Identity Theft by Rental Car - What Travelers Need to Know

August 7, 2018 - Whether you travel for business or pleasure, there's a pretty good chance that if you travel regularly you're also renting cars on a regular basis. And when you get into that rental car, one of the first things that many people do is setup their cell phones to work with the car through Bluetooth. Doing so is more than just a convenience; it's also a safety consideration. Bluetooth allows you to listen to stored music, access information on your phone and have it displayed on the car's dash screen and make phone calls without ever touching your device. What you may not know is that when it comes to rental cars, setting up your phone to use Bluetooth could also leave you vulnerable to becoming an identity theft victim.

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ID theft by rental car has become quite popular for criminals. And why not? It's fairly easy and the chances of getting caught are slim. Here's how it works.

You rent a car and enable it communicate with your phone. Once you've set this up, a variety of data can be downloaded from your phone to the car's computer. Things like your address book. If you are like a lot of people you may store information in your address book that's for your eyes only. Things like contact information for your credit cards - along with the card number and everything else you may need just in case you ever have to call your credit card company.

You may have other sensitive information store there too. Things like bank contacts along with your account numbers. Or health insurance contacts along with policy numbers. The list goes on and on.

Once that information is stored on a car's computer, anyone who knows how to access it can easily do so. And it's worth noting that rental car companies don't clear out this stored data when you return your vehicle. Doing that is up to you.

Fortunately, finding the instructions on how to delete this data is probably just as simple as conducting an internet search. But you need to remember to do so. We highly recommend that if you are going to setup your phone to work with rental cars, you also set a reminder to clear the data whenever you return a car. Not doing so could make you vulnerable to both medical and financial identity theft, depending upon what information you store on your phone.
byJim Malmberg
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