

Protecting your identity



**Wealth
Management**

Identity theft is not a new phenomenon. For years, perpetrators have rummaged through garbage and dumpsters in search of credit card receipts and financial statements in hopes of using the information for criminal purposes. However, recent developments in telecommunications and computer processing have made it more convenient for identity thieves to exploit stolen identities. Anyone can be affected, and it is one of America's fastest growing crimes.

What is identity theft?

While there are numerous variations of the crime, identity theft is essentially the act of stealing another person's identity, without their knowledge or consent to purchase goods and services or to commit fraud and other crimes in that person's name.

Obtaining pieces of sensitive personal information like credit card numbers, driver's license numbers, Social Security Numbers, and date of birth can earn criminals thousands of dollars in a very short period of time. Armed with this type of information, identity thieves can take over another person's financial accounts; apply for loans, credit cards and other services; purchase vehicles and cell phones; take luxury vacations and so on. Since bills for charges incurred are often sent to a different address, the victim will not be aware that debt is mounting in their name until a collection department tracks them down. Identity theft can take months, and sometimes even years, to detect and it can take just as long to correct the damage.

Tips to help you protect your identity

While there is no silver bullet to prevent identity theft, there are things you can do to help minimize your risk and protect your identity.

Suggestions

- Sign all credit cards as soon as they are received
- Pay attention to billing cycles; if bills fail to arrive contact the company to ensure the bill has not been illicitly redirected
- Review your financial statements and look for unauthorized transactions such as purchases and withdrawals
- Limit the number of credit/charge cards owned to reduce exposure
- If you have a lost or stolen card, notify your creditors immediately
- Destroy cancelled checks and store new checks in a safe place
- Destroy pre-approved credit card applications, credit card receipts, bankbooks, bank statements with checks and pay statements
- Cancel all inactive credit cards

- Review credit bureau files annually and immediately question any unknown credit inquires or unauthorized accounts
- Choose difficult passwords

Precautions

- Never record or keep a client card PIN, password or Social Security Number in your wallet
- Don't leave mail lying around
- Don't provide sensitive personal information such as birth date over the telephone and only provide your credit card number when you have initiated the call to a trusted third party
- Don't leave your purse or wallet unattended at work, restaurants, health clubs, in a shopping cart or at social gatherings
- Never lend credit cards to anyone

Things you should do if you suspect you are a target

- File a report with the police immediately; ask for a copy so that you can provide the evidence to the various companies you have to contact

- Contact all creditors you deal with and review your financial information
- Cancel your credit cards and get new ones issued; obtain details from the creditors about accounts tampered with or fraudulently opened in your name
- Contact these credit bureaus to file a fraud alert:
 - Equifax**
www.equifax.com
Report fraud: (800) 525-6285
Order a credit report: (800) 685-1111
P.O. Box 740241
Atlanta, GA 30374-0241
 - Experian**
www.experian.com
Report fraud: (888) 397-3742
Order a credit report:
(888) 397-3742
P.O. Box 9532
Allen, TX 75013
 - TransUnion**
www.transunion.com
Report fraud: (800) 680-7289
Order a credit report: (800) 916-8800
Fraud Victim Assistance Division
P.O. Box 6790
Fullerton, CA 92834-6790
- Close your bank accounts, open new ones and change your client card personal identification number (PIN)
- Advise your cable company and all utility and telephone companies that someone may be using your name and could try to fraudulently open new accounts
- Call (877) IDTHEFT (438-4338) and obtain a copy of “Taking Charge: Fighting Back Against Identity Theft” from the US Federal Trade Commission (www.ftc.gov)
- For information about what to do if your Social Security Card or number is stolen, visit www.ssa.gov and type “identity theft” in the search field or call (800) 772-1213