

Identity Theft

What Is Identity Theft?

Identity theft is a deliberate use of someone else's identity, usually as a method to gain advantage or obtain credit and other benefits in the other person's name and perhaps to the other person's disadvantage or loss. The person whose identity has been assumed may suffer adverse consequences if they are held responsible for the proprietor's actions. Identity theft occurs when someone uses another's personally identifying information, like their name, identifying number or credit card number without their permission, to commit fraud or other crimes.



There are a myriad of methods that these thieves employ to gain your personal information and data. From the relatively low tech 'shoulder serf' where an individual watches from behind or within eye sight of a machine, as you enter numerical information, such as an ATM pin or zip code at a petrol pump, to the more advanced 'fishing' emails. In this, a thief sends an official looking email stating that you have been selected or promised some financial benefit, but before you can continue you must provide validating information. The unsuspecting individual responds with their personal information, which the spammer utilizes to begin the process of identity theft. This can lead the criminal to take out a loan or credit card in your name, without you being aware, because they have all your pertinent data.

Secure Your Information:

- One of the simplest ways you can protect yourself is to be aware of what financial information is used and shared.
- Be extremely careful with whom you provide your personal information to, whether it is over the phone, through email or a website.
- If you are the one who has initiated the contact than most times you will be protected. It is when you are contacted through any means with someone requesting information. If you are ever in doubt do NOT provide any personal information.
- If it is a phone call, tell them you will call them back, but do NOT use the number they provide. You can search your paper statements or go online to find the phone numbers or contact information of any organization to verify. Customer service representatives will be able to tell you if they have tried to contact you regarding a request for information.
- Before you discard such items as cell phones, tablets or personal computers, make sure you factory reset the systems or wipe the digital information from them.
- If you are submitting information online look for the 'lock' icon in the internet browser at the top. Also, look for sites that have web addresses that begin with 'https' in the browser. The 's' stands for secure. If it is not present then whatever information is sent is not protected.
- Never leave your passwords on a sheet of paper that can be easily found in your desk at work or other less secure places.
- Finally, be careful what information is posted to social networking apps, because tech savvy individuals can piece together your personal information with your indirect help.

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How to protect yourself:

The best defense is a great offense, as the saying goes. This is definitely true when dealing with identity theft. Like the Securitas value of Vigilance, one must actively protect personal information from would be thieves.

- When you receive your monthly statements from financial institutions, carefully review them for any possible errors or mistakes.
- Shred all personal papers and records before you throw them in the trash, once you discard something you lose control over it.
- Do not employ one password for multiple sites, rather vary your passwords for an added layer of protection.
- Obtain a copy of your credit report, from the credit reporting agencies. You have the legal right to a free report once a year. Carefully review all the information and if there are any unauthorized or incorrect pieces of information, immediately dispute it with the credit agency. Also, as a further optional method, you can subscribe to a credit monitoring company who will notify you immediately if there are any associated changes with your credit score.
- Finally, if you are going to be away from home for an extended period of time make sure your friend or neighbor can't collect your letters/ mails.

