

Tips to Avoid ATM Skimming

We all know how much easier life would be if only everyone would follow the Golden Rule, looking out for the happiness and welfare of others as much as they would like for everyone else to respect and care for them. Sadly, there are more selfish criminals around than ever, even in the nicest neighborhoods, preying on the trust and inattention of innocent people.

One increasing way of abusing one of life's nicest modern conveniences, is "skimming" or stealing ATM card information right at the terminal. A fake slot casing containing a tiny scanner is placed over the slot where you in-



sert your ATM card. Then when you pass your card through it, it captures the information either to the device itself, or it is transmitted to a nearby receiver, perhaps in a parked vehicle nearby. There may even be a small "spy camera"

placed strategically to monitor the keypad when you enter your PIN.

The thief then removes the device after several people have used it, taking the information and the evidence with them.

The best defense? **PAY ATTENTION.**

- Look closely at the card reader on ATMs and gas pumps. Is the card reader loose,

ATM SKIMMING - continued on side 2

How To Get a Free Credit Report

Get a free credit report from major credit reporting agencies

Once a year, you are entitled to a free credit report from the major credit reporting agencies. Three major organizations (TransUnion, Experian, and Equifax) maintain a website where you may go to apply for yours. You may request your free credit report online at <https://www.annualcreditreport.com>, or by phone at 1-877-322-8228.

You can get a report once a year from each one of them. You may want to stagger them to get them at varied times throughout the year.

To get your report(s), click on the

website mentioned above. Then select where it says "Start Here" and "then Request Report." Fill in the information requested for your report. The report is free. However they may sometimes try selling you other services such the credit score, or monthly services.

You will be asked for your Social Security number.

Free credit reports requested online are viewable immediately upon authentication of identity. Free credit reports requested by phone will be processed

FREE CREDIT REPORT - continued on side 2

"Budgeting" is not a Dirty Word

No one is born knowing how to create an effective budget. It must be learned—usually from caring and disciplined parenting, but often by self-education. Children who learn good money management at an early age have a head start at understanding how to budget for necessities such as food and rent and save for long term goals like a new car or a house. Unfortunately, many of us don't come from families where wise budgeting was taught or practiced.

The majority of us must learn how to control our spending so we will have money left over at the end of each pay period to save and invest for what we want. "Left over" money is the basis of all budgets. The reason we plan a budget and live on a budget is to create money that is *not spent*, but saved.

Here are some tips to make your budgeting process smoother -

- In order to identify all of your expenses in the coming year, review your check register, cash receipts and credit card bills in order to jog your memory. You might even want to go back in time a few years. Services you don't have done every year may need to be saved for: tree trimming, foundation repair, wood floor or driveway resurfacing, duct cleaning, exterior or interior repainting, or eyeglass replacement are just a few examples.
- Don't forget little expenses you may pay cash for like flavored coffees, soft drinks, stamps, newspapers, magazines and gum. They all add up! (*Carry a folded index card or a small notebook to record every expenditure for a week or two to get a true idea of where your cash is going.*)

Try a simple, homemade budget work-

BUDGETING - continued on side 2



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with the
construction
loan

ATM SKIMMING - continued from side 1

crooked or damaged? Are there scratches? Does it have sticky tape residue?

- At a location with more than one ATM, if there are “out of order” signs on ATMs this could be a thief’s way of getting you to use his wired-up machine.
- Be very wary of ATMs in tourist areas.
- If possible, use indoor ATMs such as the ones inside convenience stores. ATMs that are inside a store are harder to tamper with (but not impossible, as there have been some notable cases recently of tampering with terminals at checkout counters where clerks often step away to wait on customers elsewhere).



- When you are typing in your PIN, shield the keypad with your other hand to block the view of a skimming camera.
- If you are getting ready to use your debit card at the checkstand or at a convenience store ATM and the next person in line is standing uncomfortably close or looking too interested in what you are doing, don’t hesitate to politely say, “Excuse me, but I’m not comfortable

with you watching my transaction. Would you mind stepping back, please?”

Contact your bank immediately if you try to cancel the transaction and your card doesn’t return, or if it doesn’t come back out after your transaction.

If you are having trouble with the ATM, do not let that “nice” person loitering nearby help you. Use a different ATM and always guard your card.

BUDGETING - cont'd from side 1

sheet. Start with a list of all sources of income: wages, commissions, tips, child support, interest, etc. and figure out your average monthly total. Then categorize all of your expenses from your other list. Examples are: rent, utilities, insurance, food, car, child care, health, clothing, gifts, donations, entertainment, children’s allowances, cleaning and home care.

Once you have entered your income and expenses, if you are like many people your expenses will be too high compared to your income. Start going over each line item to see where you can cut back.

Can you carpool? Live without cable TV (or drop premium channels)? Cut out annual magazine subscriptions and just download interesting articles from

FREE CREDIT REPORT- cont'd from side 1

within 15 days of receiving your request.

After pulling up and printing your report, you should review it for errors. Are there creditors listed with whom you haven’t done business? Credit accounts for which you didn’t apply? Incorrect balances? If you find errors, then contact the issuer to make them aware of any corrections needed.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) cautions consumers to be wary of companies that make claims regarding credit repair. These companies, commonly called credit clinics, don’t do anything for consumers that consumers cannot do for themselves at little or no cost. Beware of any organization that offers to create a new identity and credit file for you. The FTC and state attorneys general have filed actions against those who pursue these fraudulent practices. Here are some warning signs:

- An “advisor” that guarantees to remove late payments, bankruptcies, or similar information from a credit report
- An organization that charges a lot of money to repair credit
- A company that asks the consumer to write to the credit reporting company and repeatedly seek verification of the same credit account information in the file, month after month, even though the information has been determined to be correct
- An organization that is reluctant to give out their address or one that pushes you to make a decision immediately.

the Internet to read instead, or borrow books from the library? Can you take a lunch to work instead of eating out? Could you be happy with a glass of water instead of a soda? Skip the chips, cookies, candy? Go over each line item starting with the biggest expenses first, and see where you can cut back.



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