

PROTECTING YOUR IDENTITY & YOUR CREDIT

Be aware of the many ways that your identity and your credit can be stolen!

Renting a car, mailing tax returns, online purchases, applying for credit cards, writing checks at the store and many other **ways we interact financially with the community can leave you vulnerable to identity & credit theft**. Any time you share your **account or credit/debit card numbers, your income, your Social Security Number (SSN), or your contact information**, you need to be aware of the ways this information can be accessed.

Identity thieves will seek personal information to borrow money, drain your bank account, open new charge accounts, start wireless phone service, file for bankruptcy to avoid eviction, and purchase merchandise with your existing accounts that can be easily resold. The majority of the time, **consumers aren't immediately aware** of the theft as it takes missing payments on these accounts for the companies to directly contact the victim of the identity theft, or missing billing statements for you to contact your company.

Thieves have even **applied for jobs** under the identity of their victims or **used their names** when arrested so that when they no-showed to court, a warrant was issued for the victim! It is up to you to take preventative measures and to be vigilant when it comes to monitoring your credit & protecting your identity.

The Federal Trade Commission strives to **prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices** in the marketplace and to **provide information to help consumers spot, stop, and avoid them**. If you need to file a complaint or would like to get free information on consumer issues, go to www.ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261.

FTC tips to help minimize your vulnerability:

- Before you reveal any personally identifying information, **find out how it will be used and whether it will be shared with others**. Ask about the company's privacy policy: Will you have a choice about the use of your information; can you choose to have it kept confidential?
- Read the **privacy policy** on any website directed to children. Websites directed to children or that knowingly collect information from kids under 13 must post a notice of their information collection practices.
- Put **passwords on your all your accounts**, including your credit card account, and your bank and phone accounts. **Avoid using easily available information** — like your mother's maiden name, your birth date, the last four digits of your SSN or your phone number — or obvious choices, like a series of consecutive numbers or your hometown football team.
- **Minimize the identification information and the number of cards you carry** to what you'll actually need. Don't put all your identifying information in one holder in your purse, briefcase or backpack.
- **Keep items with personal information in a safe place**. When you discard receipts, copies of credit applications, insurance forms, physician statements, bank checks and statements, expired charge cards, credit offers you get in the mail and mailing labels from magazines, tear or shred them. That will help thwart any identity thief who may pick through your trash or recycling bins to capture your personal information.
- **Order a copy of your credit report from each of the three major credit reporting agencies (CRA's) every year**. Make sure it's accurate and includes only those activities you've authorized. CRA's can't charge you more than \$9.00 for a copy, and in some states, your credit report is free (*note: Colorado is free*).
- Use a **secure browser when shopping online** to guard the security of your transactions. When submitting your purchase information, look for the "lock" icon on the browser's status bar to be sure your information is secure during transmission.

To learn more about more about privacy issues and how they affect your life and the decisions you may make in the marketplace, visit the **National Consumer Protection** website www.consumer.gov/ncpw.

20 Tips for Protection – from Student Services at Bel-Rea:

1. **Make copies of all the items in your wallet and store the copies in a secure place.** If your wallet is lost or stolen, you can use the copies to immediately call all credit companies & banks with your account numbers. Most financial companies will not hold you responsible for charges incurred following this notification. They will also assist with blocking the use of those cards/checks. You also need to notify other non-credit companies immediately – such as your health & car insurance companies, so that your insurance cards are flagged against illegal use as well.
2. **Take with you only what you actually need that day.** Don't carry your Social Security Card with you at the times you don't actually need it. Store it in a safe place at home or in a deposit box at your bank. Take only the 1 credit or debit card you need that day with you, not all of them.
3. **Don't carry any written pin numbers in your wallet, phone, planner, or digital planner.** If your backpack or purse is stolen, the thieves will search for these items.
4. **Be aware of carrying frequent flyer information, frequent car rental/hotel cards with you.** Many of the time these companies will allow access without asking for a password.
5. **Request to not have your social security number as a loan identification or bank account identification number.** Many old school loans or mortgages used SSN's as account numbers. Some states also use your SSN as your driver's license number – you can go to the DMV and request an alternative number for your license.
6. **Purchase a locking mailbox for incoming mail & take your outgoing mail directly to the post office if your complex doesn't have a locking outgoing mailbox.** Think about all those pre-approval offers that arrive in your mail – it would be extremely easy for a thief to use these and spend the money before you are aware it has been borrowed. In addition to asking companies to not add you to their mailing lists, you can remove yourself from pre-approval credit offer lists & block companies from selling your contact information to other companies. (See the "How to Block Junk Mail" article in the Community Information section for current students for more information.)
7. **Empty out your glove compartment & clean out your car** – don't let these spaces become a catch all for old receipts & bank deposit slips. Get a locking key for your glove compartment that is different from your ignition key so that when you use a valet, they can park your car, but not sift through your papers. Don't forget to check under your seats & in your trunk for items that have personal information on them.
8. **Monitor your trash.** Many thieves are very happy to go dumpster diving for old bills, expired credit or debit cards, deposit slips, & receipts. Shred all items before tossing them – even the unsolicited credit card offers before putting out your trashcans or recycling bins.
9. **Pick up check reorders at your bank & know when new cards are arriving in the mail.** Arrange to pick up checks at your bank instead of having them mailed to avoid easy access to blank checks in your mailbox. If you are anticipating a new credit or debit card arriving due to a new account or an expiring card, watch for it and call the company if it does not arrive at the anticipated time.
10. **Get to know your banker, insurance agent, & health care providers.** If you get an unsolicited phone call from someone you don't know who says they are a part of one of these businesses, question it! Often times, thieves will dig for personal information by phone while posing as an employee with a company that you are actually affiliated with.
11. **When you cancel a financial account, do it in writing and then cut up the card/checkbook.** You need to notify the financial institute in order for it to be noted on your credit record, cutting up the card is not enough.
12. **Check your statements carefully each month.** Challenge any discrepancies immediately. Most bank statements have the challenge procedures listed on the back of the statement. When a bill does not show up at its normal time, contact the company immediately.
13. **Use an interior wallet/document holder in large crowds or while traveling.** Travel and safety product stores carry devices that will hold your wallet & passport inside your shirt.

14. **Be consistent with the name you use for credit applications and accounts.** Write clearly on applications using your full name (first middle last). List your name on all bills the same, a slightly varied name can be a red flag to a stolen identity situation.
15. **Write check photo ID on all of your credit/debit cards.** Store clerks will ask to see your ID instead of assuming that the signature and card belong to the person with the card.
16. **Check to make sure restaurant receipts only list the last few digits of your account number, not the entire number, before leaving the slip on the table.** Scratch out all but the last four and ask the manager to change to the last four type receipt/slip system to protect their patrons.
17. **Use caution when entering your pin.** Be aware of those who might be looking over your shoulder when you are entering your pin at an ATM or a store.
18. **Hang on to all receipts while waiting for your monthly statement.** A paper trail of receipts will allow you to easily challenge an incorrectly charged amount.
19. **Create a safe space at home.** A safe or locking file cabinet will help protect against others that have access to your space, such as: roommates, cleaning services, handymen, painting crews, or janitorial staff.
20. **If you move, change your address with all creditors immediately.** This will prevent those moving in to your old apartment/home from having access to your account information via your bills/statements.

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