

Tips to Protect Your Identity Online

Identity theft continues to be one of the fastest growing crimes in America. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, an estimated 17.6 million U.S. residents were victims of identity theft in 2014, up from 16.6 million victims in 2012. Heritage Bank is offering eight tips to help consumers protect their personal information from identity thieves.

Because cybercriminals are becoming more and more sophisticated and are using every tactic imaginable to carry out their offenses, it is extremely important that you create barriers to your personal information by enabling passcode locks on your smartphones and activating virus protection software on your computers.

To keep you safe, Heritage Bank offers the following tips to help consumers protect themselves from becoming a victim of identity theft:

1) DON'T SHARE YOUR SECRETS

Don't provide your Social Security number or account information to anyone who contacts you online or over the phone. Protect your PINs and passwords and do not share them with anyone. Use a combination of letters and numbers for your passwords and change them periodically. Do not reveal sensitive or personal information on social networking sites.

2) SHRED SENSITIVE PAPERS

Shred receipts, bank statements and unused credit card offers before throwing them away.

3) KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR MISSING MAIL

Fraudsters look for monthly bank or credit card statements or other mail containing your financial information. Consider enrolling in online banking to reduce the likelihood of paper statements being stolen. Also, don't mail bills from your own mailbox with the flag up.

4) USE ONLINE BANKING TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Monitor your financial accounts regularly for fraudulent transactions. Sign up for text or email alerts from your bank for certain types of transactions, such as online purchases or transactions of more than \$500.

5) MONITOR YOUR CREDIT REPORT

Order a free copy of your credit report every four months from one of the three credit reporting agencies at annualcreditreport.com.

6) PROTECT YOUR COMPUTER

Make sure the virus protection software on your computer is active and up to date. When conducting business online, make sure your browser's padlock or key icon is active. Also look for an "s" after the "http" to be sure the website is secure.

7) PROTECT YOUR MOBILE DEVICE

Use the passcode lock on your smartphone and other devices. This will make it more difficult for thieves to access your information if your device is lost or stolen. Before you donate, sell or trade your mobile device, be sure to wipe it using specialized software or using the manufacturer's recommended technique. Some software allows you to wipe your device remotely if it is lost or stolen. Use caution when downloading apps, as they may contain malware and avoid opening links and attachments – especially for senders you don't know.

BE SURE TO REPORT ANY SUSPECTED FRAUD TO YOUR BANK IMMEDIATELY.