



How to Protect Your Identity

Kevin Bourke's Top Tips

By Kevin Bourke

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If you're not already a victim, you probably know someone who is.

Identity theft is a serious problem that some are calling the fastest growing crime across the country.

Some months ago, I attended a **fascinating seminar conducted by Frank Abagnale – a former identity thief who stole millions.**

You know who he is - the author of the autobiography "Catch Me If You Can." Actor **Leonardo DiCaprio played Frank** in the big screen adaptation and **Tom Hanks starred as the FBI investigator who hunted Frank down.**

After getting caught and spending several years in prison (both in Europe and in the USA), Frank accepted an offer of early parole from the FBI in return for his assistance in apprehending other criminals. More than 30 years later, Frank is still busy helping the FBI track down **the bad guys who try to steal our identities every day.**

At the seminar I started to think about how I'm protecting myself, and my family, from identity theft, and I wanted to pass along some useful tips to you.

1) Use a Paper Shredder Look at it as a long term investment. Buying a good micro-cut shredder may cost upwards of \$150 now, but it could save you thousands in the future if someone decides to go dumpster diving and use your discarded financial information to steal your money.

Incidentally, Abagnale cautioned against using cross-cut shredders and shredding services.

2) Check Washing Protection It's exactly what it sounds like. Thieves can actually wash out your printed ink on your checks and fill in whatever it is they want to. What to do? Buy a good pen. The **ink from some pens cannot be washed off**, and therefore provides a greater level of security.

The specific model Frank recommends is the "UniBall 207." They cost about \$1.60 each. Make sure to use it to write out the entire check including your signature.

3) Credit Check One way thieves can defraud you is to use your good credit to purchase goods and get cash. So, get a service that alerts you to when these types of events happen that can affect

your credit. Frank recommended Privacy Guard (www.privacyguard.com), but there are others. Make sure you compare features before selecting a service.

4) Take Control of Your Data Do you have to order checks with your social security number and phone number printed on all them? Absolutely not. Do you have to tell a “telemarketer” personal data over the phone if they cold call you and offer you a credit card or prize? No, ask them to send you a written application instead, and examine it closely. Your information is your own, so be careful with whom you decide to share it.

5) Be Wary of Eavesdroppers It may sound paranoiac, but many identity thieves make it their business to listen in on yours. Stop doing personal business at a telephone booth, or your cell phone in public. You never know who’ll be looking or listening over your shoulder trying to memorize the personal information you’re talking about.

As a financial planner and investment manager, I’m not an expert in preventing identity theft. But I learned a lot from listening to Frank Abagnale and hope you’ll do the same after reading this column.

Check out [Frank’s website](#) and for more information about identity theft look at the [US Dept. of Justice’s website](#) and search for identity theft.

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