

MANAGING IN TOUGH TIMES

FAMILY FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

Protecting Your Identity During the Holiday Season

The holiday season is in full swing! It's one of the busiest times of year, often juggling office and school holiday parties, gift purchasing, and family celebrations. The winter holiday season is the biggest shopping season of the year. Holiday shopping hotspots, including both brick and mortar shopping centers and online retailers, are primary targets for identity thieves.

There are simple steps that you can take to help protect yourself this holiday season (and year round).

Be aware of your surroundings while shopping.

Is someone standing too close behind you in line? Is the person taking pictures with his/her cell phone? These could be signs of "shoulder-suffers" who try to take a picture or write down your credit card information from behind. To limit the opportunity of shoulder-suffers only have your credit card out while

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Shopping with cash is a great way to limit your holiday spending.

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your transaction is taking place and use your hand to cover important information such as your credit card number, pin number, and name.

Limit what you bring shopping. When you are shopping, it is important to have your hands free. Limit the extra items you bring while shopping so that you are not constantly setting down and picking up a purse or other items that could be left behind. It is important to carry your driver's license, but do not bring extra credit or identity cards with you. Your social security card should definitely be left at home in a safe place.

Protect your smartphone. Smartphones are designed to put information at our fingertips. Many people use their smartphones for banking, online shopping, and to track personal information. Consider having safeguards in place on your smartphone in case it is lost or stolen, that someone will not be able to instantly gain access to all of your personal information. If your smartphone has an auto-lock, consider setting up a unique pass code. The automatic log-in on apps and the "remember-me" feature on websites can be very handy; however, they also allow a thief instant access to your personal information.

Shop with cash or credit. Shopping with cash is a great way to limit your holiday spending and stay within your budget. However, some individuals may find it more practical to shop with their credit or debit card. Use your credit card instead of your debit card. Your credit card will offer additional protections if it is lost or stolen unlike your debit card.

Be mindful of your accounts. It is easy to overspend during the holiday season. Being mindful of your accounts and transactions will help you stay within your budget, and aware of any fraudulent activity. Double check your transactions to make certain that they match your purchases. Often credit card thieves will make small dollar amount purchases to make transactions on your bill less noticeable.

Safety first when online shopping. When shopping online, you enter a tremendous amount of personal information including your name, phone number, address, and not to mention your credit card information. Always make certain that you are using a personal/home computer for online shopping. Public computers, such as those at work or the public library, may store your information that someone could access later. Be certain the website you are using is secure. Once you enter into the shopping cart phase of a website, the web address should have an "s" after the http. The "s" indicates that your data will be transmitted securely. Also, be certain that you are on a legitimate retailer's site. Knock-off websites do exist and at times it may be difficult to tell the difference from the legitimate site.

Safeguarding your identify is important regardless of the time of year. These strategies to protect your identity are easy and quick to introduce into your shopping routine, and will keep your holiday season happy and financially secure.

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