

Investing In Your Own Good Name

Every year thousands of Canadians lose their good name to Identity Theft, an increasingly common financial crime that makes a victim's life miserable for months, even years as they try to reclaim their identity and get back to normal.

Identity theft is the unauthorized collection of a person's personal information and illegal use of it for financial or fraudulent gains.

Did you know?

- 1.7 million Canadians, 6.5% of the total Canadian population, reported that they were the victim of identity theft in 2007, according to a McMaster eBusiness Research Centre study.
- Resolving identity theft in Canada requires a combined 20 million hours and over \$150 million in victims' out-of-pocket expenses each year.
- More than 50% of identity theft cases involve fraudulent credit card transactions.
- 37% of all Canadian consumer credit fraud happens via counterfeit cards, according to SpamLaws.com. Thieves thrive upon this type of fraud, since new technology makes it easy for them to swipe personal information at the time of a credit card transaction.
- 23% of all reported fraud cases happen due to lost or stolen credit cards. Usually this occurs when people are not paying attention, and a purse or wallet is stolen or left behind.
- 10% of credit card scams happen without ever giving a physical card to a thief. Instead, thieves will simply ask for credit card information over the telephone (a scam called "phishing"). Unfortunately, many Canadians fall for this scam by reading their credit card numbers to thieves masquerading as legitimate company representatives.
- 7% of credit cards are stolen from mailboxes. This is the one type of fraud that is presently on the decline, since most card companies now require customers to activate credit cards using unique personal information.
- Surprisingly, only 4% of fraud cases are identity theft cases. Identity theft occurs when a person's actual identity is stolen and used for a number of fraudulent purposes.
- As of January 8, 2010, Senate Bill S-4 became law, making it illegal to possess another person's identity information for criminal purposes.

Losing your identity

Theft of a wallet or purse is not the only way identity thieves get your personal information.

- Debit cards and credit cards hold a wealth of encoded data that gives remote access to an account. Doctored ATM machines and phony swipe devices give thieves all they need to reproduce a victim's card and PIN number and use it as if it were the original.
- Phony telephone or e-mail marketing ploys can be used to get personal information from the unwary.
- The paper trail we all create in our lives is an even bigger source of personal information for thieves. Incoming mail to our homes and offices – bills, bank and other financial statements – is a prime source of personal financial information if someone can get their hands on it.

What to do

An identity theft victim must contact many people quickly. Keep records of who you talk with and what was said. Follow-up the phone calls in writing. Also, keep a record of your time and expenses for insurance purposes.

- File a police report. You will need the report file number when you are dealing with the affected organizations and creditors.
- Alert Phonebusters, a police-run anti-fraud call centre (www.phonebusters.com).
- Contact a credit bureau: Equifax (www.equifax.ca) or Trans Union Canada (www.tuc.ca). They can advise you if your credit report should be flagged with a fraud alert.
- Contact all your financial institutions to cancel credit cards and bank accounts and open new accounts with different PIN and identification passwords. Check credit card and banking agreements to find out if you're protected from fraud.
- Alert all other creditors that were providing the thief with unauthorized credit. As far as they are concerned you are still the person who owes them money. They will need proof that the theft took place.
- A lost or compromised driver's license, Social Insurance Card, birth certificate or passport, means notifying those government departments to cancel the old and re-issue new ones.

Identity theft is an emotionally draining process, extremely time consuming and in some cases very costly. What can you do to potentially reduce the risk?

- Don't give personal information to strangers.
- Never talk to strangers about financial or personal matters on the phone.
- Protect your PIN numbers.
- Review your financial statements, monthly bills and other records for odd charges or unusual transactions.
- Only shop on secure websites: Do not enter any financial information if you see a broken-key or open padlock symbol on your Internet browser.
- Delete and do not open attachments from unfamiliar email messages. They could contain a virus designed to search your computer for personal information.
- Destroy all unsolicited credit cards.
- Shred all financial documents that link your name and address with account numbers and your financial institution.
- If your bills and statements arrive later than usual or not at all, make a point to confirm they were sent by the company. If so, contact Canada Post and report the incident.

At Raymond James, your good name is important to us. By taking steps to protect yourself from identity theft, you join us in helping to keep your personal information private and secure.

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