The South Bay Mug

MACINTOSH

MAChinations

A personal view from Bob

Passwords

I've got hundreds of them. Everyone on the web wants me to sign in with a user name and password. Their importance ranges from the benign to critical.

- Benign: These are nuisance passwords required to read the NY Times, etc. Use something simple.

- Medium strength: These are for shopping sites where any damage would be minimal. Use a simple, but different, password for each.

- Critical: These include banking, credit card, ebay and financial sites where damage could be serious. For each site I use a different, strong password, like !->w`l~&cAzxcZ[T. It's also a good idea to change the password every now and then.

Now the fun begins. How do you keep track of all these and enter them without making mistakes. For years I've used an excellent program called Web Confidential ($20), a specialized database for all my account information. Open it using a password or pass phrase you've memorized. Do not write it down. Once open, all your stored passwords are displayed. It offers different categories such as www sites, ftp servers, login, newsgroups, email, banking, credit cards, etc. For each you can enter the URL, user name, password and notes. It can automatically open the log-in web

page and paste in your user name and password. It can also create passwords of different strengths.

I like finding good, FREE stuff, and uncovered a little gem called Vault, similar to Web Confidential, but without the categories and auto login. You can use it for more than passwords. It stores text and photos.
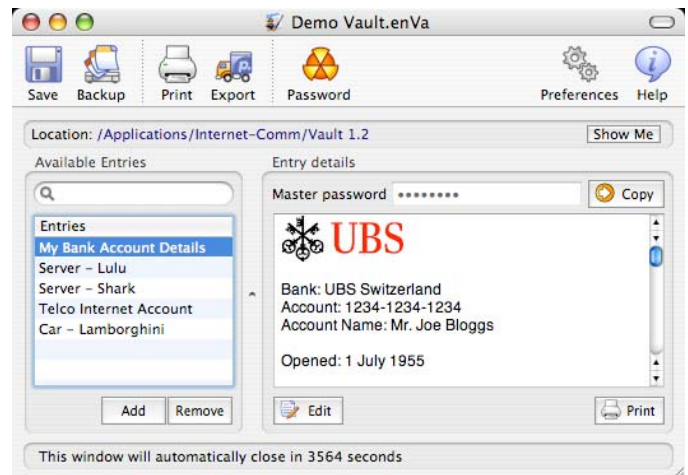
Your new Macintosh

When you get a new Mac, the first thing you do is walk through some screens to set up your user account with your name, a short name and a password. If you are Reginald Edgerton Arbuckle III, Ph.D., don't use that for your name. Use something shorter and something really short, such as reg or reggie, for your short name. The strength of your password depends on where your Mac is used. In the home it isn't too critical, but DON'T FORGET IT, because you need it each time you install software that accesses the System. In System Preferences>Accounts you can select to log in automatically or manually. I log in automatically at home, but manually "on the road" where there's a risk of theft or compromise.

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