

It's happened again. Another client was the victim of fraud. This time someone got the couple's account information, ordered checks, and then wrote a very large check to an unknown person. The bank called my clients when the thief cashed the check at a branch and returned the couple's money. Unfortunately the bank will not pay for the time it takes to transfer automatic payments and the like to their new bank account. If the clients had not used online bill pay, it still would have taken hours to call every company to whom they had recently mailed a check. *What a mess!*

Almost once a month, I'm helping a client with one type of fraud or another. It's going to happen. Fraud is unfortunately the new way the bad guys hold a gun to your head. *So what can you do?*

Here are a few tips to keep your money safe....

1. Think about the people you let into your house. *Don't tempt fate.* If you don't want someone to take it, then put it away. Don't leave your wallet and checkbook out in the open. Lock up any extra checks, bank statements, etc. Put a password on your computer and only share it with your spouse, partner, or power of attorney.
2. Monitor your accounts. My clients were lucky that their bank caught their fraud. You might not be so lucky. The sooner you catch it, the easier it is to fix.
3. If you still write checks, order duplicate style checks. If you have to close your bank account, it's much easier if you can tell the bank which checks might not have cleared.
4. If you use a debit card, keep the receipt until you see that the purchase clears the bank. Same with credit card receipts and deposit tickets. It's not uncommon for bank fraud software to pick up on irregular activity and call you to confirm. It's easier if you can look at your receipts.
5. Never...ever...give info to someone who calls and says he is with your bank or credit card company. *Make their day!* Tell the person that you want to hang up and call back using the 800 number on the back of your card. If the situation is real, it is in their computer and anyone in their customer service call center can help you.
6. And be careful if you give your credit card number to a salesperson who calls you. *I have given mine to someone I call, but rarely to someone who calls me unsolicited.* Ask the person if she is processing your transactions right then. Beware of anyone who writes your account info on a piece of paper or repeats it back to you in a room full of people.

Be smart about this! Don't let someone rob you of your piece of mind.

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