

# Learn The Truth About Identity Theft

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Identity theft is the fastest growing crime in America, according to a recently released FTC study. Did you know that the term "identity theft" did not exist until just a few years ago? It is a recent phenomenon that is causing a great furor around the world.

According to the United States Department of Justice, the terms identity theft and identity fraud refer to "all types of crime in which someone wrongfully obtains and uses another person's personal data in some way that involves fraud or deception, typically for economic gain." If a person becomes a victim of identity theft, the recovery process can be time-consuming, stressful, and expensive.

The pace of this danger is quickening. Many of the largest data collection companies and banks have experienced substantial fraud issues affecting millions of Americans. The IRS recently admitted that their complex and detailed financial records are not protected well enough at all. The fact of the matter is that we are all at risk for identity fraud and there is little that we can do about it. Our personal information is already "out there" for the taking. Please examine the following questions to help you assess your risk factors:

- Do you send and receive your personal mail in a locked, secured mailbox?
- Do you ever provide your Social Security number as a means of identification?
- Do any of the cards in your wallet display your Social Security number? (license, medical, etc...)
- Do you keep your Social Security card and all of your other cards in your wallet?
- Do you ever provide personal information in person, over the telephone or via the Internet?
- Do you use a crosscut paper shredder and use it to destroy all credit card offers, bankcard statements, old tax records, and other documents displaying personal information prior to throwing them away?
- Do you use any of the following to construct various passwords or PIN codes? The last 4 digits of your social security number, your birth date, your middle name, your mother's maiden name or anything else that could be easily discovered by identity thieves?
- Have you called (888) 5OPT-OUT to have your name removed from marketing lists that are sold by the credit bureaus? This will also decrease the number of unsolicited credit offers you receive.
- Have you requested a copy of your personal credit report in the last year? &#61587; Last 3 months?
- Do your personal checks contain any personal information beyond your first initial & last name, PO Box address and business phone number? Is your Social Security number listed?
- Do you write account numbers on your personal checks as you pay your monthly bills?
- Do you simply dispose of Privacy Notices sent by banks, doctor's offices, credit card firms, etc?

Take a look at your health insurance card. Chances are that your account number is your social security number. Call your doctor's office and request a prescription refill and you will almost certainly be asked for your social security number as a means of file identification.

I was recently at a cell phone retail store and witnessed person after person verbally giving their personal information including social security number to the employee across the counter. A criminal would have a field day listening and making notes in such an environment.

A less-than-scrupulous grocery store checkout clerk could make a fortune using or selling copies of personal checks that disclose a person's personal data including name, address, phone number, drivers license number, Social Security number, bank account number and signature.

Predators have a 360° view of all of us. That's right. They have access to data collected by our doctors, pharmacy, grocery store, banks, employer, insurance companies, credit agencies, IRS, department of motor vehicles, schools, credit card companies, and so on. They can even purchase your social security number over the internet. They steal your identity and become you. The fact is, if a criminal is determined to violate your precious identity, there is little you can do about it.

FACTA will help. It will force employers and other guardians of your personal data to protect it better and dispose of it properly or face legal consequences. As employers implement new policies and preventions to protect your

information, data loss and accompanying fraud from companies should be reduced.

Banks, credit gathering companies and database giants are being forced to better protect your sensitive information. The government has finally stepped in to prosecute these ID theft criminals. Banks, credit agencies and private companies have begun offering various types of ID theft insurance. Typically, most banks offer programs for a monthly fee, but the protection usually is only extended to the accounts held at their bank. The three major credit agencies offer plans to monitor your credit file at monthly or quarterly intervals.

Be smart. Get educated. Learn the facts about ID theft by visiting the US government's web site at <http://www.ftc.org/>, the ID theft center at <http://www.idtheftcenter.org/> and the US Post Office's site at <http://www.usps.com/> as soon as you can. Review your answers to the earlier questions and study the material at these sites. There are also several private companies offering protection from this hideous crime. Look for a plan that has daily and continuous monitoring of your credit file so that you can be instantly alerted to any suspicious or fraudulent activity. The other major feature that you want is to have to an expert who can walk-you-through the arduous task of restoring your good name. This partner or coach will be invaluable to you. I have a link on my web site that will lead you to the market leader and highest qualified company of its type.

Identity theft can be extremely costly in terms of actual monetary losses, fees for legal services as well as time spent away from work to make repairs and prove your innocence. That's right; This is a crime where you are assumed guilty until you prove yourself innocent. The residual effects of identity theft can last for years. Your best strategy is to be vigilant, having a protective plan in place, and to be protective of your personal information. These plans are analogous to virus scanning software always running in the background on your personal computer. Act quickly when you discover that you have been a victim and seek help immediately when violated. It is no longer a matter of if you might be victimized, but when. Be smart. Learn all you can and take action now.

*Daniel Sitter is the author of the breakthrough e-book Learning For Profit, the revolutionary "how-to" book providing simple, step-by-step instructions to teach people exactly how to learn new skills faster than ever before. It is what the author calls a "skinny book", a new generation of e-book designed for busy people. Containing no "filler or fluff", it gets right to the point with no wasted time. It can be read easily and quickly on a computer, a PDA or printed for later reference. Visit <http://www.learningforprofit.com/> or contact the author directly. This e-book is currently available from >c|net's [download.com](http://download.com), the authors' web site and a variety of online book merchants. Mr. Sitter is a contributing writer for several online and traditional publications.*