

USEFUL TIPS & SUGGESTIONS
Understanding the Criminal Process



What is identity theft?

The FTC defines “identity theft” as a *fraud that is committed or attempted, using a person’s identifying information without authority*. A criminal might access your bank account to steal money, open new accounts in your name, intercept your credit card information, or receive health insurance benefits, thereby jeopardizing your medical records. Common techniques for accessing a victim’s personal information are discussed below:

Widespread computer hacking

You must safeguard your computer with anti-virus software and firewalls. The incidence of highly sophisticated hacking is pandemic. Unfortunately, most businesses store transactional information generated by their customers. The implication is that your identity is also susceptible to any breach perpetrated against the companies with which you have transacted business.

Stolen mail and documents

Thieves require very little information to unleash a torrent of financial ruin. Any statement, bill, credit card, or document containing personal information could be enough for identity thieves to take advantage. Fraudsters are notorious for rummaging through garbage, dumpsters or unlocked mailboxes. Shred old credit cards, receipts, utility bills, and financial statements — never let your guard down.

Stealing information from inside

Identity thieves infiltrate the workplace or embed accomplices within a business with the sole purpose of stealing identities.

Impostors abound

Identity thieves are the great impostors — professional scam artists. Criminals commonly pose as loan officers, charity workers, or any “trusted” position to obtain your personal information — by phone, online, or in person. They only need to access a few bits of *identity-DNA* to play havoc with your credit and financial well-being.

Protect your Social Security number

Your Social Security number unlocks bank accounts, access to credit cards, and other financial holdings. It is the key to your identity-genome and as such requires constant safeguarding against the pernicious, adaptive virus of identity theft. Unfortunately, as the Information Age increases our reliance on technology, so does the susceptibility of our most valuable asset — our identity. Consider the criminal incentive of stealing personal information in order to obtain medical services and expensive operations, a not uncommon scenario, leaving the unsuspecting victim with a huge financial obligation and altered medical records. As this potentially life-threatening example shows, the repercussions of identity theft’s varied mutations have surpassed that of simple credit card fraud.