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Welcome! Almost every week the media reports of another major security breach affecting credit card holders – and these are only the big ones. Many smaller ones happen all the time. In fact, unemployed folks in Massachusetts had a recent breach to be concerned about. This month, we're talking about how to be proactive in your own monitoring and how to react should you find a problem.

Read on to learn how to protect your identity – and, remember, we're here to help you stay *On Course!*

-Jennifer Lane, CFP

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What You Need to Know About Identity Theft

Don't rely on your credit card companies to uncover unauthorized use. Be proactive!

The Three Credit Bureaus

- Three organizations create credit reports: Experian, TransUnion, and Equifax.
- By law, you can request one report per year from each bureau. The bureaus jointly sponsor AnnualCreditReport.com, created to help consumers obtain their free credit reports.

Monitoring and Reviewing

- Check your monthly statements to make sure there's no unauthorized spending.
- If your credit card company calls you, return the call immediately. They may want to verify purchases to ensure no fraud is taking place.
- Order your free credit report three times a year (one from each organization) for a review. Make sure the information (name, addresses, social security number) is consistent across all the reports and correct. Spread it out throughout the year. If you order one at tax time and two when you change the clocks for daylight savings time, you'll be all set!

If You Suspect Fraud

- Call the credit card company and have them issue you a new card.
- You probably do not need to do a fraud alert because the credit bureaus may not use that information.
- Instead, you can freeze your credit. It costs \$5 with each bureau for a total of \$15. Just make sure you don't plan to apply for credit in the next six months or so because you will have to unfreeze it.
- Submit a personal statement explaining what happened to each bureau.

Q&A

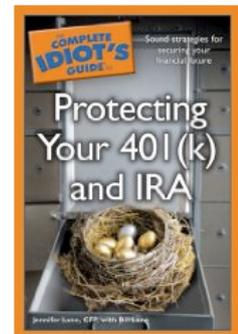
Q: A few years ago a person in Rhode Island used my name to open a credit account. They didn't charge much and they always paid the bill on time. I reported



Jennifer's Hint

Shred your investment statements when you toss them - they contain lots of personal information (name, address, account number, balances). Better yet, use online statements and transaction confirmations.

Get more tips in Jennifer's book



(click here for link)

Helpful Websites

AnnualCreditReport.com

Equifax.com

Experian.com

FTC.gov/idtheft

it when I discovered it, and their information was removed from my account. Now their address is back on my report. Should I be concerned?

-- William from Bridgewater

A: William, this goes to show that not everyone steals identities to do bad things. This is probably a person who could not get credit with his or her information. Still, it's not a good thing to have it on your report. You need to dispute the information on the credit reports and have it removed.



What's New

- We now have a Facebook page. Visit www.facebook.com/AskJennifer and like us!
- Jennifer's Compass -- Jennifer recently spoke with NECN on how to decide whether to buy or rent. Click [here](#) to watch this helpful video on her blog.
- Jennifer is now appearing on NECN every other Monday morning at 9:30 am in addition her Tuesdays' 5:00 pm and 6:30 pm appearances.

Compass Planning Associates helps families, individuals, and small-business clients achieve financial security, knowledge, and control over their money. Our **fee-only, client-centered approach** provides education and guidance for achieving financial goals and dreams.

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