

March 2005

IDENTITY THEFT: What criminals & terrorists can do to you & your organization.

By Dr. Lionel C.M. VonFrederick Rawlins, President & CEO, The VonFrederick Group

In the course of a busy day, you may write a check at the grocery store, charge tickets to a ball game, rent a car, mail your tax returns, call home on your cell phone, order new checks or apply for a credit card. Chances are, you do not give these everyday transactions a second thought. But someone else may.

The 1990's spawned a new variety of crooks called identity thieves. Their stock in trade is your everyday transaction. Each transaction requires you to share personal information; your bank and credit card account numbers; your income; your Social Security Number (SSN); or your name, address, and phone numbers. An identity thief co-opts some piece of your personal information and appropriates it without your knowledge to commit fraud or theft. An all-too-common example is when an identity thief uses your personal information to open a credit card account in your name.

Identity theft is a serious crime. People whose identities have been stolen can spend months or years—and thousands of dollars—cleaning up the mess the thieves have made of their good name and credit record. In the meantime, victims may lose job opportunities, be refused loans for education, housing, cars, or even be arrested for crimes they did not commit. Humiliation, anger and frustration are common feelings victims experience as they navigate the arduous process of reclaiming their identity.

Perhaps you have received your first call from a collections agent demanding payment on a loan you never took out—for a car you never bought. Maybe you have already spent a significant amount of time and money calling financial institutions, canceling accounts, and struggling to regain your good name and credit. Or maybe your wallet was stolen, or you only recently heard about identity theft, and you would like to know more about protecting yourself or your organization from this devastating crime. If that is the case, The VonFrederick Group is poised to train and educate individuals and organizations in protecting their good name and assets from this new and emerging criminal and terrorizing activity.

Can you completely prevent identity theft from occurring? Probably not, especially if someone is determined to commit the crime. But, you can minimize your risk by managing your personal information wisely and cautiously. If you have been a victim of identity theft, immediately call your local law enforcement and make a report. You can also call the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) Identity Theft Hotline.

The FTC, in conjunction with banks, credit grantors and consumer advocates, has developed an ID Theft Affidavit to help victims of ID theft restore their good names. The ID Theft Affidavit, a form that can be used to report information to many organizations, simplifies the process of disputing charges with companies where a new account was opened in your name. The FTC will also put your information into a secure

consumer fraud database where it can be used to help other law enforcement agencies and private entities in their investigations and victim assistance.