

How to Protect Yourself from Identity Theft

Identity theft is on the rise. Do you know how to protect yourself from becoming the next victim? Surprisingly many people do not know how to properly safeguard themselves.. Every year, thousands of people fall victim to identity theft. What was once thought to be an Internet problem is becoming more and more mainstream as scammers and thieves become more creative in how they get your personal information and take over your financial identity.

Properly Dispose of Your Personal Information

Private investigators aren't the only ones willing to go through trash. Thieves are now using "dumpster diving" tactics to obtain your personal information. What many people don't realize is that everything from your physician's statements to the annoying junk mail offering credit cards and free phones can be used to steal your identity from you. The best way to keep thieves at bay is to invest in a shredder. If you are wondering what you should shred, the answer is simple; anything which carries your personal information or account numbers. Most people know that credit card statements and bank statements are the number one thing that should never be thrown in the trash. However, there are other things that financial experts recommend shredding as well. The Federal Trade Commission suggests shredding these items as well:

- Receipts with your charge account number
- Checks
- Copies of credit applications
- Any Insurance forms (Car, house, life, medical)
- Credit Card Offers

By taking the time to shred these items, you are taking an important step to slow down the chances that your identity will be stolen.

If you pay your bills through the mail, never put your outgoing mail in the mailbox outside your house. This is a prime target for identity theft to take place. Instead, make a trip to the post office and deposit all your mail directly in a collection box or an inside drop box.

Shop Wisely to Prevent Theft

Are you watching your back? A new trend is emerging in which identity theft thieves will look or try to peer over your shoulder to see you enter your pin numbers at ATMs, stores and restaurants. Try to shield yourself from their view by putting yourself as close as possible or if you are shopping with a friend, have them stand between you and any one lurking behind you. Likewise, when you are shopping carry only what is necessary. Leave your social security card and any other unnecessary identifying cards at home. This will lessen the possibility of a thief having your information if your purse or wallet is stolen while shopping. Whenever you do shop, do not list your social security number or phone number on receipts or checks. If you are asked

to provide that information, ask if you can substitute another number. Stores don't really need this private information to identify you and you can always refuse if asked.

Recent identity attacks have also included credit card readers. These can be either wireless or ones that are attached to credit card scanners at gas pumps, ATMs, and stores. Thieves easily obtain your information without even getting their hands on your credit card. In order to protect yourself, consider purchasing an RFID protection sleeve. The sleeves are designed to block the wireless transmissions that come from the RFID chip embedded in newer credit cards. Check gas pumps and ATMs for any defects in the card readers where you insert your credit card to pay. Loose card readers or ones that don't appear to fit the slot should be a red flag that the card reader is a fake.

Identity Theft over the Phone

Identity theft through phone scams is becoming more commonly used. Phone calls come in the form of your credit card grantors, government agencies, and nonprofit scams. The person on the other line asks you to verify your personal information by giving them your name, social security number, address or any other identifying information. They will tell you there is a problem with your account; you are being awarded grant money from the government, or ask for donations for a well-known nonprofit organization.

You can protect yourself by calling them back at the number you know to be correct on your statements or in the phone book and ask to discuss the personal information with them from there. You can also safeguard yourself from identity theft and request that they send you the information in writing – but never give them your address, if they are who they claim to be, they already have that information on file and will be more than willing to send you what you need. You can also ask that they verify the information with you. Again, if they are your bank or credit grantor, they will have that information readily available in front of them.

Don't be afraid to take control of your personal information and identity. Thieves are relying on you to comply and leave yourself open in order for them to make a clean getaway with your identity. Be on guard whenever someone asks for your personal information and never be afraid to question why they need it. Most businesses and reputable companies will not only be able to tell you the reasons why you are being asked but they will also be able to tell you how they safeguard your personal information as well. You don't need to be a victim of identity theft if you take the proper measures to protect yourself.