from the ground up, using the clients' ideas and requirements to provide solutions that meet their unique needs. Vibrance has successfully implemented solutions for a wide variety of businesses and in a number of functional areas, including sales, finance and inventory management.

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