At least once a week I get a call from someone that is having trouble with their online account. It may be Facebook, Gmail, Hotmail, Shaw, Telus, any bank or online shopping account.

These problems usually involve a password that doesn't work anymore. The most common cause other than forgetfulness, is unauthorized use of your account. Password "hacking" affects all of us, every account is vulnerable and the more popular sites like Hotmail and Facebook are constantly being compromised.

If you can't log in, or if your friends are receiving emails from your account that you didn't send, then your account has probably been compromised. No password is perfectly secure, but basic passwords can be hacked in just a few seconds. So what's the solution? Simple, get a better password! All you need to do is add a few extra characters and your basic password becomes nearly impenetrable.

How long does it take to crack open a password? Assuming the hacker has a reasonably fast computer here is an estimate of the amount of time it would take. Pay particular attention to the difference between using only lowercase characters and using all possible characters (uppercase, lowercase, and special characters – like @#$%^&*).
Adding just one capital letter and one asterisk would change the processing time for an 8 character password from 2.4 days to 2.1 centuries!

Password Length	All Characters	Only Lowercase
3 characters	0.86 seconds	0.02 seconds
4 characters	1.36 minutes	.046 seconds
5 characters	2.15 hours	11.9 seconds
6 characters	8.51 days	5.15 minutes
7 characters	2.21 years	2.23 hours
8 characters	2.10 centuries	2.42 days

Here are some password tips:

1. Randomly substitute numbers for letters that look similar. The letter 'o' becomes the number '0', or even better an '@' or '*'. (i.e. – m0d3ltf0rd… like modelTford)
2. Randomly throw in capital letters (i.e. – Mod3lTF0rd)
3. Think of something you were attached to when you were younger, but DON'T CHOOSE A PERSON'S NAME! Every name plus every word in the dictionary will fail under a simple brute force attack.
4. Since it can be difficult to remember a ton of passwords, I recommend using *PasswordSafe.* It will store all of your passwords in an encrypted format and allow you to use just one master password to access all of them.
5. Once you've thought of a password, try Microsoft's password strength tester to find out how secure it is.

To change your Windows Live Hotmail password:

• Select Options… | More Options from the toolbar in Windows Live Hotmail.
• Follow the Account details (password, aliases, time zone) link under Managing your account.
• Type your current Windows Live Hotmail password under Retype your password: and Sign In.
• Click Change after Password: under Account security.
• Enter your current Windows Live Hotmail password under Old password.
• Type the new password under both Type new password and Retype new password.

If you can't log in, try the reset tool; https://account.live.com/password/reset

Here is a link where you can download the **PasswordSafe**; If you get a security warning, click on Allow, Run or Save.
www.webspinner-design.com/pwsafe.exe