

Who's Got Your Number?



Credit Card Numbers: When to Keep Them Private and Why

With so much fraud out there, how can I keep my credit card number from being misused?

1. Protect yourself when shopping online.

Use a secure browser (SSL or SET standards). Look for the symbol of an unbroken key or closed padlock. Shop with companies you know and guard personal information. Pay with a credit or charge card; they give you the most protection if fraud occurs. Use a separate card for online shopping to track purchases easily. File complaints online with the FTC at <http://www.ftc.gov>.

2. Never allow a clerk to write your credit card number on your check.

You may show a clerk your credit card, but Iowa law prohibits the clerk from writing it on your check. This prevents anyone from copying and using the number fraudulently. When cashing a check, offer as identification a driver's license that does not carry your Social Security number, or any other form of picture identification that does not carry a Social Security or credit

card number. You can show your driver's license or other form of picture identification, but do not allow a clerk to record your Social Security number or other personal identification numbers. If you find that a store's policy requires a Social Security number, you may choose whether or not to shop there.

3. Never give your credit card number over the phone if you did not initiate the call.

If someone calls telling you that you have won a free prize or vacation, check the company's reputation with your local Better Business Bureau or Consumer Protection Division of the Iowa Attorney General's Office. Legitimate sweepstakes do not require you to pay anything to collect your prize.

4. Check your credit report annually.

You are entitled to receive one free credit report every 12 months from each of the three national consumer credit reporting bureaus — Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion. The reports can be ordered through the web site: www.annualcreditreport.com; by calling 1-877-322-8228; or by

sending a request form (available at the web address) to:

Annual Credit Report
Request Service
P.O. Box 105281
Atlanta, Georgia 30348-5281

Response to phone or mail requests will be mailed within 15 days.

Consumers may choose to order all three reports at the same time to compare information or order one now and others later to keep track of changes throughout the year. If you are denied credit within the last 60 days, the law requires that you be given free access to your credit report from the bureau that supplied the report to the creditor. Contact the creditor if they do not send the information.

Consumers may need additional copies of their credit report after receiving their free reports. To purchase additional copies for a fee, contact the credit reporting bureaus:

Equifax	(800) 685-1111
Experian	(800) 397-3742
Trans Union	(800) 888-4213

Checking for inaccuracies enables you to correct mistakes before you apply for job, credit, or insurance.

5. If you discover an error on your credit report, you are entitled by law to correct any inaccurate information.

Tell the credit bureau, in writing, why you think the information is incorrect; all phone conversations should be followed with a letter. Unless your dispute is frivolous or irrelevant, the credit bureau must reinvestigate the matter and correct inaccurate information. Information that cannot be verified must be deleted. If you disagree with the results of the credit bureau's reinvestigation, you may file a brief dispute statement explaining your side of the story. Your statement will appear in future credit reports.

6. If you suspect credit card fraud, call the card issuer (usually a bank) immediately.

Follow up with a letter giving your card number, the date the card was missing or stolen, and the date you called. If you report the loss before unauthorized use, you are not responsible for any fraudulent charges. However, if a thief uses your cards before you report them missing, the most you will owe for unauthorized charges on each card is \$50, although some companies have waived that liability.

Remember, you need only one or two credit cards, which reduces your total liability if theft occurs.

You should request that a fraud alert be placed in your credit file. Contact one of the following fraud departments:

Equifax (888) 766-0008
Experian (888) 397-3742
Trans Union (800) 680-7289

7. Don't be misled by ads to repair bad credit histories, judgments or bankruptcies.

Promises to "repair" or "clean up" a bad credit history are usually false. Before you pay for their services, which can cost as little as \$50 or more than \$1,000, remember that "credit repair" companies cannot do anything that you cannot do for yourself at little or no cost.

8. If you cannot resolve your credit problems yourself or need more assistance, contact the National Foundation for Credit Counseling or your local Extension office.

CONTACTS

Better Business Bureau
505 5th Avenue, Suite 950
Des Moines, IA 50309
(515) 243-8137
(800) BBB-1600
<http://www.desmoines.bbb.org>

Equifax Credit Information Services
P.O. Box 740241
Atlanta, GA 30374
(800) 685-1111
<http://www.equifax.com>

Experian
949 West Bend Street
Lincoln, NE 68521-3694
(888) 397-3742
<http://www.experian.com>

Extension Office
(Check phone directory for the county office of ISU Extension.)
<http://www.extension.iastate.edu>

Federal Trade Commission
CRC-240
Washington, DC 20580
(877) FTC-HELP (382-4357)
<http://www.ftc.gov>

Iowa Attorney General
Consumer Protection Division
Hoover State Office Bldg. 2nd Floor
1305 E. Walnut
Des Moines, IA 50319
(515) 281-5164
Fax: (515) 281-4209
<http://www.iowaattorneygeneral.org>

National Foundation for Credit Counseling
(800) 388-2227
<http://www.nfcc.org>

Trans Union
P.O. Box 2000
Chester, PA 19022
(800) 888-4213
<http://www.transunion.com>

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