



Consumer Federation of America

PRESS RELEASE

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NEW TIPS FROM CONSUMER FEDERATION OF AMERICA ABOUT SHOPPING FOR IDENTITY THEFT SERVICES

Organization Celebrates National Protect Your Identity Week

Washington, D.C. – In recognition of “National Protect Your Identity Week,” October 17-23, Consumer Federation of America is releasing [Nine Things to Check When Shopping for Identity Theft Services](#). National Protect Your Identity Week, which is intended to highlight the problem of identity theft and provide consumers with practical information on how to reduce the potential to become victims and resolve identity theft problems. Identity theft is the top complaint made to the Federal Trade Commission,¹ and surveys by Javelin Strategy and Research show that identity fraud, the unauthorized use of someone’s personal information, is on the rise.²

Many companies sell services that promise to “protect your identity” but, as CFA reported last year, the claims that some identity theft services make are exaggerated or misleading. It’s not easy to tell from their Web sites and advertising exactly how these services work, how much they cost, or what protection or assistance they really offer. “Identity theft services may be able to help you detect identity theft quicker than you could yourself, and some also offer to help resolve your identity theft problems, but no service can absolutely prevent your personal information from being stolen,” said Susan Grant, CFA’s Director of Consumer Protection. “It’s important for consumers to know what to steer clear of when purchasing identity theft services.”

CFA’s new tips are designed to help consumers look for identity theft services that follow good practices. They also provide links to resources where consumers can learn about how to reduce the potential for becoming identity theft victims and how to resolve identity theft problems on their own. The tips were developed in consultation with CFA’s ID Theft Service Best Practice Group, which includes companies that provide identity theft services, consumer organizations, and consumer agencies. The group is working on

¹ Press release, Federal Trade Commission, February 24, 2010, <http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2010/02/2009fraud.shtm>

² Press release, Javelin Strategy and Research, February 10, 2010, <https://www.javelinstrategy.com/news/831/92/Javelin-Study-Finds-Identity-Fraud-Reached-New-High-in-2009-but-Consumers-are-Fighting-Back/d.pressRoomDetail>

recommendations for best practices for identity theft service providers, primarily focused on how identity theft services are promoted. CFA plans to release the best practices later this year.

What to Check When Shopping for Identity Theft Services

1. **Do the claims on the identity theft service's Web site or in its advertisements make you think that the service will completely protect you against identity theft?** If the answer is yes, steer clear! No one can absolutely protect your personal information from being stolen or fraudulently used, and identity theft service providers that follow good practices won't imply that they can.
2. **Does the identity theft service use scare tactics to try to get you to enroll?** If the answer is yes, steer clear! Identity theft service providers that follow good practices won't exaggerate the likelihood of becoming a victim or the harm that identity theft causes.
3. **Does the identity theft service make basic information about the company easy to find on its Web site?** If the answer is no, steer clear! Identity theft service providers that follow good practices will provide basic information such as the company name, the physical location of its headquarters, and how to contact it or its product distributor directly for answers to questions.
4. **If the service offers to monitor your personal information and alert you if someone may be fraudulently using it, is it clear what it monitors?** If the answer is no, steer clear! Identity theft service providers that follow good practices will make it easy to find information on their Web sites and through their customer service representatives about what is monitored and how frequently.
5. **Does the identity theft service make clear how monitoring or other features of its program actually help you?** If the answer is no, steer clear! This information can help you decide which service best meets your needs and what other steps you might want to take to protect yourself.
6. **If the service offers to help identity theft victims, is it clear exactly what help it provides and who is eligible for it?** If the answer is no, steer clear! This information can help you decide which service best meets your needs and what other steps you might want to take to protect yourself.
7. **Is the cost of the service provided before you are asked for your payment information?** If the answer is no, steer clear! Identity theft service providers that follow good practices will make clear and complete information about the cost of their programs available before you are asked for your name, address, and payment information.
8. **Does the service have a clear, transparent privacy policy?** If the answer is no, steer clear! Identity theft service providers that follow good practices post clear, transparent privacy policies on their Web sites and make that information available from their customer service representatives so that you can easily learn what types of personal information they collect, how they use that information, what types of information, if any, they share with others, what control you have over the collection and use of your personal information, and how your information is safeguarded.

9. **If the identity theft service offers insurance or a guarantee, is it clear what is covered and who is eligible?** If the answer is no, steer clear! Identity theft service providers that follow good practices should make it easy to find information on their Web sites and through their customer service representatives about exactly what the insurance or guarantee does for you and in what situations.

For the full tips, go to <http://www.consumerfed.org/pdfs/9-Things-to-Check-When-Shopping-for-Identity-Services.pdf>

Other ID Theft Resources

CFA's March 2009 report on identity theft services, *To Catch a Thief*:

<http://www.consumerfed.org/elements/www.consumerfed.org/file/To%20Catch%20a%20Thief,%20March%202009.pdf>

CFA's tips, *Ten Easy Steps to Protect Your Identity and Detect Fraud*:

<http://www.consumerfed.org/elements/www.consumerfed.org/file/Ten%20Easy%20Steps.pdf>

The official website for National Protect Your Identity Week:

<http://www.protectyouridnow.org>

The Consumer Federation of America is an association of nearly 300 nonprofit consumer organizations that was established in 1968 to advance the consumer interest through research, advocacy, and education.