With the increase in sensitive information being compromised worldwide, Murray State University is taking the intuitive to help you secure your data. One way to do this via email is by encrypting attachments. While there are more technical solutions to encrypt the entire email message and/or attachments, just encrypting specific attachments is a very easy approach for users who only need to send sensitive data every now and then.

For this method to be affective, the users must create a strong password for the file they are securing and be able to communicate the password to the recipient in another means other than email. This means that the user should encrypt the file(s) they want to send using one of the below described methods, create a password longer than 12 characters that they do not use for anything else, email the file to the recipient, and then call the recipient and tell them what the password is. While the encryption procedures discussed below are secure, they are still vulnerable to dictionary and brute force password attacks, so the file is only secure if the password is strong.

ENCRYPTING EMAIL ATTACHMENTS WITH MICROSOFT OFFICE

Encryption with Microsoft Office used to be fairly insecure due to Microsoft using a weaker algorithm, but with Office 2007 they have changed a few default settings to make it very secure. This is a very good thing for all users since Office is installed on most computers by default now a days and most sensitive data that needs to be encrypted is in .docx and .xlsx files.

To encrypt a file using Microsoft Office, all you have to do is click on the top left icon → Prepare → Encrypt Document. Once you click on Encrypt Document, it prompts you to enter a password. Once you have entered a password and saved the file, you now have a secure document.
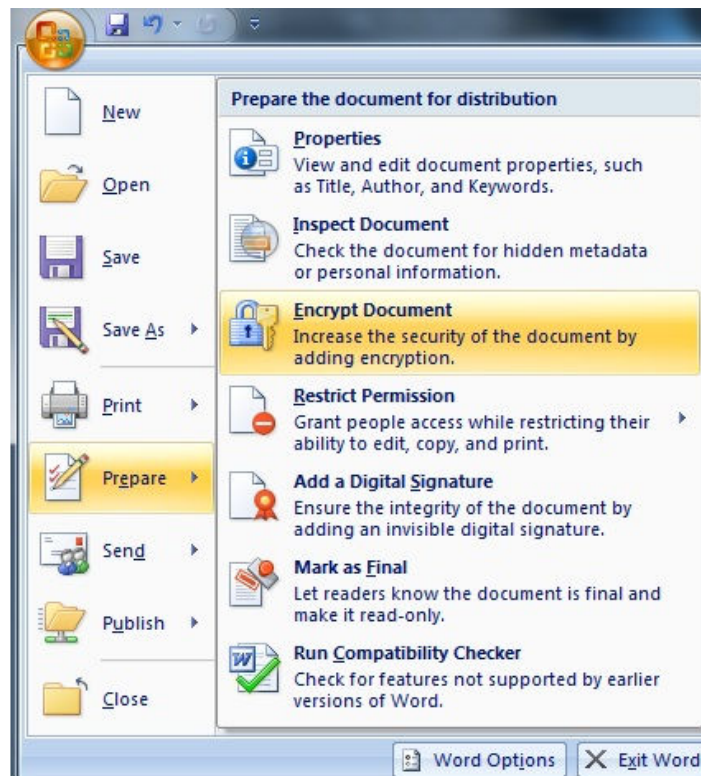
ENCRYPTING EMAIL ATTACHMENTS WITH 7-ZIP

Using 7-Zip for encryption is a very flexible solution since it can encrypt any type of file and also encrypt multiple files at once. All you have to do is download the free software and then specify a few options. The steps below will walk you through this process.

Step 1 – Downloading 7zip

Download the latest version of 7-Zip from http://www.7-zip.org/download.html.

Step 2 – Installing 7-Zip

Double click on the 7zxxx.exe file and then follow the instructions provided by the program. Please accept all of the default values when installing.

Step 3 – Encrypting a File

Select the file(s) you want to be encrypted and then right click on the file(s). Then select *7-Zip* and *Add to archive…*
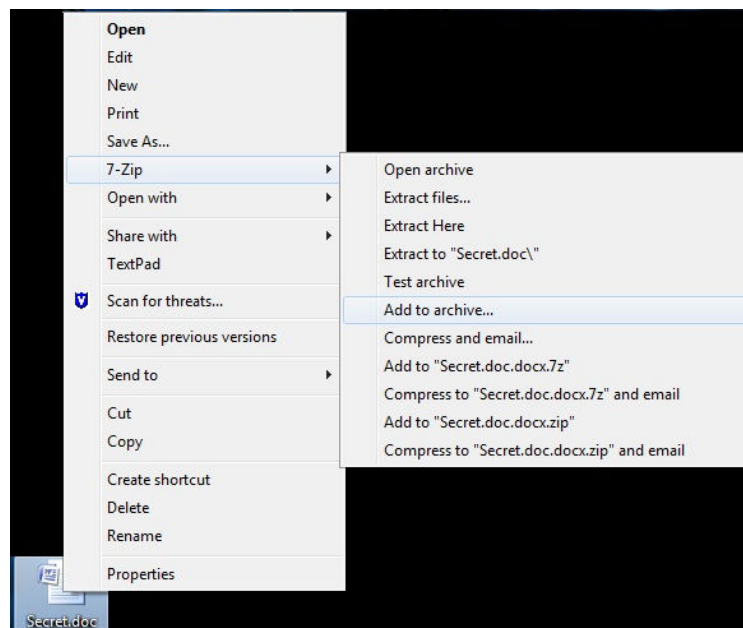
Once you click on *Add to archive…*, 7-Zip will prompt you with a screen full of options. The main one we are worried about is the *Encryption* section. This is where you should enter a very strong password to secure the file(s). For additional security you should also select the *Encrypt file names* box.
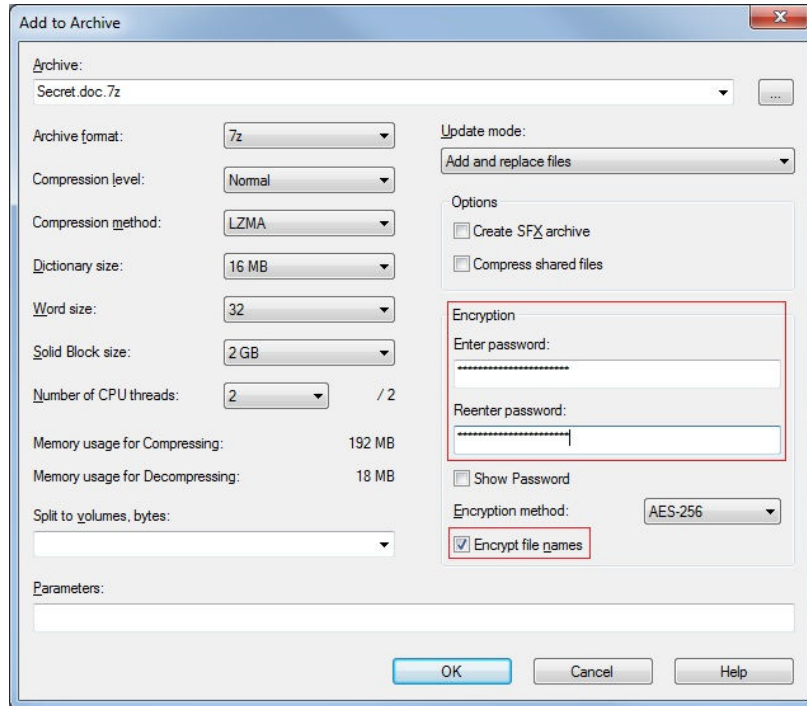
Once you have done that, there should be a new secure file. To open this file, right click on it and select *7-Zip* and *Open archive*.
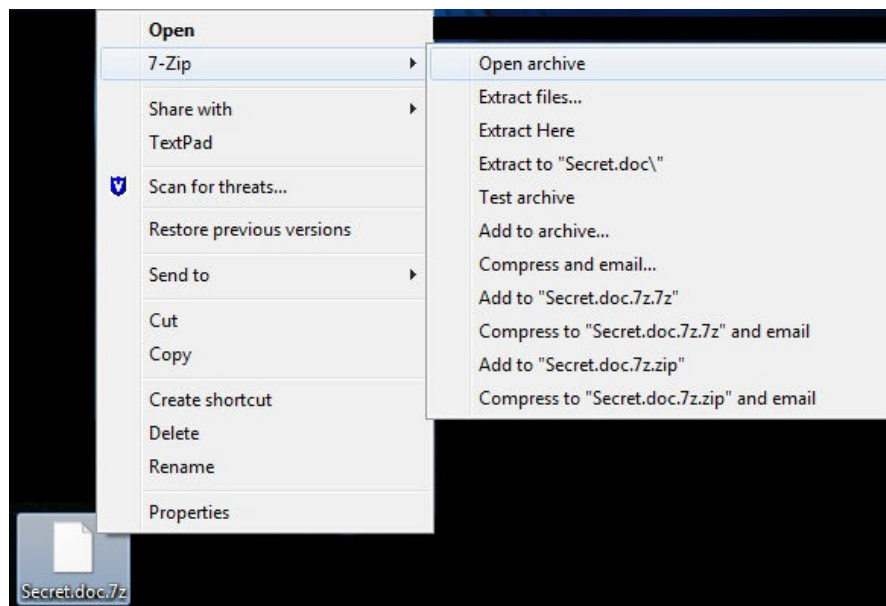
7-Zip will then prompt you for the password.

Once you have typed in the correct password, you will then have access to the file(s) within the archive. From here you can add, delete, or move files.