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Consumer Advisory

Scammers Never Take a Holiday--Keep your Holidays Happy and Bright Tips against ID theft

It's true, scammers never take a holiday. In fact, they bet on you paying more attention to gift buying and looking for good deals than protecting your identity. As the holidays approach, the opportunity for theft and scams increase. "Special offers" through e-mail, texts and other digital advertising feed off the holiday buying frenzy. Consumers can and should take advantage of good deals online. But all that convenience can create easy pickings for con artists. Credit cards do have built-in protections, but nothing will ruin your holidays more than a stolen identity.

Here are some tips to ensure your holidays are happy and bright.

- Don't get so caught up in getting a good deal that you forego checking on the authenticity of the site and the company.
- Consider buying online from companies that you are familiar with. Clicking on a promo ad to chase a good deal might just land you on a fake website. It's better to go directly to the company's website, than "clicking through" and risking landing on a look-alike website.
- If the cost on that designer purse looks too good to be true; it probably is.
- Shop on protected sites. You'll know the site is secure by checking the web address. A secure site will show a padlock icon and the address field will have "https" (the "s" means secure).
- What's in your wallet? :
 - Carry only one credit card. If you lose your wallet, you only have one card to cancel.
 - Never carry your social security card or any card with your social security number on it.
 - Have a Medicare card--- Then your social security number is on it! Make a copy of your Medicare card, then black out the first five numbers. Your physician's office will take the copy as indication of coverage.
 - Don't carry your PIN number. Crooks can use your PIN to access your bank accounts.
- Are your account numbers and passwords on your mobile phone? Password protect your phone. It may be a bother to have to enter your password, but it's a bigger bother to track down all the information stored on your phone.
- Your glove compartment is not a secret hiding place. Thieves will break into your car and go right to the glove compartment to access valuable information including your home address, and personal data.
- Stash your mobile GPS out of site while you are shopping and don't put shortcuts called "home" on the device. If your car gets broken into, the thief can follow your GPS home and rob your house while you are still shopping.

Remember you aren't being a Grinch by questioning or researching shopping sites or sales tactics, you are keeping your identity and money safe.

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