

Linsey's Administrative Tips

Protect Your Personal Information on Public Computers

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Occasionally, you will use a public computer, such as the one you use while at work or at the library. When you are on a public computer there is always a risk of exposing personal information. Below are some tips on how to protect yourself and manage (or lessen) that risk:

- **Don't save your log-in information.** Some websites will ask if you want to save your password and your answer should always be no. Saving your password may allow others to sign into the website with your username and password and possibly access private information
- **Always hit the "log-out" button** after visiting a website that requires a username and password before closing the browser. Closing the browser window will not log you out of the website and the next time someone visits the same website you will still be logged-in.
- **Don't do online banking or shopping.** A public computer is not secure and there are certain things you should never use them for. Online banking and online shopping both involve entering personal information that could be unsafe on a public computer. If you are away from home, use an ATM or bank to check your balance and complete your banking.
- **Delete your browsing history.** This is an easy way to prevent the next person from seeing the websites that you visited. Do this by looking under the Tools tab and clicking Internet Options. Under that menu you can delete the browsing history, cookies and temporary internet files.
- **Don't save files directly onto the public computer.** Files that you would normally save onto your home computer, such as email attachments, should not be saved onto a public ma-

chine. This will help keep your documents and private information safe. It is also polite not to save personal files onto a public computer; this will give the next user a clean desktop and computer to work with.

- **Delete temporary files off the computer.** When using a program such as Microsoft Word or Excel the computer automatically creates a temporary file. These are supposed to be automatically deleted when the program is closed or the computer is shut down, however sometimes they are preserved. Before leaving a public computer, do a search of the hard drive for any files ending in ".tmp" and delete those files. This way, the next user cannot access the files you were working on.
- **Reboot or shut down the computer when finished.** A reboot or shut down of the system clears out most of the temporary files that were stored on the computer. It will also clear out everything you did that used computer memory.
- **Be aware of your surroundings.** It is good common sense to pay attention to what is going on around you when on a public computer. Be cautious of other people around you who could see what you are doing on the computer. Some people use public areas to purposely obtain private information about others. Do not view any documents that are private or sensitive that you wouldn't want anyone else to see. Try to cover your hands when typing log-in information.

References:

- Littlejohn, Kris. *TechRepublic: A ZDNet Tech Community*. 12 March 2008. 28 October 2009 <<http://blogs.techrepublic.com.com/10tbings/?p=322>>.
- Microsoft. 2009. 28 October 2009 <<http://www.microsoft.com/protect/mobile/public/publicpc.aspx>>.