



What is Identity Theft?

Identity Theft is the number-one consumer complaint reported to the Federal Trade Commission's Consumer Sentinel Database. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, an estimated 500,000 to 700,000 people per year become victims.

Identity theft (also known as identity fraud) is the misappropriation of another person's identifying information in order to:

- Obtain credit fraudulently from banks and retailers;
- Steal money from the victim's existing accounts;
- Apply for loans;
- Establish accounts with utility companies;
- File for bankruptcy;
- Rent an apartment;
- Obtain a job; or
- Achieve other financial gain using the victim's name.

There are two main classes of economic crime related to identity theft:

Account takeover occurs when an identity thief acquires a person's existing credit or bank account information and either withdraws money or makes purchases. Victims usually learn of account takeover when they receive their monthly credit card or bank account statement.

In true identity theft, an identity thief uses another person's Social Security number and other identifying information to fraudulently open new accounts for financial gain. Victims may be unaware of the fraud for an extended period of time, which can allow the criminal to continue the use for months or even years.

