



Are Your Credit Cards and Identity Safe During Holiday Shopping?

The holidays and extensive sales will have masses of shoppers taking to area malls and stores. While some revel in the excitement of waiting in line with others to get that perfect early holiday gift on sale, identity thieves could be amongst those, waiting for a slip-up and an opportunity to steal your identity.

“Technology today goes well beyond pick pocketing or taking an unattended purse,” said Dorothy Barrick, Accel financial counselor. “Cyber thieves have the Internet, radio frequency ID scanners and camera phones at their disposal to help them steal credit card numbers and build a personal profile on an individual. It only takes small amounts of information and a few keystrokes to open up a new account in your name.”

New this season, many new credit cards contain tiny two way radios called radio frequency identification (RFID) chips. The technology lets you wave your credit card, passport or license in front of a nearby scanner, instead of having to slide the magnetic stripe through it. This makes it easy for thieves to employ electronic pick pocketing without touching you. RFID blocking products, like credit card secure sleeves, could help prevent the electronic stealing.

“It’s a fairly simple transaction,” said Barrick. “The electronic scanner sends a signal which is received by an antenna embedded into the card, which is connected to the card’s RFID chip, thus activating it. It’s yet another way that ID thieves can steal sensitive data without you even knowing it.”

Accel reminds people about protecting their identity, whenever they are shopping:

1. Before you leave your house, take out the credit cards that you know you will not be using. This will also cut down on the temptation to shop beyond your set gift list for the day.
2. Copy the front and back information on your card, so you have contact information quickly in case your card is stolen. Keep this in a safe place in your home.
3. Consider purchasing a secure sleeve to protect your credit card from RFID scanners.

4. Do not carry your social security card with you. That number is vital in opening new credit accounts.
5. Watch where you leave your card when you shop. “Don’t leave it on the counter with people around,” said Barrick. “A simple click of a camera phone or a good memory can capture your name, card number and expiration date. A thief can then use that information instantly to buy goods online.”
6. Keep your receipts in your purse or wallet, not in the bag. The thief might have a harder time returning the merchandise without a receipt. This will also make it easier to track your merchandise spending and help you to stay within your budget.
7. If your merchandise bag is stolen, quickly go back to the store to report your theft. Perhaps a quick thinking salesperson may be able to identify them.

Accel also gives three steps to follow if you become a victim of identity theft this holiday season:

1. Contact the three credit bureaus and tell them that you have been a victim of identity theft.
Equifax fraud division Experian fraud division
800-525-6285 888-397-3742
www.fraudalerts.equifax.com www.experian.com/fraud
Trans Union fraud division
800-680-7289
www.transunion.com
2. Contact your creditors directly and ask to speak to someone in the security department. Freeze the existing account.
3. Contact local law enforcement and file a police report. This will serve as documentation that a crime has occurred.

“It can take anywhere from 20 hours to 600 hours to clear your name when you have been a victim of identity theft,” said Barrick. “By taking some preventive measures, you can ensure a smooth shopping experience throughout the holiday season.”

Keeping Your Resolutions for the New Year

It's the time of the year when people reflect over the past year and make new commitments and resolutions for the upcoming one. Saving more money and paying down debt tend to be at the top of people's lists of New Year's resolutions. Here are some ways for you to make good on your resolutions and achieve your financial goals:

- **Set easier goals.** The Association for Consumer Research reports that people who set an easy goal for themselves are much more likely to achieve the goal than those who set challenging goals or no goals at all.
- **Create annual goals rather than monthly ones.** The Association for Consumer Research reports that people who had already violated their monthly savings goal were more likely to make additional purchases than those who hadn't. Setting an annual goal provides more flexibility to judge success or failure.
- **Identify best practices.** Find out how others have achieved goals similar to your own.
- **Create action steps.** Break down your goals into steps you will take to reach your objective, and include ways to respond to obstacles that you may encounter.

For additional information on budgeting, saving, and achieving your goals, visit Accel's Resource Center at <http://www.accelservices.org/members/resources/resource-center.htm>

Manage Your Stress During Tough Economic Times

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), a lack of money is the leading cause of stress. The following are some tips to help deal with financial related stress:

- **Turn off the news.** Although it is important to stay informed, getting caught up in negative news stories can add to higher anxiety and poor decision making.
- **Recognize how you deal with financial stress.** In tough economic times, people are more likely to relieve stress by turning to unhealthy activities, such as smoking, drinking, or emotional eating.
- **Use this time as an opportunity for change.** Think of ways these tough economic times can help you find healthier ways to deal with stress. Having dinner at home with your family will not only save money, it can help bring you closer together. Learn a new skill, through your employer or through your community education program, which may lead to a better job.
- **Ask for professional support.** If you continue to feel overwhelmed by the stress, you may want to contact a psychologist or your local community health clinic, which can help you address these issues. Credit counseling services are also available to help you take control over your money situation. You can speak with a certified financial counselor by calling Accel toll-free at (877) 33ACCEL. (Source: American Psychological Association)



Paper Savings Bonds Will Be Harder to Get Starting in 2012

Savings bonds seem to be a long-standing tradition in America. They are purchased to celebrate a newborn, they are given by grandparents for birthdays, holidays and other special occasions and have been considered a safe investment for years. But come 2012, paper versions of certain bonds are going to be harder to come by. According to *MONEY Magazine*, on January 1, 2012, you will no longer be able to walk into a financial institution and purchase a paper savings bond. The Treasury announced earlier this summer that series EE and I bonds will be available for purchase only through www.treasurydirect.gov or via your tax refund.

As a member of United Financial Credit Union, you can take advantage of the *Accel* program, a free financial education and counseling program. To use this service, simply call 1-877-33ACCEL (332-2235) or visit them on the web at www.accelservices.org.

