

Has your identity been stolen? A recent study has shown:-

A fifth of Australians have fallen victim to identity related crime as criminals use low-tech means like snatching mail to commit the fraud, a report has found.

More than 1.5 million Australians had credit cards illegally copied in the past year, and 1.2 million had bank accounts illegally accessed, the Veda Advantage Identity Crimes Report, conducted by Galaxy Research, shows.

The report also found that almost 1.2 million, or seven per cent, of respondents had had personal mail stolen.

Veda head of marketing and communications Kelvin Kirk said mail theft is one of the easiest ways to get details of someone's identity.

"It's one of the easier ways to gain through crime. It's easier than going to rob a bank," he said.

"If you've ever moved into a new house the amount of mail you receive is incredible.

"A lot of identity checks relate to having to bring in a bill or to bring in some paper work to shows your name and address and details.

"Your bank statements, your utility statements, are actually used to identify a person."

The report found that five per cent of respondents had had their identity stolen, while nine per cent, or 1.55 million, had been victims of credit card "skimming" or theft.

The survey of 16,817 people ages over 16 also found that 22 per cent of white collar workers were victims of bank account and credit crime, while aged 24 per cent of 25 to 49 year olds were likely to be victims of bank and credit fraud.

Mr Kirk said the findings built on a Veda report released in April that found 70 per cent of respondents were not taking simple measures - like locking their mail box - to prevent identification theft.

"I think (the 25 to 49 age group) are more casual. I think it's some 'it won't happen to me' thinking," Mr Kirk said.

"But if they ask their family and friends, they'll find out that family and friends have had their identity stolen. It's massive."

"It's a simple thing like redirecting your mail if you move house, or locking your mail box, or let alone (considering) the amount you throw out in the rubbish."

The most recent report also found that almost one quarter of South Australian's had either been victims of identity theft through illegal access to their bank accounts, stolen PIN numbers, or had mail stolen.

This was followed by Queensland (22 per cent), New South Wales (20 per cent), Victoria and Tasmania (18 per cent) and Western Australia (17 per cent).

Meanwhile, criminals have tried to capitalise on the recent Samoan Tsunami and set up websites that can install identity stealing software on computers, a cyber security firm said.

Symantec Australia said that cybercriminals are poisoning web searches so that their fake websites are listed at the top of the page.

The websites, which offer to scan your computer for viruses, instead download 'malware' that can be used to collect your bank or credit card details.

"These types of attack are becoming increasingly prevalent online," Symantec security response manager Hon Lau said in a statement.

"The people behind these scams are constantly evolving and adapting their attacks to suit current news events.

"Unfortunately there is no event, no matter how heartbreaking, which a hacker will not try to profit from."

Don't be a victim of identity theft. Don't dispose of personal documents in household rubbish. Make sure your home mail is secure or obtain a Post Office Box. If you move residence, make sure you set up a long term mail redirection and be vigilant about changing your mailing address for all banking and financial matters. Be on the lookout for suspicious activity in your street around rubbish bins and home mail boxes and report immediately to the local post office or police services.

Derek Miles
Principal