



## EMERGING IDENTITY THEFT MARKET TARGETS TEENS AS NEWEST NICHE

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*Over 10 million people were victims of identity theft last year and young people with no credit records were the number one target.*

The Citibank commercial in which a woman is mouthing a male voice describing the \$20,000 he stole to build a “girl-robot” is more than just a way to promote a product, it’s a warning about a problem that affects many young people.

Identity theft is when a person steals someone else’s personal information, such as credit card, bank account or Social Security numbers, to purchase goods and services.

Young people, 18-29 years of age, are the number one target for identity thieves, according to Quest, a communications company that is working to raise awareness of the issue.

### **Teens vulnerable**

Teenagers and young people are more vulnerable to identity theft than adults because most have not established credit records that can be monitored.

“If you don’t have a credit file, whatever someone first submits under your name becomes the basis of the credit file. Thieves can rack up charges on a clean record and when it’s time for these kids to take out a loan for college, they cannot because of the charges racked up on their record,” explained Jay Foley, co-executive director of the nonprofit organization, the Identity Theft Resource Center.

Teens also are more susceptible to identity theft because they are less likely to check their credit card records and may not even be aware of their credit record and its importance. Most teens have little or no knowledge of financial transactions and credit reports.

“All students are required to take American government in high school, but there is no mandatory class on finance or managing credit,” Foley said.

Most teens discover they have fallen victim to identity theft when they apply for a driver’s license and are denied because one has already been issued under their Social Security number,

“It’s scary how easy it is for someone to acquire your Social Security information and pass it off as his/her own,” said Emily Morin, who just graduated from high school and is headed to college in the fall.

“None of my friends take it seriously. My friends are careless with their belongings. They’ll leave their purses around without thinking about what might happen.”

### **Online identity theft**

While most identity theft occurs “offline,” the emerging market for thieves who are in the “business” of stealing identities is the Internet.

Using a couple lines of software code, thieves can acquire bulk amounts of information. The stolen information is then sold in small amounts to other thieves who use the stolen account information to purchase goods or obtain money.

The thieves use the stolen information for a short period of time or until the fraudulent activity is detected.

### **Repairing the damage**

Victims of identity theft must spend a lot of time and money repairing their credit records.

According to the Identity Theft Resource Center, victims can spend on average 600 hours over years repairing damage done by identity theft. In some cases, it can take victims up to 10 years to clear their records.

Some identity theft victims grapple with penalties such as increased insurance or credit card fees, inability to find a job, or higher interest rates for loans.

“I’ve seen devastating effects,” said Foley. “I’m currently working with a young man now who had his identity stolen at age 14. He is now 22 years old and is \$300,000 in debt to the IRS.”

Although credit card companies are spending millions of dollars to try to prevent identity theft, it still happens every day. And most teens are unprepared.

“[Identity theft] is one of those things I think probably could never happen to me,” said 18-year-old Court Eccles. “I’m aware of it and cautious about it; but I’m not concerned it will happen to me.”

*--Compiled by Jennifer Schonberger for NewsHour Extra*

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