

ISSUE #15 – 1st Quarter 2006

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Computer Threats

Every computer has exposures that need to be managed. Spam, viruses, worms, Trojans, and zombies, to name a few, abound in our electronic world. You need to pay attention to these threats because they are becoming more sophisticated and more targeted in their attempts to steal personal information.

According to a recent report issued by the UK security firm Sophos (www.sophos.com), the number of new Internet threats increased by 48 percent in 2005 with 5,907 new malware threats being identified. Sophos notes that while more malicious code is being written, larger amounts are being devoted to breaking into innocent people's computers for the purposes of stealing and spying.

In general, cyber threats are turning from focusing on disruption to focusing on theft. And while stealing information, cyber attacks are becoming more targeted in order to better manage the theft of information and to better avoid detection. For example, it's easier to target, steal, and manage information stolen from 1,000 computers than it is from 100,000 computers and while the authorities may be investigating and pursuing large data breaches, they are probably not allocating resources to investigate what is on your computer.

A separate study conducted by American Online and the National Cyber Security Alliance determined that 81 percent of survey respondents lacked at least one type of common computer security controls (e.g. virus protection, firewalls, or spyware). With these respondents, 56 percent had no antivirus software or had not updated it within the week of the survey. Forty-four (44) percent did not have a properly configured firewall. Thirty-eight (38) percent indicated they did not have anti-spyware. However, 83 percent of respondents believed they were safe from online computer threats.

In a previous newsletter, we indicated that 91 percent of all computers are infected with some sort of malware, some being more malicious than others. We are most concerned about spyware. Once again, spyware sits secretly on your computer and can log your keystrokes and steal information. In the AOL study, 74 percent of respondents indicated they use their computers for sensitive transactions such as banking, stock trading or reviewing medical information. That's precisely the type of activity Internet thieves are targeting as the information being transmitted can be very valuable.

In order to protect yourself and your computer against electronic threats, it is important to have basic protection in place. This protection includes having virus software that automatically updates itself to defend against the daily threats being newly created. Next, be sure to deploy a firewall to keep threats from entering your computer. Lastly, having anti-spyware tools are needed to uncover and prevent malicious code from residing on your computer. It may seem a daunting task to combat Internet thieves and cyber criminals. Indeed, you may never be fully secure. However, you should take the time to build your defenses. Some software vendors will combine some of the above prevention tools into one software package or you might access them separately. In order to try free software to check for spyware, visit www.spychecker.com, a company that we have no affiliation or interest in other than to facilitate your protection.

At the end of the day, the computer exposures we all face are one more reason to have identity protection. In the event your computer protection efforts fail and you become a victim of identity theft, you can trust Identity Fraud, Inc. is there to help you uncover from simple or complex identity theft issues.

Did you know?

Under the FACT Act, once-per-year, you can get FREE *Personal Information Reports*, separate from, and in addition to, your credit reports.

To access free credit reports, please visit:
www.annualcreditreport.com or call 1-877-322-8228

To access Personal Information Reports from a 'Nationwide Specialty Consumer Reporting Agency', please visit:

Insurance Reports – www.choicetrust.com

Medical Records – www.mib.com

Check Writing – www.chexsystems.com

Please refer to our newsletter article below on Personal Information Reports for more details.

Personal Information Reports

Did you know? Under the FACT Act, you can get FREE *Personal Information Reports*, separate from, and in addition to, your free annual credit reports.

The Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act (FACT Act or FACTA) was signed by President Bush in December 2003, in part to address the growing concerns about identity theft. While also amending and updating the Fair Credit Reporting Act, provisions were made to allow each citizen with established credit to receive one free credit report per year from each main credit reporting agency (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion). In addition to the free credit reports, the FACT Act also addresses consumer information and reports that are compiled by companies similar to the three main credit reporting agencies.

Under the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA), personal consumer information may be used for purposes other than establishing credit. The FCRA allows consumer reports to also be issued for purposes including insurance, employment, check writing, and housing rental history. Such reports are very common and an increasing number of companies specialize in providing these types of reports to third parties that have a legal reason to review the information.

While the three main credit reporting agencies are fairly well known, other businesses that collect, use, and report on personal information are not well known. You may have heard of one company called ChoicePoint. Unfortunately, earlier in 2005, ChoicePoint was the victim of data thieves whereby thousands of records were taken illegally. Suddenly, ChoicePoint became well known. ChoicePoint operates a company called ChoiceTrust (see below) who provides volumes of information to many third parties.

FACTA defines a company that issues non-credit reports as a "nationwide specialty consumer reporting agency". Similar to your credit reports, you can access your Personal Information Reports from these companies because they fall under or are partially regulated by the FCRA and FACTA laws. Certain companies dominate certain industry segments and are mentioned below. Other companies are not mentioned but similarly must provide you access to your personal records (where and if they exist) for free, once-per-year. For example, the Medical Information Bureau records medical and claim information about you, but only 20 percent of people actually have records. But checking to see if you have a record makes sense, and it is free.

To access your free credit reports, please visit or contact the following:

Request via the Internet: www.annualcreditreport.com (Reports provided on-line)	Request via Telephone: 1-877-322-8228 (Reports provided via mail)	Request via Mail: Annual Credit Report Request Service P.O. Box 105281 Atlanta, GA30348-5281 (Form Required)
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To access your Personal Records Information, visit or contact the following main sources:

Medical Records: www.mib.com 1-866-692-6901	Insurance Reports: www.choicetrust.com 1-866-312-8076	Check Writing History: www.chexsystems.com 1-800-428-9623
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A more direct link to ChexSystems is: <https://www.consumerdebit.com/consumerinfo/us/en/freereport.htm>

For all of your personal records, it is important to review them once a year and to review the records for a) accuracy, b) possible fraud, and c) to better manage your personal records (i.e. dispose of credit cards you no longer use).

Also, remember that when accessing "free" reports to verify the company you visit or call. In many cases, there are companies that provide "free" reports but require you to disclose payment details for which you may be billed for services you do or do not wish to have.
