

Steps for Preventing Identity Theft

Have you been hearing reports about identity theft crimes? Do you have any idea what identity theft is?

Identity theft is the stealing of your personal data such as your social security number, licenses number, credit card and bank account numbers, and even your mother's maiden name in order to commit fraud.

Being prepared is necessary. It might seem inconvenient, but it's less convenient when you want to go shopping one day, only to discover that the department store rejects your credit card because someone has been using your identity to buy something.

In order to prepare, you have to take significant actions to avoid your identity being taken from you. It takes years to clear up identity theft, so prevention is the best thing that you can do.

How do you protect yourself from identity theft?

At home:

- * If you have roommates, use contractors, or work from your home, ensure that your personal data is not accessible to them.
- * Place your outgoing mail in collection box or mail it at the nearest post office, rather than putting it in your home mailbox. Remove incoming mail from your mailbox on time. If you have sudden business trip and will not be able to get your mail, call the postal office to ask for them to hold delivery of your mail.
- *
- * Destroy all your bill receipts, doctor's prescriptions, duplicates of credit requests, insurance applications, and other important mail.
- *
- * If asked to give out your social security number, request to use other forms of identification. Do not permit anyone to use your social security number or driver's license number as an account number.

At Work:

- *
- * Inquire about data safety guidelines in your office or at any business, physician's office, or other establishments that ask for personal identification data. Try to know who has access to your personal data and confirm it is held safely.

On the Internet:

- * If you make business transactions online, read the confidentiality and safety announcements. If possible, try to know the people who hold your personal information. Make sure that your personal data will be handled properly. If, for example, you hear negative feedback about the company, do not do business with them again.

- * You can use Pay Pal. You can move a limited amount of money into your Pay Pal account and utilize it to purchase goods online rather than using your credit card. Similarly, Google now offers a service called Checkout.
- * Avoid giving your personal data over the telephone, via email, or online unless you initiated the contact or you already know the person with whom you are doing business.
- * Before you give out any of your personal data, verify that you are doing business with a legitimate party. You can always check their website on the internet. Be alert when answering promotions. Identity thieves may call with promotional offers to make you give them your personal data.

Is there identity theft insurance? Should you purchase some?

There are companies that provide insurance that claim they will protect you in the case of identity theft. Be alert that most creditors will only transact with you if you have a problem, meaning the insurance companies are not capable of reducing your trouble.

As for other services, make sure that you know what is being offered before you buy into it. If you want to purchase identity theft insurance, investigate the company through the Better Business Bureau and legal agencies to find out if they are reliable and have no complaints outstanding.

In conclusion, always be wise and alert. If someone asks for your personal information, whether it is a friend, acquaintance, or a business, ask the reason why they need it.

Know why they want your information, what are they going to do with it, how will it be stored, who will have access to it, and how will it be secured.

If they can answer these questions and you feel content with the answers, then he or she is worthy of your trust. You can safely give them your information.