



Identity Theft & Identity Fraud

COPING STRATEGIES

Written by aimpublications LLC

The holidays present a great opportunity for identity thieves. Just about everyone buys more and differently than usual, obscuring fraudulent transactions in a flurry of out-of-the-ordinary bills and events.

Since personal data on more than 50 million Americans — roughly one-sixth of the entire population — was lost or stolen in just the first half of 2005, there's plenty to worry about.

Which is exactly what affluent investors, those smart and/or lucky enough to have more than \$500,000 in investable assets, are doing. As far back as last summer, no less than 52% of them viewed identity theft as a big concern, according to a study by Spectrem Group ("Privacy Concerns of the Affluent Investor").

Fewer of the 500 households polled were concerned about the economic impact of another act of terrorism (38%), or the Social Security system's ability to make promised lifetime payments (42%), or a faltering economy causing someone in the household to lose a job (24%).

How, then, can you protect yourself, your employees, and your customers? It turns out that some of the most effective techniques are low-tech, like much identity theft.

Shred the Risk

To stay in compliance with privacy legislation like the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act (FACTA), notes Jude Rake, president and chief operating officer of Fellowes, Inc., all business owners must properly dispose of personal information that is derived from a consumer report. When that information resides on paper documents or plastic cards, they can most effectively accomplish this through shredders.

“It’s not only very important for organizations to be in compliance with this legislation,” he says,

“but it also has a tangible impact on their bottom line and is essential to gaining consumer trust.”

Shredders are just as important at home as in the office. Jay Foley, executive director of the Identity Theft Resource Center, recommends purchasing a shredder that can destroy credit cards and has a confetti-cut shredder head so that documents come out completely unidentifiable.

A new line of shredders, the Fellowes® Powershred® Series for the home and office, offer the above features and are designed to be quiet, easy to use and space efficient. The exceptional power of the SB-85C and SB-95C is perfect for use in small businesses and busy home offices.

“One of the simplest ways for individuals to protect themselves against identity theft,” advises Rake, “is to shred sensitive financial documents and materials, such as credit card and bank statements.”

How Businesses Can REDUCE ID THEFT RISK

Seven Best Practices

1. Place cross-cut paper shredders at each workstation or cash register area and insist that employees promptly shred all credit card slips, sensitive data, prescription forms and so forth.
2. Supply employees and customers or clients writing sensitive documents like gift certificates, checks or medical forms with pens using specially formulated ink that cannot be “washed.”
3. Secure — electronically and physically — all personal documents and data about employees and customers, and implement encryption and other data safeguards for all mobile workplace devices containing sensitive data, including notebook computers and PDAs.
4. Establish electronic audit trail procedures so that access to, and use of, sensitive data is constantly monitored.
5. Destroy old computer disks and CD-ROMs, wipe electronic files and erase any data from computers before disposing of them.
6. Conduct criminal and civil background checks before hiring anyone who will have access to personal identifying information for employees or customers and clients. Also screen cleaning services, temp services and contractors.
7. Do not sell or share sensitive data about employees or customers and clients.

UNI-BALL FIGHTS FRAUD

Uni-ball is a leader in the production of high-performance writing instruments, including a line of uni-ball gel pens that help prevent identity theft such as check washing and document fraud.

“Check washing” is a form of fraud where criminals steal checks from the mail and erase the ink on the check, often using common household chemicals. Over \$815 million is lost annually in the U.S. to check washing.

Making CHECK WASHING Difficult

To avoid check washing and other forms of document fraud, consumers should use a uni-ball 207 pen because its pigmented ink becomes trapped in the paper, making check washing difficult. The pigmented ink found in the uni-ball 207 pen contains discrete color particles that embed themselves within the paper fibers.

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Prevent Document Washing

Every year, according to the National Check Fraud Center, Americans lose more than \$800 million to “check washing” thieves who remove (often with common household products) what’s written on the check and replace it with names and amounts of their choosing.

This time of year, the 75% of U.S. consumers who receive checks, gift certificates, or gift cards during the holidays are particularly vulnerable.

The solution? Prevention, observes Frank Abagnale, a longtime identity theft expert best known as the subject of the movie *Catch Me If You Can*. His advice: use pens with specially formulated inks containing color pigments that get absorbed into a check’s paper fibers. Washing attempts fail because the ink is trapped in the paper.

Such pens are just as valuable in organizations. “When writing secure documents, use a uni-ball 207 gel pen,” counsels Abagnale, who describes the product as “a simple and effective method for preventing check and document washing.”

He also advocates signing important documents with black ink. “These black inks are typically bolder,” he says. For years Abagnale has suggested using uni-ball pens to avoid check washing and other document fraud, and he particularly recommends the uni-ball 207, which uni-ball designed to his specifications.



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Five Ways to PROTECT YOUR IDENTITY

1. Use pens with specially formulated ink that cannot be “washed” when writing checks, contracts and other sensitive documents.
2. Before throwing them out, shred documents that could be used to steal your identity — including banking and credit card information, old bills and offers of preapproved credit.
3. Use e-mail-based account alerts to review your credit report and monitor transfers, payments, low balances, withdrawals, etc. If possible, electronically monitor account balances and activity every week, check your statements and pay bills online.
4. Keep your personal identifying documents, such as your birth certificate, Social Security card and military ID, private. Get your Social Security number removed from personal checks, driver’s license, insurance cards, employee records, and so forth.
5. Do not provide your Social Security number whenever asked. Instead, ensure you know who is asking for it, why, and precisely how it will be used.