

Over the Back Fence
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User name and password!
By Alva Wood

Manfred Czarnecki's niece Sarah does a lot of traveling. Thanks to the wonders of the Internet, she can earn consulting fees wherever she is.

Just in case her laptop should crash, she backs up all her clients' data onto an internet server somewhere in Indonesia. Otherwise, she still uses the same Telus account she opened years ago.

Because she depends so much on her laptop, she carries it with her, constantly.

Until a particularly officious Air Canada clerk ruled that her knapsack was too big to carry on. So she had to check it. All the way to Moscow.

It arrived three days after she did, looking as if an elephant had practiced tap-dancing on it.

Sarah called her uncle Manfred for help. She could easily buy another computer. But she needed her old user name and password so that her new computer could access her old Telus account, and through it, all her data.

"Don't you remember your own name?" asks Manfred, incredulously.

"The program remembers all those things automatically," Sarah replies. "I haven't entered my ID or password in years. Could you call Telus and get that information from them?"

"Telus?" splutters Manfred. "They taught Air Canada everything it knows about customer service!"

"Please?" says Sarah.

"Why don't you call them yourself?" asks Manfred.

"I tried," says Sarah. "But their voice mail menu expects me to punch in menu choices, and the youth hostel I'm at still has a dial phone."

Manfred calls Telus. After punching the appropriate options, and waiting half an hour for his turn, he finally gets a technical support person.

"My niece is in Moscow," he begins.

"How nice," says a bored voice.

"Her laptop computer got damaged," Manfred continues.

"Bleep happens," says the voice unsympathetically.

"She has an internet account with you," says Manfred.

"Good for her."

"She wants to know what her user name and password are."

"She can get that by clicking on the 'Forgot your password?' button," Telus says helpfully.

"You haven't been listening," Manfred retorts. "Her computer is defunct. Caput. Non compos mentis. She can't get on line to click buttons."

"She can replace her computer," Telus suggests.

"She has," Manfred retorts. "But she needs to enter her user name and password into the new computer, so she can access her e-mail account."

"Why doesn't she call us herself?"

"Have you any idea what her long distance charges would be from Moscow, while she waits for a human to answer?"

"Of course," Telus replies. "We are a telephone company, you know."

"That's why she asked me to get the information for her," Manfred continues.

"I can't give it to you. Confidential information. How do I know you're legit?"

"I'm her uncle, for God's sake!"

"You'll have to authenticate yourself by giving me her user ID and password."

"Hello?" says Manfred. "Wasn't that just what I was asking for?"

"All right, I'll see if I can find her account," sighs Telus. "What's her user name?"

"That's what she needs to know."

"What's her real name, then?"

"Sarah Btfsplk," says Manfred, pronouncing it carefully.

"How do you spell her name?"

"With an 'h'."

“Does she have a middle name?” Telus asks.

“Terwilliger.”

“How do you spell that?”

“T-H-A-T,” says Manfred, who’s getting impatient with this whole process.

“Initial ‘T’?” Telus persists.

Manfred grunts agreement.

“Okay, I’ve found an account for a Sarah T. Btfsplk.”

“Good,” says a vastly relieved Manfred. “Now, if you’ll tell me what user name she chose, and her password, I’ll pass them on to her.”

“To release that information, I’ll need authorization from her, directly.”

“How?” Manfred demands.

“E-mail is sufficient.”

“This is ridiculous,” Manfred fumes. “Cancel her account.”

“Fortunately, we’ve recently streamlined our policies on that,” says Telus helpfully. “All she needs to confirm the cancellation is her user ID and password.”