

Identity Theft - It's Only Funny In The Commercials

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You've probably seen the commercials on TV where the people are talking in a voice not their own about purchases they would never make. Sure It's funny to see the old ladies laughing about motorcycles they purchased or the big manly man talking about getting his hair and makeup done, but if you ever become a victim of identity theft, you will know it is no laughing matter.

Identity theft is a growing problem - one that affects between 250000 and 750000 people each year. One in 25 Americans will fall victim to it and if it happens to you, you might find yourself in the frustrating position of having to prove that you are ... well .. you.

Two of the most prevalent identity theft scams are crimes that happen on the internet. These crimes called phishing and spoofing which make use of email to try to get personal information. Typically the email will "pretend" to be an institution that you may have an account with like a bank or investment company. Even eBay has criminals posing as it in emails to try to get your account information.

Phishing fraud can be very sophisticated and the criminal will typically create a website that looks just like a site you usually use. This way you will think you are logging into your bank when you are really logging into a place where someone can then record and steal your username and password. Usually they get you to go to their site by sending an email claiming that there has been unauthorized activity on your account unauthorized and you must login or you will not be able to use your account. They provide a link in the email to the fake website. Paypal and Ebay are two institutions that Phishers often use to try to scam individuals out of password information.

Spoofing fraud consists of an email that appears to come from someone you know. This is used to try to get you to open and then respond to the emailed solicitation, providing private information.

Identity theft doesn't just happen over the internet, however. Your personal information can be stolen from a phone call pretending to be an institution you do business with or even from bills or receipts you throw away in the trash.

With so much identity theft going on these days, you must remain vigilant to protect yourself. Never give out personal information, passwords or account numbers unless you are 100% sure of who you are communicating with. You should also monitor your credit card statements every month and check your credit report once a year. If you find anything that looks out of place, call your credit company and take steps to make sure it is a valid charge.

If you do find that you have been a victim of identity theft, you should first off cancel all accounts and change all passwords that you have. Then report the theft to your credit card companies and other financial institutions. Finally, notify your local police and one of the big three reporting bureaus TransUnion, Equifax or Experian, of the crime. Notifying one is sufficient as it will notify the other two for you. Lee Dobbins writes for <http://identitytheft.pagechic.com> where you can learn more about how to protect yourself from identity theft.