



## WV Executive Branch Privacy Tip

### The Worst Security Questions You Can Possibly Pick

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*Secret questions, Security questions, Multi-Factor Authentication ...* we all know the drill. When you first create an account on a secure site, you'll probably be asked to choose 2-3 questions to answer in case you forget your password or your account gets hacked. Some really secure sites will require you to answer one of them each time you sign in, even with your password. So you click on the drop-down menu and scan the meager selection of questions to choose from. Here are the ones you might want to steer clear of and why:

#### 1. What city were you born in?

Pew Research says that over 37% of Americans have never moved from their hometowns. Depending on your definition of home, this could mean that for over a third of Americans, the answer to this security question is as simple as where they currently live. If you use social media, your current and/or past cities may be open information to anyone online. Not to mention that many people can be located by a simple search of their first and last names.

#### 2. What is your mother's maiden name?

For many, this is one that offers no added security protections because your mother's maiden name happens to be your own last name. Also, statistics show that married women are increasingly making the choice to retain their maiden name in some way, potentially making your mother's maiden name hardly "secret" enough to protect your account. Also keep in mind that those "People Search" sites that come up when you search your own name can get their information from public records, including marriage certificates.

#### 3. What was your high school mascot?

In the past, in order to create a Facebook account, many people were required to associate themselves with their high school network. Today, the high school someone attended may serve as the supporting line beneath their name in search results or come up in their public profile. A quick search of any high school would bring up the school's website with their mascot displayed proudly on the home page.

#### 4. What is your (favorite) pet's name?

If there's one thing the internet actually seems to agree on, it's the fact that dogs and cats are adorable. Social media feeds are full of pet photos with captions and hashtags using the pet's name. If you are one of the millions of Americans that believes they have the most photogenic pet, think twice before making their name the answer to your secret question. The day that Mr. Marshmallow goes viral should be filled with celebration not security vulnerabilities!

#### 5. What is your father's middle name?

How many guys do you know who share a middle name with their father? Some even go by their father's middle name. As with maiden names, "People Search" sites readily include family members' middle names whenever they're available. The answer to this question is easy to guess and even easier to find online if the person in question has a unique last name.

Now that we've covered that, you're probably thinking "Well, which questions *should* I choose and what if my favorite food changes every single day?". No worries! You're in good company, and variety is the spice of life (or so they say). We recommend that you choose the most obscure and specific question to which you can give a definitive answer. Some good examples are "What was the first concert you attended?", "Who was your first boyfriend/girlfriend?" (assuming they're not your current) and "What was the name of your 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher?". If those types of questions aren't available and you have to choose one like "What is your favorite movie?", just decide on a good movie and try to remember the title like you would a password.