Identity Theft Protection Services: Unfairly Unappreciated.

By Denise Richardson

Remember the days when we didn't worry about securing our possessions online, or fear an intrusion into our privacy? It wasn't that long ago. We didn't know it was important to have up-to-date virus protection installed on our computers and rarely worried about firewall security. Now we wouldn't think of working, shopping or banking online without it.

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As criminal skills are honed, and more and more intrusive crimes occur, the same recognition will come to identity theft protection services. Technology advances have produced high-tech devices that steal your data without your knowledge -- from handheld skimmers to attached gas pump and ATM skimmers, to RFID readers and malware apps.

The only way we can fight this type of intruder is to use that very same technology to block them. We have RFID blocking wallets, GPS tracking software that can remotely find our phones and laptops -- and we have identity theft protection services that can detect when our data is being sold online or misused in ways that are not just credit related.

Trouble is people continue to talk about the bad news, the problems and the busts - but the real problem is that nobody is talking about the viable solutions.

The crime of Identity theft has become a professional business. Ongoing advances in criminal technology were the catalysts that spawned an ID theft protection industry. These protection services started out with little more to offer than convenience. Help with tackling the cleanup was the service that most ID theft victims, myself included, found of interest and value. But as the crimes evolved and criminals honed their skills, companies serious about ID protection followed suit and found new, sophisticated software that gave the criminals a run for their money.

Useful solutions are available today that just a few years ago were not. But nobody is talking about them. Meanwhile, some in the media (and businesses hit with a data breach) continue to downplay the risks associated with any data loss -- pushing the "do it yourself" route or credit monitoring services.

Many consumers don't understand that the types of identity theft crimes occurring today have little to do with credit and more to do with emptying bank accounts, hijacking tax returns and stealing government benefits such as unemployment insurance, Medicare or Medicaid.

Consumers need to do all they can to protect themselves from today's more intrusive crimes -and the only way to do so is to not only understand today's risks - but to understand today's solutions.

Consumers get mixed messages whenever there is a reported data breach. While stories like this one in the Sacramento Bee note that the average victim spent $631 and 33 hours to clear his or her financial life, the consistent message consumers get after a data breach is always: "There is no reason to believe this data will be used to create ID theft" and a list of resources that are available to consumers for free.

WHY stop there? Making it seem as though there is a miniscule risk associated with any reported data breach gives a false impression that leads to a dangerous false sense of security.

Why not provide info on the latest services available today and let the consumer make an informed decision? Many would like to know about the value of a service that can detect and alert us to our Social Security number or other critical data being misused, and then be there 24/7 to help reduce the hassles that come with cleaning up an intrusion. It is well worth the nominal price of around $100 a year, which is often less than the cost of standalone credit monitoring --which isn't enough

If we recognize that the crime of identity theft has become a professional business, then we must also recognize that today's identity theft protection industry has an important and valuable role, both now --and in the future. As criminals continue to hone their tech savvy skills, we must too.

We can be thankful for advances in technology that allows us instant access to the world --we just can't underestimate the problems and risks that come with it. Nor should we underestimate the value of id theft protection services that offer more coverage and less risk.

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