Setting Administrator & Guest passwords on Windows XP

Andrew Bovett
Bovett Computer Services
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What is the problem?

All Windows XP Home Edition PCs have two “special” user accounts – the Administrator and Guest accounts. The normal control panel does not give sufficient control over these accounts – it doesn't even show the Administrator account, and it doesn't (by default) allow you to set a password for the Guest account.

Why does this matter?

These accounts can be a weak point for hacking into the computer, especially if the computer is connected to a network. In particular, the Guest account is used for accessing “shared folders” (if enabled) via the network – *even when the account is disabled in the control panel.*

How do I fix it?

To make Windows XP Home Edition more secure, you should set a password on both of these accounts. The method is described on the following pages. It is not difficult, but a little care must be taken.

NOTE: If you want to share a folder on your computer with another user on the network, they will have to use the guest password you choose once these changes have been made. This means that only the people to whom you give the password can get in. You can change the password as often as you like.

Should I use a password to log in?

I *strongly* recommend that you use a password to log in to your computer, especially if it is a laptop, as any personal details on it are very vulnerable if it is stolen or simply left lying around for a while. Most computers have personal details lurking on them. (Ever entered a credit card number into a web page? It may still be on the computer somewhere).

You can set this through the normal control panel (*Click **Start**, then **Control Panel**, then **User Accounts***), or by using the method described below. If you set one, make sure you remember what it is!

Important!

Even if you do not normally enter a password to access your computer, your account may be "password protected". **Before proceeding, you should check if it your account is password protected, and if so what the password is**. If you do not know, use the control panel (*Click* ***Start***, *then* ***Control Panel***, *then* ***User Accounts***) – it will tell you if your account is password protected. If it is, but you don't know the password, then you will need to seek expert help.

How to set passwords for all accounts on Windows XP Home Edition

1. Click **Start**.

2. Click **Run**.

3. Type:

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control userpasswords2
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and press "Enter". A box like this appears:

4. Make sure that the box marked "**Users must enter a user name and password**

to use this computer" is **ticked**. You can untick it afterwards if you want (see steps 9 and 10 and the associated warning), but it must be ticked to allow you to set or change passwords.

5. Click on the account you want to change (e.g. **Guest** or **Administrator**).

6. Click **Reset Password**. A box like this appears:

7. Type the password you want into both spaces and click **OK**. This box will disappear (as long as the passwords match).

8. Repeat from step 4 to step 7 for each of the accounts you want to change. If you are going to use a password to log on to the computer yourself, you can set or change that here as well by selecting your own name from the list. Alternatively, you can use the normal control panel (*Click **Start**, then **Control Panel**, then **User Accounts***).

   Note: I strongly recommend that you do use a password to log in to the computer (see above). If you do, the next two steps do not apply.

9. If you **do not** want to enter a password yourself when you turn on the computer, **untick** the box marked "**Users must enter a user name and password to use this computer**", and click **Apply**. A box like this will appear:

10. If you have unticked the box in step 9, the next step is ***very important*** (if you left the box in step 9 ticked, as recommended, you can ignore this step also).

Type your user name and your password (twice) into this box. You **must** make sure that the user name and password you enter **exactly match** your actual user name and the password. If you have not set a password on your own account, leave the password boxes blank. The computer **will not warn you** if you get the password wrong at this stage, it will ***lock you out*** the next time you restart the computer.

> *Note: Your own account **may** have a password even if you do not normally enter one when you start the computer. See the note at the start of this document for details.*

11. Click **OK** on all open boxes to finish.

That's it. Your computer is now more secure.

Andrew Bovett

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If you have questions or comments on any of the items in this article, or would like help with any of the areas listed above, please get in touch.

E-mail: pcsupport@bovett.co.uk

Web: http://www.bovett.co.uk

Tel: 01684 298896 (fixed)
07801 747068 (mobile)