

Unsecured Mail Gives Thieves an Opportunity to Steal from You.

Take a few easy steps to protect your business from mail theft.

Business identity theft (also known as corporate or commercial identity theft) is a new development in the criminal enterprise of identity theft. In the case of a business, a criminal will hijack a business's identity and use that identity to establish lines of credit with banks or retailers. With these lines of credit, the identity thieves will purchase commercial electronics, home improvement materials, gift cards, and other items that can be bought and exchanged for cash or sold with relative ease.

The damage can be devastating to the victim's business. The damage to the victim's credit history can lead to denial of credit, which can lead to operational problems. The cost to clean up and correct the damage can be hundreds of dollars and hours of lost time.

While there is growing attention to hi-tech methods of stealing personal information, like hacking into databases and sophisticated phishing schemes, ***the reality is stealing mail continues to be a frequent and favorite method of identity thieves.***

Check Fraud

Check Fraud – In a previous Fraud Alert Bulletin the topic of check fraud was addressed. Check fraud has been around a long time, however check fraud is getting more sophisticated and harder to identify.



Criminal Enterprises

It is Real and Happens Locally – Instances of check fraud is prevalent in our area. Sophisticated criminal enterprises find and steal mail from unsecured mailboxes. They will often study mail routes and pickup and drop-off schedules to determine the best and safest time to hit many mailboxes at once. Incoming and outgoing mail can contain dozens of checks, new blank checkbooks, financial records from the firm's CPA, credit card and bank statements, employee payroll records and a wealth of other information.

The mastermind counterfeits your check through desktop publishing and copying to create or duplicate an actual financial document; or chemical alteration, which consists of removing some or all of the information and manipulating it to the benefit of the criminal. Next, they will recruit individuals who agree to cash the check. The mastermind convinces them the checks are legitimate so they will use their true identity to cash the check with the promise of receiving a portion of the proceeds.

Reduce your Risk!

- ✓ **Make Mail Inaccessible.** If your business has a lot of customers coming and going, make certain that your mailbox—incoming or outgoing—isn't accessible to the public in any way.
- ✓ **Sending Mail.** When sending mail, use the letter slots inside your local Post Office™ facility or hand it directly to a letter carrier, instead of placing in a publicly accessible outbox.
- ✓ **Pick Up Mail Promptly.** Pick up your mail promptly after delivery—never leave it sitting out and visible in public areas of your business. If you regularly receive checks, credit cards or other negotiable items, consider using a PO Box™.
- ✓ **Didn't Receive Expected Mail.** If you don't receive a check or other valuable mail you're expecting, contact the issuing agency immediately.
- ✓ **Change of Address.** If you change your address, immediately notify your local Post Office™ facility and anyone with whom you do business via the mail.
- ✓ **No Cash.** Never send cash in the mail.
- ✓ **On Vacation.** Notify your local Post Office™ facility if your business will be closed for vacation, so they can hold your mail until you return.
- ✓ **Pickup Schedule.** Being aware of Postal Service™ pickup schedules will make you alert to possible mail thieves.
- ✓ **Postmaster.** Consult with your local Postmaster for the most up-to-date regulations on mailboxes, including the availability of locked, centralized, or curbside mailboxes.

- ✓ **Report Thieves.** Report all suspected mail theft to a Postal Inspector and the police.



Available Banking Services!

- ✓ **Sign up for eStatements.** Prevent your bank statement and private account information from sitting in your business mailbox waiting for a fraudster to steal. Enroll in eStatements and receive notification electronically when your statement becomes available in online banking.
- ✓ **Employ Check Positive Pay.** Check Positive Pay is a service offered by financial institutions to mitigate the risk of altered or counterfeit checks clearing your account. Information (Issue Date, Check Number, Dollar Amount, and Payee Name) is passed to the financial institution each time a payroll or an accounts payable check run is performed and as items are presented for clearing they are matched against the information provided to the financial institution.
- ✓ **Engage in ACH Block Or Filter Service.** ACH Filtering is a service offered by financial institutions to allow only ACH debit transactions matching specific, predetermined criteria to post to an account. ACH Block service prevents any ACH debit from posting to an account.