

MAC LESSON #117

Keeping Track Of Our Passwords, Serial Numbers, ATM Codes, Etc

Keeping track of our passwords, serial numbers, ATM codes, etc, can be difficult. And on top of that we need to keep this info safe.

The problem is that if you make this information easy to remember, it's easy to crack. Make it hard to remember and you might forget it.

If you are a Mac user, OS X 10.3 or higher has the solution. Use Keychain to hide passwords, password hints, Web site access codes and passwords, and even notes or documents.

To open Keychain Access clicking on Go in the Finder window, and then click on Utilities. Now click on the Keychain Access icon.

When Keychain Access opens you'll see a list of all the items in your Keychain, including information about each item's name. If you haven't opened Keychain Access yet, most of these items will be passwords—Internet passwords, application passwords, disk image passwords. The Access Control tab lists the applications allowed to access each item.

To add a new password item, click on the Password icon in the Keychain Access toolbar. Give the new item a name, like ATM PIN, enter the account or user name associated with the password, and then enter the password or passphrase you want stored in the Keychain. Click on Add to save the new item.

The Keychain can also store secure notes. These are just bits of text, but because they're part of your Keychain, they're safe. To create a secure note, click on the Note icon in the toolbar. Give the note a name; then type your note text or paste it in from another application, like TextEdit, Microsoft Word, or your e-mail client.

A secure-note item works like a password item in that you can see information about the note in the Attributes panel at the bottom of the Keychain Access window. By



selecting the Show Note option and providing your account password, you can view the note itself.

You can lock your Keychain by launching Keychain Access and clicking on the Lock icon in the toolbar, but if you lock your Keychain frequently, from within Keychain Access, choose View, then Show Status In Menu Bar. This adds a menu extra (a padlock icon), to your systemwide menu bar. You can then lock the Keychain by clicking on the icon, choosing Lock Keychain Name, and entering your Keychain password. As a bonus, the menu's Lock Screen command lets you immediately turn on OS X's screen saver— and turning it off will require a password, even if you don't have this feature enabled in the Security preference pane.

By default, your Keychain password is the same as your OS X account password, and OS X unlocks your Keychain when you log in. If you'd rather just do the unlocking yourself...so that nothing and no one can access your confidential data until you authorize it, you can disable this behavior in your Keychain's settings or, more securely, change your Keychain password by clicking on Edit and then on Change Password For Keychain login.

