The Tech Lounge.

THE IT DEPARTMENT YOU DESERVE

...Staying Safe Online...

Keeping your business safe online

As a business you'll already be aware of how vulnerable you are to physical attacks on your systems and processes. If thieves break into your premises and remove your computer equipment, it will be costly to replace hardware, software and restore backed up data so you probably have insurance in place to cover loss of earnings and disruptions, good quality security systems and an entry and exit procedure for staff and visitors.

But what about cyber attacks? You may not have considered the extent of damage which could be caused by an invisible attack on your IT systems, wiping out important data and crippling your ability to do business. What systems and procedures do you have in place to protect against such an attack?

Securing your environment

As with all security the first priority should be to secure your environment. There's no point being aware of burglars if you're going to leave the front door open! You must ensure any equipment you use to get online is as secure as possible. At the most basic level this includes:

- ☑ Router
- ☑ Computer hardware
- ☑ Team (staff, contractors, freelancers)
- ☑ Premises
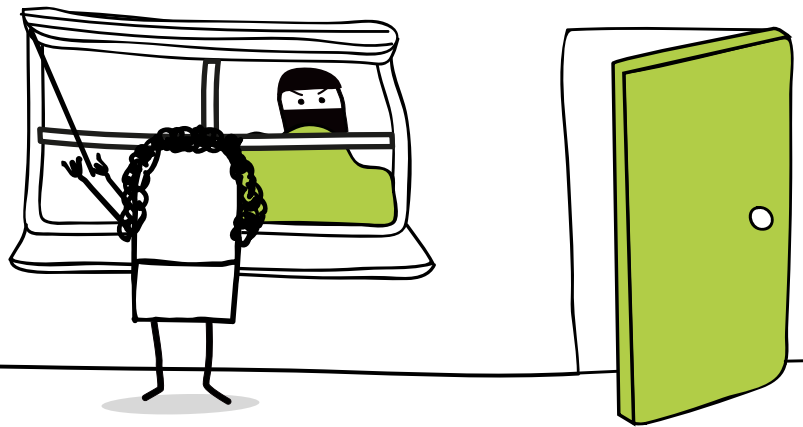
What is a router?

You connect to the internet via a router. Usually this is provided, set up and configured by your Internet Service Provider (ISP). It can be hard wired via a cable or via a wireless connection.

It is important that someone in your organisation is familiar with the admin interface for your router. If you're in any doubt, ask the engineer to show you how to access it when they set it up – or the next time they are onsite to correct a fault or conduct routine maintenance.

⭐ *Tip* In our experience a mug of tea and a few chocolate biscuits will be enough to tempt any engineer worth his salt into spending a few minutes familiarising you with the router's admin interface!

How do I protect my router?

☑ Make sure the router is running the latest firmware / software
☑ Change the default administrator username and password
☑ Check that access to your wireless network (if you have one) is password protected

Most modern routers are configured to use the WPA/WPA2* protocol. If your router isn't, you should change it. If your router doesn't support WPA/WPA2 you should plan to purchase a new one or speak to your ISP about upgrade options available.

*WPA/WPA2 are two security protocols and security certification programs developed by the Wi-Fi Alliance to secure wireless computer networks.

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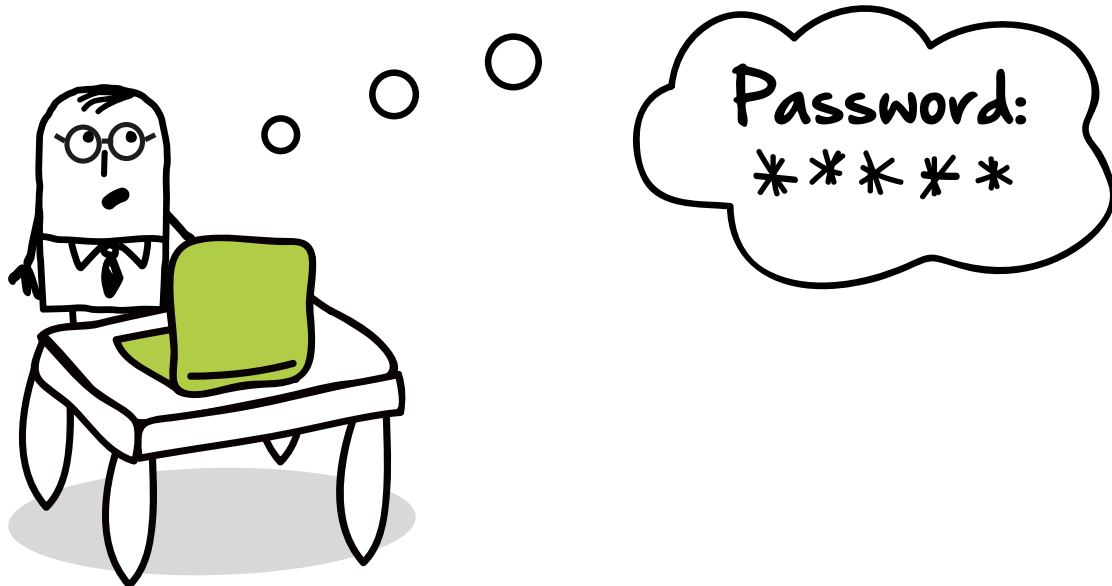
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Computer Hardware

It doesn't matter if your computer is running Microsoft Windows, Apple Mac OS X or Linux, the rules are essentially the same:

- ☑ Ensure you have the latest software and security updates installed
- ☑ Make sure you protect access to your computer with a strong password – and change it regularly
- ☑ Install and run the latest Anti-Virus software

All major software platforms include a mechanism for updating the basic operating system. Microsoft Update is Microsoft's service for updating its products, including Microsoft Office. Apple Software update is available for users of Apple Mac's OS X.

Running Anti-Virus software isn't simply about protecting your computer. If you receive a file with a virus, your computer may not be affected – but it is possible that you could then pass the virus onto other users on your network or external customers and suppliers.

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Your Team

When it comes to security, you are only as secure as your weakest link so it's essential your whole team are 'on the same page' and aware of the actions they need to take to keep your systems safe:

- ☑ Have a company Acceptable Use policy that covers online behaviour
- ☑ Have a Data Security policy so the whole team are aware of what can – and can't – be shared
- ☑ Educate your team on the risks associated with being online at work
- ☑ According to PWC 2014 Information security breaches survey, 31% of the worst security breaches in the year were caused by inadvertent human error. Promote an environment where it's OK to admit if mistakes do happen; the quicker mistakes are spotted and corrective action taken, the better

⭐ *Tip* Make this PDF available for all staff to read, or use it as the basis of a team briefing over coffee one morning. And don't overlook temporary staff such as contractors and freelancers using your systems as part of their assignments.
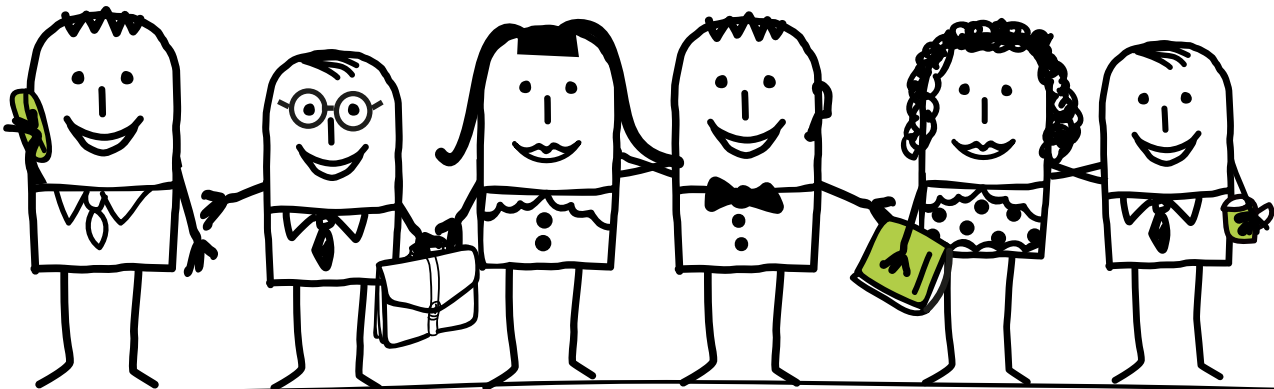
Online Safety

So having put all these measures in place are your computers safe now? Unfortunately there are still plenty of online risks out there waiting to catch the unwary.

- ☑ Websites
- ☑ Social Media
- ☑ Telephone
- ☑ Email
- ☑ Physical Media
- ☑ Social Engineering

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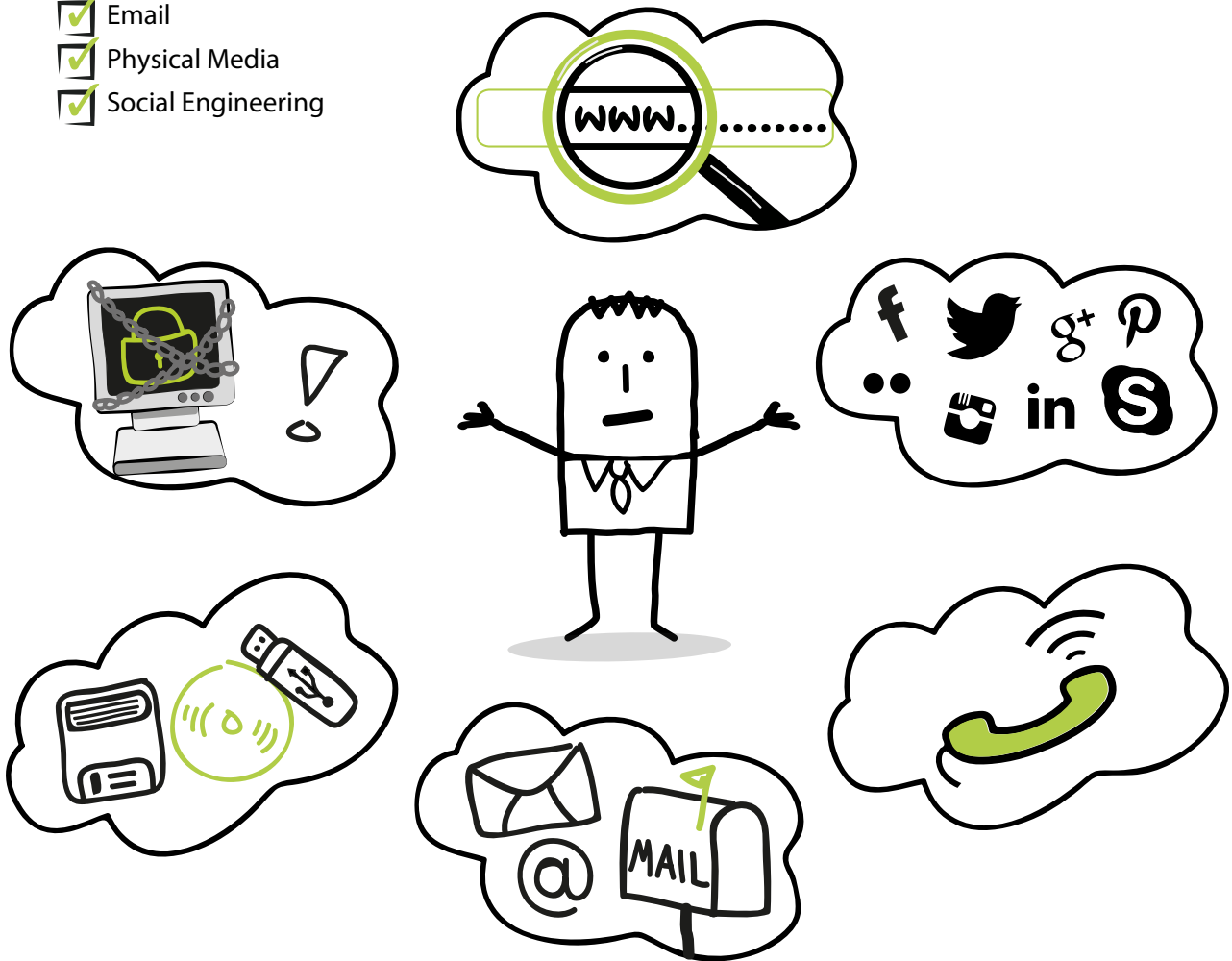W: http://www.thetechlounge.co.uk
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Your Premises

Keeping your premises secure from unauthorised visitors is a critical step; all the actions implemented above will count for nothing if anyone can walk in and remove equipment or plug in their own devices without being challenged.

- ☑ Secure your premises out-of-hours and restrict who has access physically and remotely as far as practicable
- ☑ Change access and alarm codes regularly
- ☑ Secure valuable or critical assets to desks or lock them away when not in use if you can
- ☑ Be vigilant about unauthorised devices being plugged into company computers – external hard drives, CDs, USB sticks etc

CASE STUDY

Last year a prospective client commissioned us to conduct a security audit at their offices. The audit covered all aspects of security and was part of a certification standard they were trying to achieve.

One of our testers posed as a delivery driver and plugged a small device into a plug socket in the post room.

Within 4 hours their entire network had been compromised.

Web Safety

Dodgy websites can be difficult to spot from the legitimate ones but can land you and your business in a world of pain.

- ☑ Check the website address you are being pointed to.
  http://www.natwestbank.com is a fake. The legitimate address is http://www.natwest.com.
  If you're in any doubt, Google the company and check the correct web URL
- ☑ Check the look, feel and language of the site. Bad quality logos or images, poor spelling and grammar are often clear signs of a fraudulent site
- ☑ Lack of SSL (the Padlock)
- ☑ No registered postal address, as required by The Consumer Protection (Distant Selling) Regulations 2000
- ☑ Lack of customer reviews or testimonials
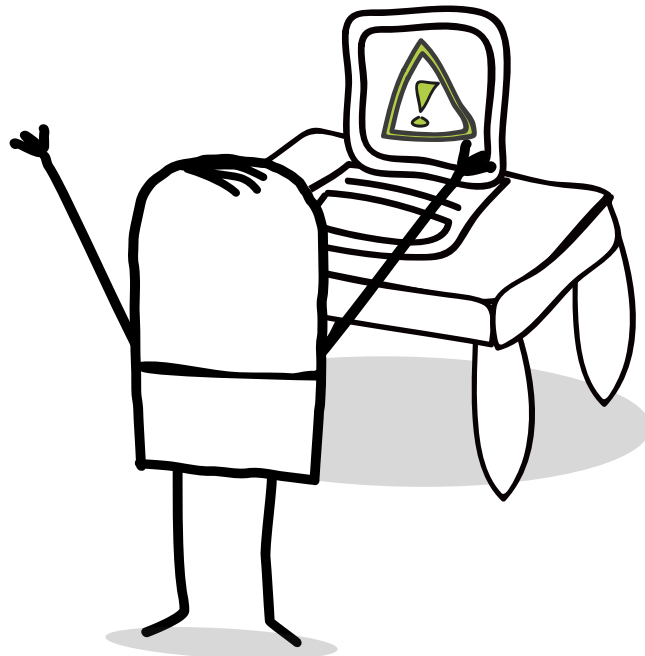
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Email Safety

Unsolicited, or spam email is annoying at best but some of it can be particularly nasty. Thieves are becoming increasingly clever and are disguising viruses, malware and fraudulent attempts to gather your data in increasingly realistic emails.

- ☑ If it looks legitimate but you're not expecting anything – for example tracking for parcels or something from your bank – don't click any links or open attachments. Instead type the web address in manually in your browser window to check its authenticity
- ☑ Don't 'Unsubscribe' as this just confirms your email address as being valid
- ☑ If in doubt don't open them at all – delete on receipt
- ☑ Empty your trash can to avoid accidentally opening discarded emails at a later date
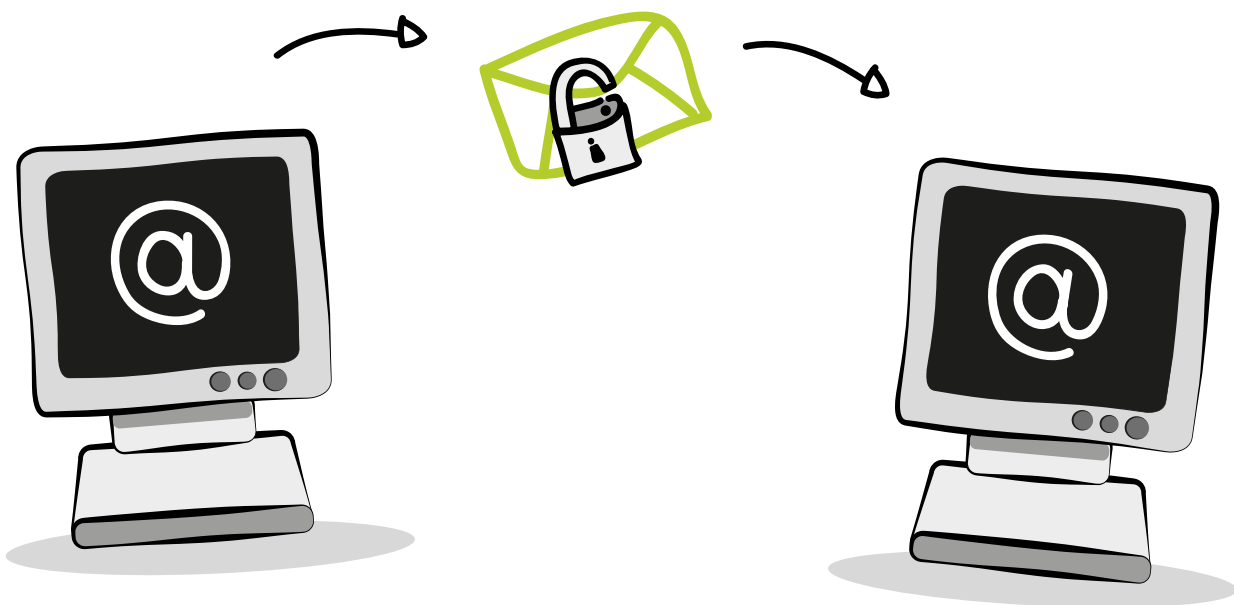
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Telephone Safety

No IT support company will call you up to tell you that you have a virus or other computer-related problem unless you have a contract with them to monitor your systems. If you receive such a call, it will be a scam and should be treated as such.

- ☑ Don't provide any personal or business information. If they are legitimate they should already have this information available
- ☑ Never provide any security information as you have no evidence to confirm their identity
- ☑ If unsure, ask for their full name and extension number and offer to call them back on their company's publicly listed number – not their direct line

Social Media

Social Media channels are a great platform for extending your brand's reach and engaging with current and prospective customers and suppliers, but there are risks associated which you should be aware of.

- ☑ Be wary of what information you share on an open platform. Most people are honest but you can't control where your information goes. If you share your opening hours, you've also shared when your premises will be unattended.
- ☑ Be careful when connecting social profiles. It's easy to trace personal information from a LinkedIn profile to a Facebook profile that may contain personal information and photos
- ☑ Be selective about who you connect with. You're potentially giving strangers a deep insight into who you are

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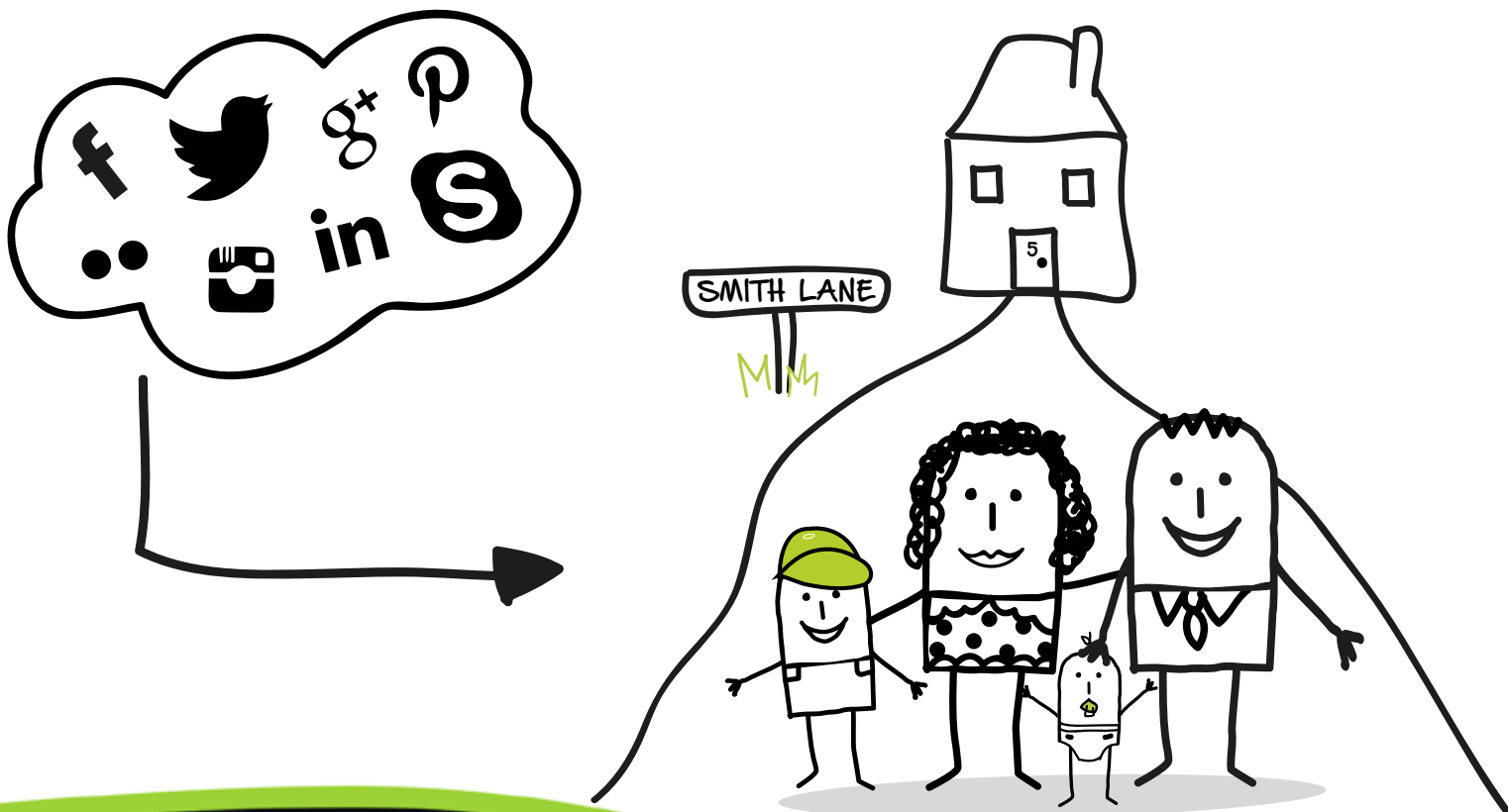W: http://www.thetechlounge.co.uk
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Physical Media

Take note of what staff and visitors are bringing into your premises and plugging into your network or computers.

Physical media such as CDs, DVDs and USB sticks can carry hidden payloads that can be used to transmit your data to another location or simply to copy and remove important documents or business data.

- ✅ Ensure virus protection is running and up-to-date
- ✅ Insist that all media is scanned on a known clean machine first
- ✅ Be aware of who is accessing what information, and limit access to sensitive data
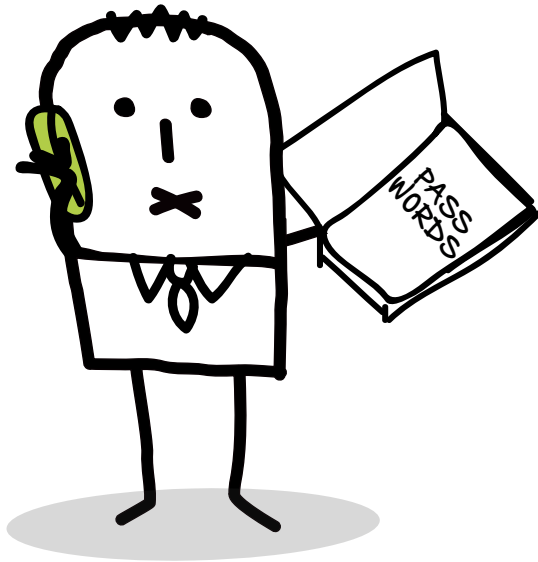- ✅ Consider only allowing your own branded media to be used

Social Engineering

Social engineering or psychological manipulation is a confidence trick to gather information for the purpose of fraud. Someone may ask some apparently innocent questions which, when put together, reveal significant insights into your business:

- ☑ They are a stranger to your business; treat them like any stranger you might meet in the street – don't reveal personal or business information
- ☑ Never provide any security information. You have no evidence they are who they say they are
- ☑ If they ask you to confirm information and you're unsure of their motives, politely decline to answer
- ☑ Ask for their full name and extension number and offer to call them back on their company's publicly listed number – not their direct line

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And finally

Make no mistake, it is getting increasing difficult to protect your identity and assets in the fast-paced digital world, but taking a few simple steps will improve your chances and reduce the level of risk.

If you don't have the time or skills in-house, we would be happy to help you review your systems and processes and implement protocols to keep your business information and hardware secure.

For a no obligation discussion or to book a security audit, call us on 01256 636 214 or email questions@thetechlounge.co.uk

For more information about our full range of IT support services, visit our website www.thetechlounge.co.uk

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