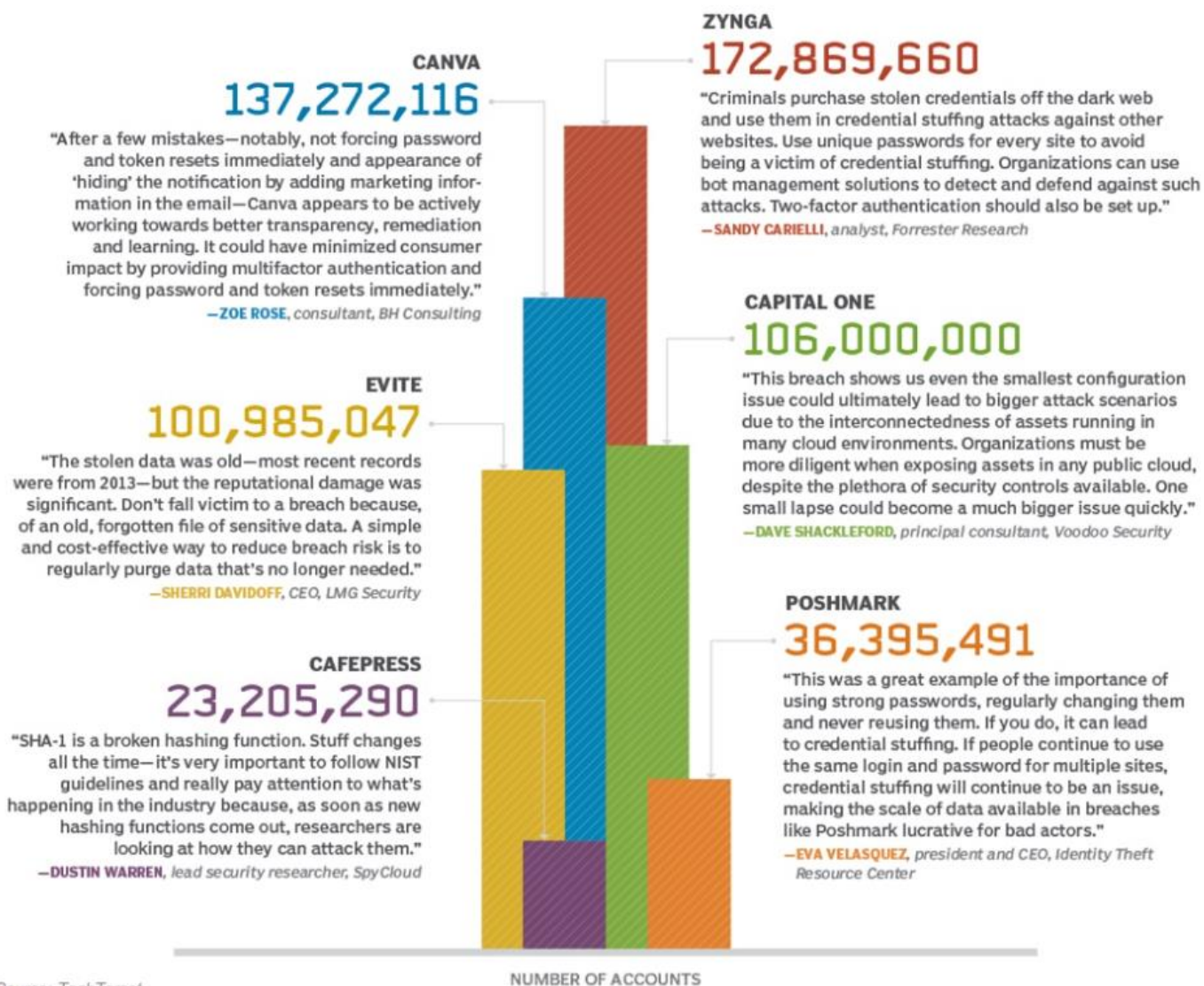


As you're reading this, a cyberthief could be buying a new car with your credit. If you don't regularly check your credit report, you'd never know about your "recent purchase." It could be the beginning of a massive spending spree on your dime, and in the end, there may be very little left of your funds and your credit. Hacker's with access to financial accounts can do significant damage to your credit, quickly and with anonymity. In this unprecedented time of coronavirus and a historic level of hacking, there's never been a more crucial time to pay attention to your credit report.

It's no secret that hackers are always locked and loaded with email phishing campaigns, malware, ransomware, and various financial and identity fraud attacks. Since the average person is often the prime target of attackers, keeping tabs on credit reports can show details about your finances you had no idea were happening. A criminal with access to your credit report can open accounts in your name, get loans, credit cards, and make purchases using your stolen identity and passwords. A victim can literally be locked out of their accounts – and no one wants that. Remember, victims are responsible for any and all financial damage done to their accounts. And, it's not so easy to repair it.

Top data breaches disclosed in 2019



Source: TechTarget

The now infamous 2017 Equifax data breach, one of the largest identity theft crimes of the decade, is a reminder of just how vulnerable your credit and other data can be. Equifax is one of the top three credit bureaus; the other two being TransUnion and Experian. In the attack, the PII (personally identifiable information) of 148 million Americans was stolen, along with millions more in England and Canada. The hack stole the credit card details, Social Security numbers, dates of birth, driver's license numbers, and more. The enormity of the attack led to the company agreeing to compensate those affected. But for most victims, it was too little too late. For them, the excruciating process of restoring their identity and credit began.

Fortunately, there are counter-measures for protecting credit and the PII it includes. The website [AnnualCreditReport.com](https://www.annualcreditreport.com) is where you'll find free credit reports from each of the "big three" (Equifax, TransUnion, Experian). Also, freezing your credit is an effective way to stop any and all attempts at abusing it – and it's free to do. Before doing so, it's important to know you won't need to access your credit during the freeze. If you find you do need it, you can always unfreeze and then refreeze it when appropriate. Remember, all actions are free of cost including credit reports. Unfortunately for hackers, excuses for not monitoring one's credit are getting much harder to find.