

IDENTITY THEFT – PROTECTING YOURSELF FROM THE BAD GUYS

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In recent years, we have heard more and more about identity theft. Unfortunately, it has become big business for many. Identity theft can come in many forms:

- Tax ID theft
- Medical ID theft
- Child ID theft
- Driver's license theft

The most common breaches are Social Security numbers, credit and debit cards, bank accounts and email addresses. Once thieves obtain your personal information, they can use it to apply for credit cards and loans, file fraudulent tax returns, get medical services and even obtain employment. These actions can damage your credit as well as cost you quite a bit of money and time to restore your identity. Consequently, we all need to be vigilant in protecting our personal information.

So, what are some of the things we can do to protect and monitor our identities?

- Do not give your Social Security number to anyone unless it is absolutely necessary.
- Beware of "phishing" scams via phone or emails. Do not give out your personal information to anyone that you do not know.
- Keep your computer's anti-virus software up-to-date.
- Change your passwords frequently and make them hard to break. Use a mixture of capital and lower case letters as well as numbers and symbols.
- Shred any offers of credit you receive in the mail. Do not throw them in the trash or recycling bin. In fact, shred anything that has your personal information on it.
- When using your debit card, do not let others see your PIN as you enter it.
- Look carefully at charges on your billing statements and bank statements.
- Check your credit score often and look for accounts that were opened without your knowledge. Creditkarma.com is a great tool for monitoring your credit score and it is free.



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Despite best efforts to protect ourselves, we may still fall victim to identity theft. The steps to take to restore your identity will be the subject matter of a future blog.

If you have any questions about this or any other business or tax issue, please contact your Account Manager or [Patty Ward, EA](mailto:pward@connerash.com), at (314) 205-2510 or via email at pward@connerash.com.