



For immediate release

AUSTRALIANS EXPOSE THEMSELVES TO IDENTITY THEFT

Fuelled by the economic slowdown and growth in malicious online activity, identity theft continues to soar, yet Australians place themselves at enormous risk by throwing personal details into their rubbish, leaving their mailboxes unlocked and their computers unprotected from attack.

Identity fraud – which costs the Australian economy \$1 billion a year¹ – occurs when thieves steal personal details from victims by raiding their bins, stealing their mail, through internet phishing scams or by convincing them to divulge personal information.

Around 4.4 million Australians (26 per cent) have now been affected by identity theft, up from 3.8 million (23 per cent) for the same period last year², according to a study conducted by Galaxy Research for Veda Advantage's Indexed Identity Theft Report.

With the third annual National Identity Fraud Awareness Week taking place from the 5 - 11 October 2009, Crime Stoppers is urging the public to be vigilant about destroying personal documents before throwing them in the bin.

"Every time we put our bins out for collection, most of us are not heeding the warnings and still putting ourselves at risk of identity theft, it's almost beyond belief what people throw out," said Peter Price, Chairman of Crime Stoppers Australia.

"Detailed biographical information taken from bank statements, utility bills and other personal documents commonly found in household rubbish can be worth their weight in gold to identity thieves.

"All it takes is a combination of a few key pieces such as date of birth, address and bank account details," he said.

Peter Campbell, National Marketing Manager of Fellowes Australia, major partner of Identity Fraud Awareness Week, said that shredding all personal information before it leaves the house is the only way to ensure that it doesn't fall into the wrong hands where it can be used fraudulently.

"To rectify the damage and reinstate your credit rating if you have your ID stolen can take years and many thousands of dollars, never mind all the stress and inconvenience, so it really pays to take preventative action.

"Take a few minutes to shred your personal mail before it goes in the bin, ensure that your letter box is locked or use a secure post office box from your local Australia Post branch," Peter added.

Victims of ID theft – case studies:

US Federal Reserve Chairman

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (Released 27th June 2008) Personal Fraud Survey

² Galaxy Research Study commissioned by Veda Advantage – April 2009.

The most recent high profile victim of ID theft was Chairman of the US Federal Reserve Ben Bernanke. Last month it was revealed that Mr Bernanke's wife had her purse stolen, including personal cheques, credit cards and other personal identification.

This information was used by the ID thief to deposit a \$US900 (\$1,083.55) cheque under the names of Mr and Mrs Bernanke into a third person's account. The thief then withdrew \$9,000 from that person's account, having stolen that person's identity as well. (Source: Wall Street Journal)

ID theft used to fake a marriage

In a Family Court judgment in Sydney this month, someone apparently used a woman's lost birth certificate to assume her identity and have the marriage registered. (Source Sydney Morning Herald)

Other Australian cases

The following summaries of real cases documented in the Australasian Centre for Policing Research publication Australasian Identity Crime Policing Strategy 2003-2005.

- In March 2001, a man used up to 50 false identities in a \$7 million property fraud spanning Victoria, NSW and ACT. The offender and an accomplice used the false identities in order to obtain a series of home loans from banks and financial institutions.
- A bank manager and his assistant created accounts in fictitious names and in the names of relatives, amounting to about \$1.5 million. They established the false loan accounts by circumventing proof of identity processes and disregarding internal banking procedures. The false loans were discovered in 2001 when one of the loans went into default and enquiries were conducted to try and find the fictitious customer.
- In 1997, a 24 year old female applied for 61 credit cards in false names, of which 45 were granted. Some of these identities were fictitious but many of them were real, including some people known to her from her school days. This resulted in the destruction of credit of many, one of whom also suffered the additional indignity of being named by the applicant as her co-offender and mentor in the frauds.
- A solicitor used false drivers' licences and birth certificates to open bank accounts to transfer money obtained from share trading accounts. Money from the sale of shares in the three elderly victims' accounts was then transferred into the false accounts.
- An organised group of car thieves obtained personal details of people who owned cars of the same make and model as the vehicles they had stolen. They used this information to obtain duplicate registration certificates, labels and plates to re-identify the stolen vehicles prior to selling them to unsuspecting purchasers. Many of the identity theft victims experienced ongoing problems in proving that they had no involvement in the transactions.
- During 2001 an offender created a series of fictitious identities by producing various false proof of identity documents on his home computer. These documents, which included altered birth certificates, employment documents and utility bills, were used to open credit card accounts, lines of credit, finance and other loans. One of the major purchases made by the offender was a \$35,000 ski boat which he proudly named 'Crime Pays'. When he was arrested the police found further false identities in his possession.

- A male assumed the identities of four babies, who had died in the 1970s by obtaining their birth certificates. Over an 8-month period he obtained \$20,857 in the form of unemployment benefits in the dead infants' names. He was arrested in possession of numerous false 'proof of identity' documents to support his welfare claims including motor vehicle learner's permits, mobile phone accounts, student cards, rental leases and bank account access cards.

About National Identity Fraud Awareness Week and its Partners:

National Identity Fraud Awareness Week is an international campaign that aims to educate consumers and businesses about the dangers of ID fraud and the preventative steps that can be taken. It takes place annually around the globe in Europe, Asia, the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

Identity fraud occurs when thieves steal identifying details from victims by raiding their bins, by stealing their mail, through internet phishing scams or by convincing them to divulge personal details in person or over the phone.

In Australia, NIFAW is a joint initiative of Fellowes, Crime Stoppers Australia, and partners: Veda Advantage, Symantec – makers of Norton Internet Security – and Australia Post Post Office Boxes.

For more information on how to protect yourself from identity fraud, and how to cope if you are a victim of ID fraud, visit the official campaign website www.stopIDtheft.com.au or www.Crimestoppers.com.au

Fellowes

Founded in 1917, Fellowes is a global operation that employs over 1700 people. As a global manufacturer and marketer of business machines, records storage solutions and technology accessories, Fellowes enables people to work with greater security, organisation and productivity. To see the full range of Fellowes shredders visit www.fellowes.com.au.

Crime Stoppers

Crime Stoppers has become an integral part of policing, with information gathered and supplied by the community essential to crime fighting and crime prevention. Globally Crime Stoppers helps to solve a crime every 14 minutes!

Symantec

Symantec is a global leader in providing security, storage and systems management solutions to help consumers and organisations secure and manage their information-driven world. Our software and services protect against more risks at more points, more completely and efficiently, enabling confidence wherever information is used or stored. More information is available at www.symantec.com.au.

Veda Advantage

Veda Advantage has been at the forefront of the information business for many decades. Issues such as privacy, data security, fraud and business intelligence are part of our commercial landscape.

Veda Advantage is the largest custodian of credit related information in Australia and New Zealand. We provide insights into more than 16.5 million credit-active individuals and 4.4 million companies and businesses throughout New Zealand and Australia. The vast majority of applications for credit in Australia are checked against the files held by Veda Advantage - providing businesses with the information and knowledge to assist them in making informed decision in customer acquisition and credit risk management.

Veda Advantage recently acquired personal security specialists [Secure Sentinel](#). Veda Advantage will now offer cost-effective and comprehensive identity protection services to help Australians adopt a proactive stance against identity crime.

SecureIdentity

4.4 million Australians have been impacted by identity theft*. To help Australians combat this alarming issue of identity theft, we can now offer you a service called SecureIdentity. A SecureIdentity membership will provide you with:

- A copy of your credit file to assist you in managing your credit history information
- An alert system on your credit file, so that you're notified when a credit provider accesses your credit file. You will receive an electronic alert letting you know who has viewed your credit report, any changes to address information, or if new credit applications have been made under your name. This service helps you take action to prevent financial loss from someone else taking out a loan or credit card in your name.
- In addition, one call to Secure Sentinel, 24hrs/7days and we'll immediately arrange to cancel and assist with the reissue of your lost or stolen credit, debit, fuel, ATM and charge cards. You are also covered against the fraudulent use of your registered cards from the time you register your loss with us, to the time we notify the relevant financial institutions.

For more information on how you can protect yourself against identity theft, visit www.secureidentity.com.au or call 1800 022 043. After all, your identity is your most important asset.

*Veda Advantage Galaxy Survey (April 09)

Australia Post - Post Office Boxes

With 1.7 million post office boxes installed in over 3,500 outlets across the country, Australia Post has the largest post office box network in Australia. Post office boxes can be leased at Australia Post outlets in city, metropolitan, rural and remote areas and are available in a range of sizes to suit private and business customers.

To find out more about post office boxes call in to any Australia Post outlet, visit www.auspost.com.au/postofficeboxes or call 13 13 18.

ENDS

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