CS 5430

Passwords

Prof. Clarkson
Spring 2016

Review: Authentication of humans

Categories: [IBM, TR G520-2169, 1970]

- Something you know

  password, passphrase, PIN, answers to security questions

- Something you have

  physical key, ticket, {ATM,prox,credit} card, token

- Something you are

  fingerprint, retinal scan, hand silhouette, a pulse

Password lifecycle

1. **Create:** user chooses password
2. **Store:** system stores password with user identifier
3. **Use:** user supplies password to authenticate
4. **Change/recover/reset:** user wants or needs to change password

4. PASSWORD CHANGE

Password change

Motivated by...

- **User** forgets password (maybe just *recover* password)
- **System** forces password expiration
  - Naively seems wise
  - Research suggests otherwise:
    - When users do change passwords, they change them predictably
    - Foreknowledge of expiration causes users to choose weaker passwords

Digression: Password research

Where to get password corpus for research?

- Pay users to participate in experiments
  - Validity? low-stakes passwords might be different than high-stakes
- Use cracked password databases posted by attackers
- Participate with IT departments to run approved code against plaintext passwords

Password change

Motivated by…

- **Administrator** forces password change
  - Perhaps intrusion or weak password detected
- **Attacker** learns password:
  - Social engineering: deceitful techniques to manipulate a person into disclosing information
  - Online guessing: attacker uses authentication interface to guess passwords
  - Offline guessing: attacker acquires password database for system and attempts to *crack* it

Change mechanisms

- Tend to be **more vulnerable** than the rest of the authentication system
  - Not designed or tested as well
  - Have to solve the authentication problem without the benefit of a password
- Common mechanisms...

Security questions

- Something you know: attributes of identity established at enrollment
- **Pro:** you are unlikely to forget answers
- **Assumes:** attacker is unlikely to be able to answer questions
- **Con:** might not resist targeted attacks
- **Con:** linking is a problem; same answers re-used in many systems

Emailed password

- Might be your old password or a new temporary password
  - one-time password: valid for single use only, maybe limited duration
- Something you know: emailed password
- **Assumes:** attacker is unlikely to have compromised your email account
- **Assumes:** email service correctly authenticates you
- Something you ?: however you authenticated to email

3. PASSWORD USAGE

When authentication fails

- **Guiding principle:** the system might be under attack, so don't make the attacker's job any easier
- Don't leak valid usernames:
  - Prompt for username and password in parallel
  - Don't reveal which was bad
- Rate limit, and eventually disable
- Record failed attempts and review
  - Perhaps in automated way (A4)
  - Perhaps manually by user at next successful login

Mutual authentication

- Before entering their password, the user ought to be authenticating the system itself: mutual authentication
- Some mechanisms:
  - **Secure attention key:** key (or key sequence) that OS itself detects and handles
    - e.g., Ctrl+Alt+Del in Windows
    - Defends against login spoofing
    - Provides a trusted path
  - **Visual secrets:** user and system share a secret image
    - User enters username; system retrieves and displays image
    - User authenticates image before entering password
    - Makes phishing attacks harder but not impossible: if users can't or won't discern who is on the other side, man-in-the-middle attack will succeed anyway

2. PASSWORD STORAGE

Storage by humans

- To keep identities **independent**, humans should have separate password for every identity
- But humans have little memory capacity
- So we...
  - **reuse** passwords across systems
  - **record** passwords either physically or digitally
  - both introduce vulnerabilities

Storage by machines

- Passwords typically stored in a file or database indexed by username
- **Strawman idea:** store passwords in plaintext
  - requires perfect authorization mechanisms
  - requires trusted system administrators
  - ...
- In the real world, password files get stolen

Storage by machines

- **Want:** a function f such that…
  1. easy to compute and store f(p) for a password p
  2. hard given disclosed f(p) for attacker to recover p
  3. easy to check at time of authentication given a password q and stored password f(p) whether q=p
- Cryptographic hash functions suffice!
  – one-way property gives (1) and (2)
  – collision resistance gives (3)
- So would encryption, but then the key has to live somewhere

Hashed passwords

- Each user has:
  - username uid
  - password p
- System stores: uid, H(p)
- Assume: human Hu authenticating to a local machine L over trusted secure channel (e.g., keyboard)

To authenticate Hu to L:

```
1. Hu->L: uid, p
2. L: let h = stored hashed password for uid;
      if h = H(p)
      then uid is authenticated
```

Hashed passwords

To authenticate Hu to remote server S using local machine L:

```
1. Hu->L: uid, p
2. L and S: establish secure channel
3. L->S: uid, p
4. S: let h = stored hashed password for uid;
      if h = H(p)
      then uid is authenticated
```

Dictionary attacks

Assume: attacker does learn password file (offline guessing attack)

- Hard to invert: i.e., given H(p) to compute p
- But what if attacker didn't care about inverting hash on arbitrary inputs?
  - i.e., only have to succeed on a small set of p's: p1, p2, ..., pn
- Then attacker could build a dictionary...

Dictionary attacks

Dictionary:

- p1, H(p1)
- p2, H(p2)
- …
- pn, H(pn)

- Dictionary attack: lookup H(p) in dictionary to find p
- And it works because most passwords chosen by humans are from a (relatively) small set

Typical passwords

[Schneier quoting AccessData in 2007]:

- 7-9 character root plus a 1-3 character appendage
  - Root typically pronounceable, though not necessarily a real word
  - Appendage is a suffix (90%) or prefix (10%)
- Dictionary of 1000 roots plus 100 suffixes (= 100k passwords) cracks about 24% of all passwords
- More sophisticated dictionaries crack about 60% of passwords within 2-4 weeks
- Given biographical data (zip code, names, etc.) and other passwords of a user...
  - success rate goes up a little
  - time goes down to days or hours
- For comparison: a scan of every printable character string on your hard drive breaks >50% of passwords

...defense against offline guessing?

Defense 1: slow down

- **Vulnerability:** hashes are easy to compute
- **Countermeasure:** hash functions that are slow to compute
  - Slow hash wouldn't bother user: delay in logging hardly noticeable
  - But would bother attacker constructing dictionary: delay multiplied by number of entries
  - Ideally, enough to make constructing a large dictionary prohibitively expensive
- Examples: crypt, bcrypt, scrypt, PBKDF2, Argon2, ...

Slowdown by iterated hashing

- Given a fast hash function...
- Slow it down by iterating it many times:

```
z1 = H(p);
z2 = H(p, z1);
...
z1000 = H(p, z999);
output z1 XOR z2 XOR ... XOR z1000
```

- Number of iterations is a parameter to control slowdown
  - originally thousands
  - current thinking is 10s of thousands
- Aka key stretching

Defense 2: add salt

- **Vulnerability:** one dictionary suffices to attack every user
- **Vulnerability:** passwords chosen from small space
- **Countermeasure:** include a unique system-chosen nonce as part of each user's password
  - make every user's stored hashed password different, even if they chose the same password
  - make passwords effectively be from larger space

Salted hashed passwords

- Each user has:
  - username uid
  - unique salt s
  - password p
- System stores: uid, s, H(s, p)

To authenticate Hu to L:

```
1. Hu->L: uid, p
2. L: let h = stored hashed password for uid;
      let s = stored salt for uid;
      if h = H(s, p)
      then uid is authenticated
```

Salt

- Salt is as public as username, not as secret as password
- Salt needs to be unique even across systems; easiest way to achieve is to choose randomly
- Length of salt should be related to strength of cryptography employed in rest of system

Salt

To combine with iterated hashing, include salt in first hash:

```
z1 = H(p, s);
z2 = H(p, z1);
...
...
z1000 = H(p, z999);
output z1 XOR z2 XOR ... XOR z1000
```

this idea used in widely-deployed algorithm for deriving encryption keys from passwords... (next time)

Upcoming events

- [next Wed] A4 due

Treat your password like your toothbrush. Don't let anybody else use it. – Clifford Stoll