The importance of having strong passwords

WE use passwords every day to access various things from our phones and emails, to our online bank accounts, but how strong are they? Or are they just the same characters and numbers that we use across all our devices, social media accounts and back accounts?

If you're using the same easy-to-guess passwords, the chances of your personal information being hacked are high.

According to Proxyrack's fraud analyst Ariana Bago, the hacking industry is becoming increasingly advanced. Last year, hackers leaked over 721 million passwords.

"Therefore, making sure your data and personal information are protected by a strong password should be the top priority for any Internet user, especially as these sites hold valuable information," she said.

PASSWORD USAGE REALITY
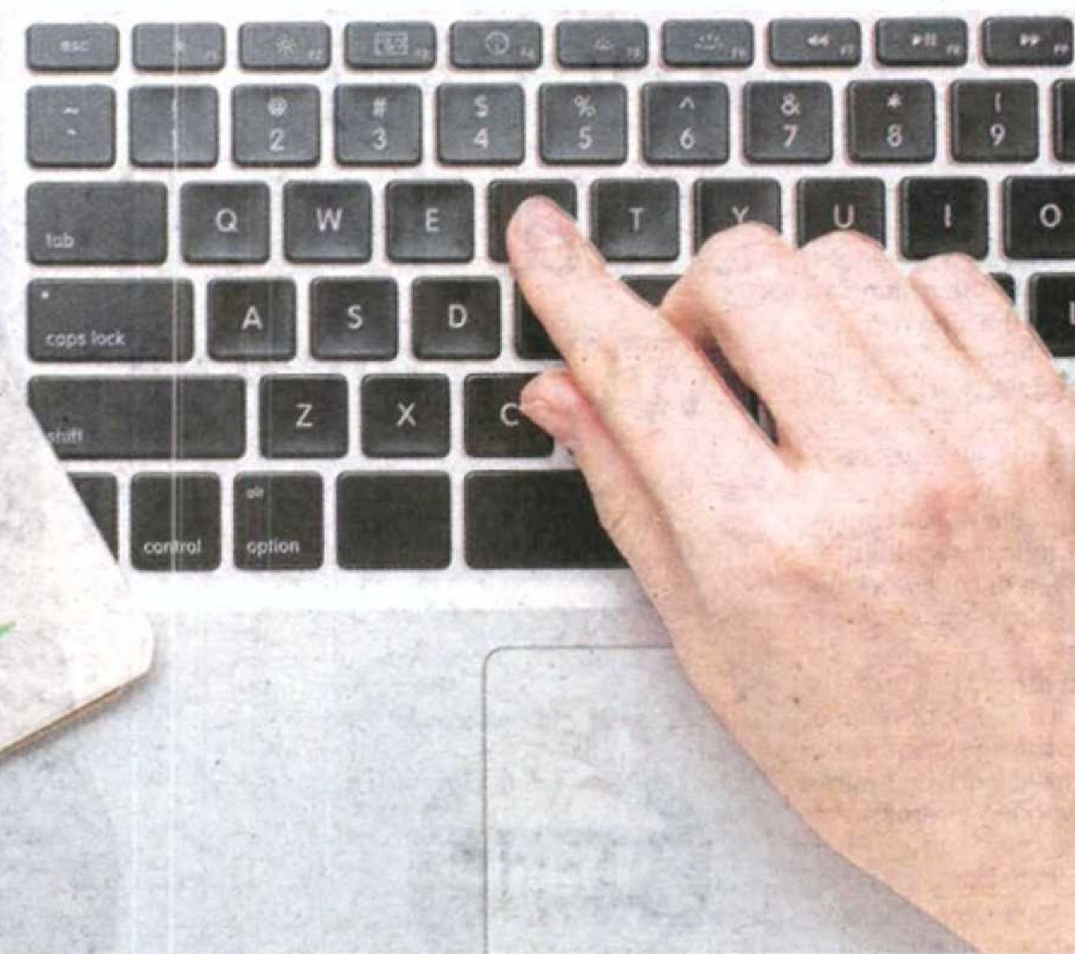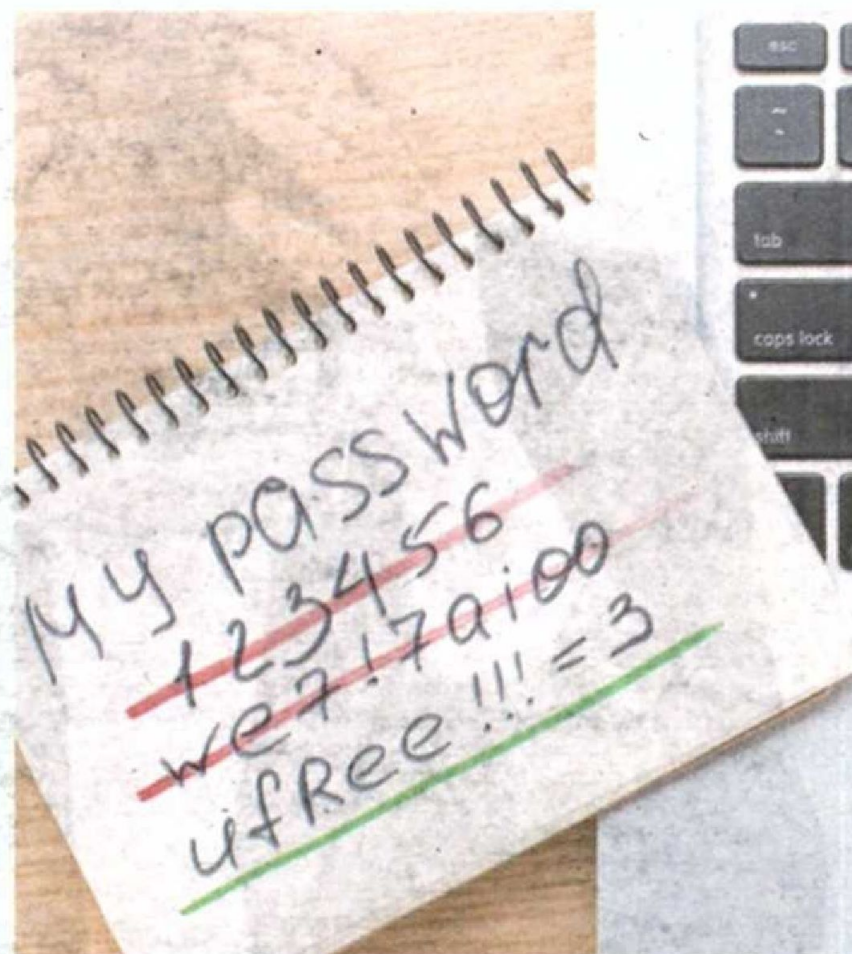Did you know that around 65 per cent of Internet users reuse passwords?

"The first thing I would recommend users to do is to identify any passwords they have used across multiple accounts and rename each duplicate uniquely," said Bago.

This is because when a hacker manages to figure out a duplicate password, it instantly compromises any account sharing that password, so be sure to change each to a unique password.

"Remember, password strength isn't personal. One of the most common password mistakes is including personal information to make them memorable, such as using a pet's name as the main body. However, these can easily be figured out by hackers and need to be avoided," said Bago.

The most important aspect of a strong password is its length.

A six-character password can now

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PICTURE CREDIT: FREEPIK

be breached in just seconds using brute force techniques, in which a computer tries every possible combination of characters to work out the correct sequence.

"Every extra character, whether it's a letter, number, or symbol, increases the possibility area and makes it more secure.

"If you find it hard to remember or keep track of your passwords, use a password manager. Password managers store your passwords for your accounts in an encrypted vault that only you can access," said Bago.

"Ultimately, while it may seem a pain to change your passwords to make them stronger, you won't need to change them regularly if you are creating strong and unique passwords for each account."

So if you feel that your passwords are easy to guess, here are seven ways you can create more secure ones.

1. USE A VARIETY OF SPECIAL CHARACTERS.
Including symbols (such as S, !, %) is a more effective way of strengthening your password compared with adding uppercase characters or numbers. These characters are much less guessable and should be included in any password.

2. THE LONGER THE PASSWORD THE BETTER.
When it comes to password security, length matters. Longer passwords are harder for hackers to figure out, with each additional symbol making your password exponentially more difficult to crack, so aim for 12-15 characters, including a mix of letters, numbers, and special characters.

3. AVOID COMMON WORDS OR COMBINATIONS.
If a password can be looked up in the dictionary, it is not a strong password. Additionally, common character combinations such as '1234' and 'abcd' can easily be figured out by hackers. Hackers have a bank of frequently used passwords that they test, so make your password as unique as possible.

4. REFRAIN FROM INCLUDING PERSONAL INFORMATION.
Family members and pet names, alongside memorable dates and other personal information, are commonly used in passwords. However, a password should be unrelated to anything personal as hackers may be able to figure this out.

5. NEVER REUSE PASSWORDS.
A strong password is a unique password. While you may be tempted to

use one password for all your online accounts, this will leave you more vulnerable to multiple attacks if your password is breached, so never repeat or recycle your passwords.

6. USE A PASSWORD GENERATOR.
If you don't have time to develop your own passwords, using a password generator is a quick and easy way to get a strong and unique password. The generator will create a random sequence of characters and symbols for you to copy and use to secure your accounts.

7. TRY A PASSWORD MANAGER.
A password manager can be an effective way of keeping track of your passwords. It will make you feel more comfortable using different passwords for different accounts, especially if you have been following these tips and have curated multiple combinations of characters to create a strong password.

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By Izwan Ismail