

Seven ways to lock down personal info, financial assets

As more commerce and banking moves online, it is becoming important for



Michael Joyce

people to protect their personal information and financial assets through cybersecurity measures.

In an increasingly digital world, it is imperative that people secure internet access in the home and remember to activate the security measures

readily available to them on devices and software.

By putting the protections described below in place, consumers will significantly decrease their vulnerability to hackers, viruses and malware and protect their financial information.

(1) SECURE YOUR HOME'S INTERNET ROUTER

Cybersecurity should begin where your internet access begins.

Before doing anything else, consumers should secure their home's wireless router. Without doing so, others may gain access

to your computer, and can even use your network to perpetrate cybercrimes.

Recommended practices:

■ Since router manufacturers assign a default identification called an SSID (service set identifier) or ESSID (extended service set identifier), it is advisable to change the router's default ID to a unique name.

■ Be sure to change the default password on the router.

■ You should also increase the router's security level. It is recommended that you choose level WPA2 (Wireless Protected Access 2) or WPA. WEP, or Wired Equivalent Privacy, is not adequately secure.

(2) ACTIVATE FIREWALLS

Firewalls protect consumers from hackers who might share their personal information. Firewalls are on the lookout for attempts to access your system and then act as a barricade against communication from unauthorized sources.

Many operating systems and security software programs come with firewalls, but in order to activate their blocking power, consumers must remember to turn on this feature.



Consumers can add an extra layer of security by using two-factor authentication.

(3) USE ONLY SECURE SITES

To keep your personal information safe when shopping or banking online, make sure that the e-commerce or e-banking site you are exploring features adequate security.

Sites with web addresses beginning with "https://" have taken extra precautions to secure customer information.

On the other hand, sites beginning with "http://" are not secure.

(4) ACTIVATE TWO-FACTOR AUTHENTICATION

Consumers can add an extra layer of security, in addition to usernames and passwords, by using two-factor authentication to protect online accounts and personal information, where available.

While hackers may be able to gain access to your username and password online, it is much more difficult for them to access the second form of authentication, particularly within the time limits generally imposed by these security measures.

Two-factor authentication comes in different forms and often involves a second device, such as a security code sent to your cellphone, or an "offline" method, such as a card reader or fingerprint reader.

Generally, the consumer must opt-in to activate two-factor authentication. Be sure to check your online accounts to see if two-factor authentication is available to you.

(5) CREATE UNIQUE USERNAMES AND PASSWORDS

You've heard this tip again and again – but it bears repeating. Verizon reports that two-thirds of security breaches occur as a result of inadequate passwords.

Suggestions for increased username/password security:

please see **ASSETS**, page 10

TAKING STOCK: Tesla burns through money as if it's in government

Dear Mr. Berko: I bought 100 shares of Tesla Motors in July 2015 at \$280 and sold them in October at \$248, losing \$3,200. I sold them because you



Malcolm Berko

said Tesla would fall below \$150 a share, and it did. Thanks to you (my stockbroker didn't want me to sell), I avoided a much larger loss.

Most investors thought it would go to \$1,000.

I've lost \$87,000 in my account since last

summer. It's down to \$783,000. I think oil and gas master-limited partnerships are good investments, and I seek your recommendations. I have \$25,000 to invest in MLPs. At 72, I need more dividend income and must change my investment direction from growth stocks to dividend stocks. — H.L., Detroit

Dear H.L.: Most people who lost money on Tesla Motors (TSLA-\$245) don't know the difference between a speculation and an investment.

TSLA, with a suspicious four-star rating, is not an investment. TSLA burns through millions of dollars of cash every day, squeezes hundreds of millions in tax credits from Congress, has never made a profit, has never paid a dividend and is not (and I repeat, is not) an investment.

It is a bleeding speculation and could

crash to \$150 again. According to CNBC, Tesla loses more than \$4,000 on each car it sells and quickly needs another \$700 million cash infusion.

This is a fairy tale stock based upon the fantasies of a modern-day Pied Piper, called Elon Musk. TSLA is a textbook example of bandwagon blandishments, the power of cupidity, hope over substance and stupidity over logic.

ANOMALY

TSLA's rise to nearly \$300 a share was the result of a record \$3 trillion deluge of quantitative easing money, which got lost in the economy but stuffed the purses of the wealthy, who began frantically looking for appreciating assets to buy.

In addition to owning TSLA and other stocks with high price-earnings ratios, the wealthy paid record amounts for artwork – for example, \$300 million for a Gauguin, \$272 million for a Cezanne and \$186 million for a Rothko.

If those crazy artists were alive today, they'd turn over in their graves at the prices paid for their "stuff."

GAS AND OIL OPERATORS

Gas and oil operations are classified as upstream, downstream or midstream. Upstream and downstream operations refer to a company's location in the supply chain and are very commodity price-sensitive.

Upstream oil and gas MLPs search for deposits, drill wells and recover raw



Midstream operators may be the least risky investment in the gas and oil industry.

materials. Examples are Exxon Mobil and Schlumberger.

Downstream operations include refineries and marketing. Downstream companies turn crude into usable products, such as gasoline and petroleum-based products, that are sold to end users.

Marathon Oil and Phillips 66 are well-known downstream companies.

LITTLE EXPOSURE

Midstream operations are the link between upstream and downstream MLPs, with little exposure to commodity price fluctuations.

Midstream operations are like toll booths, collecting pass-through fees. The fees pay for product transportation, pipeline storage and gathering systems.

Well-known midstream companies are Kinder Morgan and Williams.

Because midstream operations may be the least risky, the following MLPs could regularly increase revenues, earnings and dividends. And if oil returns to higher levels, these issues may experience

attractive appreciation.

■ **Spectra Energy Partners** (SEP-46.10), a \$2.5 billion-revenue company with a good balance sheet and a \$40 book value, should earn \$3.30 a share this year.

SEP's business is 100 percent low-risk storage. The \$2.56 dividend, yielding 5.6 percent, could rise to \$2.95 this year.

■ **Enterprise Products Partners** (EPD-\$24.38) is a darn fine, well-managed \$32 billion-revenue MLP.

Though negative fundamentals pertaining to natural gas liquids modestly affect EPD's gas processing and marketing, the consensus is that EPD will continue growing its revenues and earnings. And the \$1.56 dividend, which may be raised this year to \$1.62, will yield 6.8 percent.

■ **Magellan Midstream Partners** (MMP-\$65.90) is a low-risk, \$2.6 billion-revenue MLP with a stellar management team. It transports, stores and distributes hydrocarbons and related products.

A strong balance sheet and superior earnings growth support a \$3.14 dividend, which yields 4.6 percent and should grow by about 6 percent every year.

Invest \$8,000 in each of those.

Also, there's no excuse for your huge losses, so my last recommendation is to employ a better adviser. And hurry!

Florida-based Malcolm Berko regularly dispenses financial advice. You may address questions to him at P.O. Box 8303, Largo, FL 33775 or by email at mjberko@yahoo.com. Creators Syndicate Inc.

Be receptive to change – and make it an opportunity

Let's for a moment examine the fundamentals of change from both a physiological and a psychological perspective.



Jon
Craighead

In a physiological sense, there is the phenomenon of homeostasis, a term for the body's automatic reactions to internal physical changes.

For example, humans automatically regulate body tem-

peratures to ward off the effect of external changes by sweating when hot and shivering when cold. Another example occurs in the case of organ transplants which, if not chemically assisted, will automatically be rejected by the body.

From a psychological perspective, if someone entered your office when you were gone and rearranged your desk, upon your return you would likely be disorientated and upset.

The point of these examples is that resistance to change is automatic and occurs without initiation or awareness on our part. Humans prefer the familiar and resist the unfamiliar, which change represents.

Psychological changes are difficult to resolve since they require action on our part. But they must be considered from an organizational, interpersonal and individual perspective.

ANTICIPATED DISRUPTIONS

Business leaders are trained to anticipate potentially disruptive and costly

changes, called disasters.

These particular changes can take many overwhelming and often deleterious forms, such as a snowstorm that hinders the movement of people and merchandise; a surprise competitive product that seriously threatens your primary offering; or an unforeseen loss of key personnel that jeopardizes productivity.

And, of course, there is the inevitable system breakdown that brings everything to a halt with no known immediate resolution.

ADAPT TO CIRCUMSTANCES

Successful leaders are expected to have vetted plans for such anticipated disasters. Yet there is always the possibility the best-laid plans can be circumvented by unanticipated contingencies that render those plans ineffectual.

Leaders are expected to respond skillfully and to expeditiously remedy these disasters. Skilled leaders adapt to circumstances in order to resolve these situations.

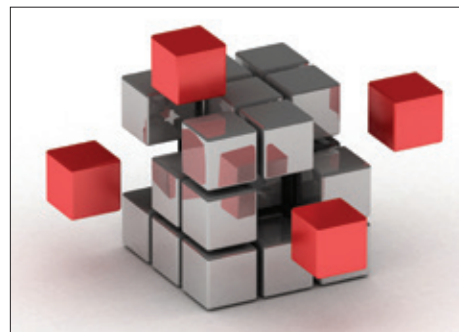
By defining and assessing the situation, they're able to restore operations in the shortest possible time, while minimizing the human tendency for shame and blame.

By not resisting the inevitable, a skillful practitioner of change is the solution to an otherwise critical problem.

COMMITMENT TO TRANSFORM

Personal behaviors are the most difficult to impact. The work required to change unconscious behaviors is complex. They are usually rooted in past experiences.

Activities such as persistent lateness, substandard work performance and gen-



Adapting to disruptions, skillful leaders quickly restore production – sometimes even improving operations.

eral unhealthy lifestyle practices can result in antisocial behaviors that normally aren't noticed until there is a startling incident of their toxic sway.

When these outbreaks occur, it takes a commitment of the targeted person and the perpetrator to bring resolution.

Even more lethal is a negative mindset housed internally and spewed outwardly. These negative eruptions explode uncontrollably with traumatic effect, the consequences of which affect not only those present but the perpetrator, as well.

Again, it requires the help of others to cause a change, and the commitment of the perpetrator to transform such behaviors.

LOSS OF GUIDANCE SYSTEM

These aforementioned personality disorders are examples of people needing to come to terms with life as reality rather than imagination.

Beyond these, for most people, their current experiences are significantly different than their remembrances. It can be

as simple as witnessing our children move into adulthood or as complex as dealing with the physicality of aging.

One especially difficult experience for some people can be witnessing the decline of long-held values and standards that once were a reliable guidance system but are no longer pertinent.

If we can awaken ourselves to our natural and automatic resistance to such changes, we can enrich our ability to accept and adapt to the challenges that they evoke.

NATURAL EFFECT

Changes are the natural effects of an evolutionary process. They can enhance our appreciation of life itself.

Transforming our relationship to change from threat to opportunity empowers us to change what we can and accept what we cannot. A dynamic relationship to change enhances the overall quality of life's pleasures and keeps the adventure of life exciting.

To cite the saying popularly attributed to Darwin: "It's not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the one most adaptable to change."

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ASSETS

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- Be sure to create a different password for each of your different online accounts. Keep a list of those passwords in a safe area, away from your computer.

- Your different passwords should be at least 12 characters in length.

- Your different passwords should

incorporate a combination of characters, numbers and upper and lower case letters.

(6) TURN ON AUTOMATIC SOFTWARE UPDATES

Be sure to activate automatic update features in your software programs.

Hackers look for systems using outdated versions of software as easy access points, so having the latest versions of software programs is a great defense against cybersecurity risks – and your pro-

grams will be automatically updated by activating this feature.

(7) PROTECT ALL DEVICES THAT CONNECT TO THE INTERNET

Protect video gaming systems, smartphones and other online devices from viruses and malware.

- By putting these protections in place and by remembering to activate security features,

consumers can enjoy the ease and efficiency of e-commerce and e-banking with the knowledge that their personal information is safe.

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PLINKE

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for their money."

"No," responds Jim. "They see little white sails on a great blue lake, and barbecue every Saturday night at the club.

"It's called salesmanship, Rocky."

BENEFIT THE BUYER, TOO

If you're selling people what they want, that's one way to look at it, I guess. But selling something that the vast majority is never going to benefit from is not honest salesmanship; it's running a con game.

If you want to be successful, sleep

soundly and enjoy your life, you need to help people.

As author and salesman Zig Ziglar famously put it, "You can have everything in life you want, if you will just help other people get what they want."

The ethical question in sales should not be, "Did it make money?" but "Did it help the buyer?"

Another essential question to ask: "Did the sale benefit me or did the sale benefit the buyer?"

A sale should benefit both parties, and that should be the goal of every salesperson.

RUN THEM OUT OF TOWN

The Saturday morning hucksters may

very well believe in their products, but when they sell them as something they are not or promise results that will never happen, they are selling snake oil and should be tarred and feathered and run out of town on a rail, like in the good old days.

I'll take the good old days when my Saturday morning ritual was topped off by Lunch with Soupy Sales.

After all, a pie in the face is better than a

hernia or a frozen pipe in the next county at 3 in the morning during a snowstorm.

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WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?

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