



Protecting Yourself from Identity Theft

Guide 4

Because you
don't have to be
the next victim

Desert Schools Money Matters Series

Guiding you toward financial success



Identity theft is serious. According to the Federal Trade Commission, identity theft is one of the fastest growing crimes in America, and it's certainly on the rise in Arizona. While some victims can resolve their problems quickly, others spend hundreds of dollars and a significant amount of time repairing damage to their good name and credit record. But, you can learn to protect yourself and avoid scams that could put you at risk for ID theft or fraud.

Table of Contents

How ID theft happens	5
Identity theft quiz	6
8 scams to watch out for.....	8
What to do if you're a victim	8
Tips to better protect yourself.....	10



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Learn to Prevent Phishing

Phishing is a scam where Internet fraudsters send spam or pop-up messages to lure you into revealing personal and financial information. But, you don't have to be a victim.

Take a look at these helpful hints:

Do be extra cautious about opening attachments or downloading any files from emails you receive, regardless of who sent them.

Do forward phishing emails to the Federal Trade Commission at **spam@uce.gov** and to the organization impersonated in the phishing email.

Don't reply to email or pop-up messages that ask for personal or financial information, and don't click any links in the message.

Don't email personal or financial information, even to friends or family.

Do use up-to-date anti-virus software, as well as a firewall.

What is Identity Theft?

While someone can't actually steal your identity, they can use your personal and financial information without your knowledge to commit identity fraud. This is known as identity theft.

The 3 Types of Identity Fraud

1. **Financial** – A thief opens credit cards in your name
2. **Criminal** – A thief uses your name in a traffic violation or crime
3. **Identity cloning** – A thief creates a new identity using your information

Understanding How ID Theft Happens

Your information can be stolen in a number of ways, including:

- **Phishing and spoofing** – Impersonating a well-known company through fraudulent emails and phony Web sites
- **Digging through garbage** – Looking through trash bins to find old account statements or other personal documents, like receipts
- **In person** – Listening in or watching you during financial transactions
- **Hacking** – Breaking into your computer system to retrieve information
- **Stealing mail** – Taking your mail, like pre-approved credit offers
- **Pretexting** – Conducting false phone interviews to gather your personal information
- **Posing as somebody else** – Obtaining your credit report by pretending to be someone else, like a landlord or employer, or posing as a repairman to gain access to your home
- **Skimming** – Using card readers at ATMs or gas stations to scan your card and steal its data
- **Taking your purse/wallet** – Stealing your medical, debit and credit cards, along with your ID

Thieves can change your address

Pay attention to your mail, especially bill statements. If you get a notice in the mail from the Post Office or any creditors to confirm your change of address (when you didn't authorize it), contact them right away, and alert them to the potential threat of fraud. Otherwise, accounts may be opened in your name, balances can run up and bills may remain unpaid. Also look for phone or wireless services in your name, and check your financial statements each month for suspicious activity, like checks you did not write or purchases you did not make.

Are You Protecting Yourself?

Take this quiz to see if you're at risk for ID theft.

1. I never let my purse or wallet out of my sight.
 - a) always
 - b) sometimes
 - c) never
2. I update my computer's anti-virus software every year.
 - a) always
 - b) sometimes
 - c) never
3. Friends would say I have a great memory.
 - a) always
 - b) sometimes
 - c) never
4. I shred all my mail.
 - a) always
 - b) sometimes
 - c) never
5. I password protect all my electronic files, including email accounts.
 - a) always
 - b) sometimes
 - c) never
6. I check my credit report more than once a year.
 - a) always
 - b) sometimes
 - c) never

7. I keep my medical and tax return information in a locked safe.
 - a) always
 - b) sometimes
 - c) never
8. I read my financial and credit card statements very closely.
 - a) always
 - b) sometimes
 - c) never
9. I only give out my address to people I personally know and trust.
 - a) always
 - b) sometimes
 - c) never
10. I use a P.O. box or secure mailbox.
 - a) always
 - b) sometimes
 - c) never

Scoring Your Answers

Mostly A's: Congrats! You're doing an excellent job of protecting yourself. Keep up the terrific work.

Mostly B's: You are like many people who, if they remember, protect themselves. Be a little more vigilant and you can decrease your odds of being a victim of ID theft.

Mostly C's: Don't put yourself at high risk. Keep reading this guide; it's a great first step to learn how to keep yourself and your information safe.

Avoiding Scams

Be cautious. Smart choices and great deals can be deceiving at times. Before you commit to an agreement or purchase something, check with the Better Business Bureau or search for user reviews online.

8 Scams to Watch Out For

1. **Telephone fraud** – Unauthorized charging of long distance calls or services
2. **Direct mail scams** – Unordered products, false contest notifications
3. **Telemarketing** – Lottery cons, pyramid schemes, fake investment opportunities and advance-fee loans
4. **Scholarship scams** – Pitches for money-back guarantees and financial aid
5. **Internet scams** – Credit card fraud, misleading rebates, work-from-home offers, phony auctions
6. **Travel scams** – Inexpensive holiday, spring break or summer packages
7. **Vehicle sales and repair scams** – Overpayment or unnecessary repairs
8. **Credit repair** – Debt consolidation that sounds too good to be true

Taking Action if You're a Victim

If you're a victim of ID theft or fraud, take action immediately.

Do all of the following:

- File a report with your local police department.
- Place a fraud alert on your credit reports, and review them regularly.
- Contact your creditors to close any accounts that have been compromised.
- File an FTC complaint by calling (877) ID-THEFT or visiting consumer.gov/idtheft.
- Change the passwords and PINs on impacted accounts.
- Monitor all your accounts very closely.

If your Desert Schools account or password is ever compromised, please visit your nearest branch immediately. If you believe your Social Security, account or credit card number are being used for fraudulent purposes, call us at

(602) 335-MYID (6943) or email IDtheft@desertschools.org.

True or False

I can trust my email spam filter to filter out all dangerous emails.

(False)

Did you know?

A percentage of all identity thefts is a result of stolen wallets, checkbooks and credit cards. Be sure to keep an eye on your purse or wallet wherever you go.

True or False

Anyone can be a victim of identity theft, but people can reduce their risk by following preventative measures, like using a firewall on a personal computer.

(True)

Choosing an Identity Theft Protection Service

Desert Schools Financial Services, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Desert Schools Federal Credit Union, partnered with the nation's most trusted names in identity theft protection to provide **IDSafeChoice**SM for those who fall victim to identity theft for any reason. For as little as \$15 per year, you can receive the recovery help you need, when you need it. \$3 more extends protection to family. To learn more visit desertschools.org or call **1 (800) 393-1502**.

Tips to Better Protect Yourself

Preventing fraud means being vigilant about how you protect your personal and financial information. Here are tips to help you better protect yourself:





Identity theft can happen to anyone.

Each year, over 10 million Americans have their lives changed by the repercussions of identity theft. It can start while you're waiting in line at the grocery store or shopping online. But it doesn't have to happen to you. ***Protecting Yourself from Identity Theft*** will help you do just that – protect yourself from identity theft. In this guide, you'll learn how ID theft happens, better ways to protect yourself, different scams to watch out for, and what to do if you're ever a victim.

Because you don't have to be the next victim, ***Protecting Yourself from Identity Theft*** is your guide to learn how to make better decisions that keep you and your personal information safe, no matter where you go or what you do.

If you find this guide helpful, please share it with family and friends.

To learn more, call
(602) 433-7000, visit
desertschools.org or stop
by a nearby branch.

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