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Being GREEN = Emailing future issues!

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(Addresses of colleagues & friends are also welcome.)



The Best Laid Plans...

by Michael F. Ganino, CPA

In our previous newsletter, we discussed a number of ways to decrease the risk of your personal information being stolen. Unfortunately, even diligently incorporating those recommendations into your daily life will not guarantee your information will be safe from a resourceful criminal. In this issue we'll spotlight ways to quickly identify if you have indeed become one of every 10 Americans that have fallen victim to identity theft and what you can do to quickly regain control and repair the damage.

Time Is Of The Essence

Time is of the essence when your personal information has been stolen, so a regular review of bank and credit card statements and credit reports is imperative in protecting yourself. All too often it's only after significant damage has been done that consumers become aware they've become victims of identity theft. Some signs that your personal information may be in the possession of another party could include:

1. Unexpectedly being denied credit or being offered less favorable credit terms than in the past
2. Being contacted by collection agencies for unknown debt or businesses for products/services you did not purchase
3. Receiving confirmation of credit cards that you did not apply for
4. NOT receiving expected bills (may indicate someone changed your billing address to delay any discovery of fraudulent charges)
5. Noticing unauthorized transactions in your bank account or similarly unauthorized credit card charges
6. Incorrect information in your credit reports (see below), such as Social Security Number, addresses, names or employers

Check Your Credit Reports

The most effective way to evaluate your credit landscape is to obtain your credit report – a summary of all your credit information that is held by one of three national credit bureaus (Equifax, Experian & TransUnion). Current law requires each of them to provide you a free copy of your credit report once every 12 months. To receive this free report, DO NOT call the individual credit companies, but instead:

- Go to www.annualcreditreport.com OR
- Call toll-free 877-322-8228 OR
- Go to www.ftc.gov/credit, complete the Annual Credit Report Request Form and mail to: Annual Credit Report Request Service, P.O. Box 105281, Atlanta, GA 30348-5281

Review your report carefully and note any discrepancies. If any are found, or you believe you are at a high risk for fraud in the near future, you should take the following four steps immediately:

1. Place a fraud alert on your credit reports. A fraud alert can help prevent an identity thief from opening any more accounts in your name for at least 90 days. You only need to contact one of the three credit bureaus to place an alert as they are required to contact the remaining two:
 - TransUnion: 1-800-680-7289 or www.transunion.com
 - Equifax: 1-800-525-6285 or www.equifax.com
 - Experian: 1-888-397-3742 or www.experian.com
2. Identify any fraudulent or compromised accounts and close them immediately. Follow up in writing and include copies of supporting documents. It's important to notify credit card companies and banks in writing and use certified mail, return receipt requested so you can document what the company received and when. Maintain a file of your correspondence and enclosures.
3. File a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission. Call the FTC's Identity Theft Hotline, toll-free: 1-877-438-4338 or write Identity

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Plan Ahead – Wills and Estate Planning

by Eric N. Hendlin, CPA

When was the last time you read your will? Although we are bombarded by reminders to look at our estate plans and update our wills, the fact is that many people procrastinate, saying they will deal with the issue tomorrow. Unfortunately, in many cases tomorrow never comes, and families are left to deal with issues that could have easily been taken care of while their relative was alive and well.

Here are some of the issues that we see as accountants and advisors to our clients:

- 1. People who die without ever having prepared a will.** This is known as dying “intestate” and when this happens, your assets are distributed to your heirs based on whatever law exists in your state of residence. This can mean that assets that you would like to stay with your spouse can be distributed to your children, or others, and in proportions to which you would not have agreed.
- 2. Wills that are outdated.** Many wills are prepared at the time of the birth of a first child. At that time, decisions are made about guardians for minor children and administrators or trustees for an estate to assure that children will be cared for in case something happens to the parents. Sometimes these wills are put away and forgotten until someone dies. At that time, relatives (including children who may be adults) are left to contact long lost relatives, friends or business associates (some of whom may be retired) to either get their approval to serve in the capacity specified in the will, or to ask for waivers or resignations so that other family members can be named. This can be difficult and time consuming especially if people have moved over the years and family members do not know the people assigned.
- 3. Naming of beneficiaries to retirement plans, IRA’s and life insurance policies.** Over the years, you participate

in retirement plans through work; maybe you have contributed to an IRA account or purchased a life insurance policy. Each of these investments allows for a beneficiary to be named for amounts to be paid upon death. In some cases, who the beneficiary is can make a significant difference in the amount of taxes to be paid on distribution, and when those distributions need to be paid. Make sure you update your beneficiary information to account for life changes - divorce, the birth of children or other family changes.

- 4. Parents establishing bank accounts for children under the “Uniform Gifts to Minors Act (UGMA)”.** Under the UGMA, assets can be held in trust for a minor without the need to set up a formal trust. Under the law, when the child reaches the age of maturity (age 18 or 21 depending on the state), the assets become the property of the child and must be turned over to him/her.

Finally, you must make sure that family members know where to find your assets in the event of your death. Many investment accounts today are accessible only through electronic media. Absent an up-to-date file of accounts and access information, family members may not be aware of assets owned, or may not be able to access accounts without obtaining legal approvals. Be sure to prepare a schedule of information and keep in a safe deposit box or with a trusted advisor such as an attorney or accountant.

As always, consult with appropriate legal and tax advisors prior to adopting or changing your will or other beneficiaries as laws are constantly being modified. Should you have questions regarding your estate plans, you can contact us at (203) 929-3535. ■

For more information on how we at DHL&S can help with these and other tax planning and financial opportunities, please contact your tax specialist at 203-929-3535, or visit our website at www.dhls.com.

Be sure to “Like” us on Facebook



by Jennifer S. Bull, CPA

Social media is substantially changing the way people communicate and network. One of the largest of the social media sites, Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life. Through “conversations” on sites like Facebook, people are obtaining information, education and news.

There are more than 800 million active users on Facebook. In addition to providing a forum for users to share information, photos and ideas, Facebook also allows you to “like” businesses and products that interest you. Through this form of social networking, businesses and products are able to provide insights, tips and advice.

DHL&S has recently created a Facebook business page which will allow us to inform our clients and friends of interesting and informative developments in accounting and tax. The Facebook page will also allow us to share with our clients and friends DHL&S’s more personal side by sharing some of the office events we hold, community activities and seminars we participate in throughout the year. So, we encourage you to “like” us and learn more about DHL&S, its employees and resources. ■

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The Best Laid Plans...

Theft Clearinghouse, Federal Trade Commission, 600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20580. Be sure to call the Hotline to update your complaint if you have any additional information or problems.

- 4.** File a report with your local police or the police in the community where the identity theft took place.

While taking these steps, it would be wise to change your passwords on all remaining accounts, keep a log of all your conversations and a file of all original documents during this process. We hope you never find yourself in this situation, but if you do and need guidance, give us a call. ■