



Pioneer Bank & Trust

Trust & Investments

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Fear of identity theft

A recent survey of high-net-worth investors, reported on wealthmanagement.com, probed for respondents' greatest fears. Major illness came in third, at 56%. Terrorism concerned 65%. The top worry, for 72% of respondents, was identity theft.

The concern is not misplaced. Reportedly, in 2015 alone there were 13.1 million victims of identity theft, at a cost of \$15 billion. Curbing identity theft was a big motivator for the addition of chip technology to credit and debit cards. But there are many more ways for identity thieves to skin that cat.

E-mail. In the early years of e-mail and the Internet revolution, having a naïve password was understandable. You might think that by this time, most people would have gotten the message to avoid passwords that are easy to guess. If so, you would be wrong. According to time.com/money, the top five 2015 passwords from a leaked trove were, in descending order: 123456, password, 12345678, Qwerty, and 12345.

To make guessing a password harder, experts recommend avoiding complete words, user names, real names or company names. When you change a password, make it completely different, rather than just a tweak. Finally, although it may be tedious to have different passwords for every Web site, it is very dangerous to rely on a single password for everything.

Snail mail. A wealth of personal financial information passes through your mailbox. In many cases you can eliminate this danger by requesting online only versions of bank statements, credit card accounts and retirement accounts.

Short of that, you never should leave mail in your mailbox overnight or on weekends. The U.S. Postal Service will hold your mail if you will be away for three to 30 days. Preapproved credit offers that are being tossed should be disposed of in a secure manner.

Public Wi-Fi. Using free Internet service from a public hot spot may be tempting, but it can be dangerous. Hackers may set up fake public Wi-Fi hot spots, from which they may gain access to your data.

Experts recommend sticking to known secure Wi-Fi when possible. Avoid all sites related to your personal finances when using public Wi-Fi. When in doubt, check on the authenticity of a hot spot before using it.

Eternal vigilance is the price of a protected identity. For some, a revocable living trust may add a layer of identity protection. Using a revocable trust with a distinct tax identification number might make it more difficult for a criminal to pilfer the accounts.

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