



How much is a good name worth?

Several years ago, we occasionally heard about fraud committed through impersonation, but we didn't worry about it affecting us. Today however, our names, addresses, birth dates, and Social Security Numbers are often worth more to thieves than merchandise, and they are easier to steal.

How do identity thieves operate and what can you do?

Old-fashioned methods—stealing purses or wallets and breaking into homes or businesses—are common practices for identity thieves. More recently, theft of data from corporations, small businesses, and even government agencies has increased the risk for more people and businesses. Other methods and preventive measures businesses need to be aware of include:

- **“Dumpster diving”** (stealing mail and recycled paper documents from the trash) – Make sure all protected information is properly shredded and disks and hard drives are broken in pieces or “wiped” electronically. If you hire an outside business to destroy these records, do a thorough background check of the company first.
- **“Skimming”** (dishonest employees use small scanning devices to secretly scan debit/credit cards at checkouts) – Investigate prospective employees before hiring. Monitor sales activity and question suspicious behavior by employees such as swiping customers' cards twice. Also watch for unfamiliar devices near a register. Review your credit sales reports and check for multiple charge-backs.
- **Online fraud** – Beware when doing business online—both as a buyer and a seller, especially in foreign markets. The schemes are too numerous to list and range from spreading e-mail viruses that capture information to setting up fraudulent Web sites that mimic legitimate sites. Protect your own and your customers' information. Don't open or reply to unsolicited e-mail or click Web site addresses you don't know. Type in addresses to known sites and bookmark them instead of clicking links. Always look for the closed padlock icon on a Web page before entering information. Change passwords frequently on sites that store financial or personal information.

Learn as much as you can about this issue. Visit the Federal Trade Commission Web site section dedicated to the problem of identity theft at <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/edu/microsites/idtheft/>.

A good name is worth everything...keep yours safe.

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