

After the holiday season winds down and the New Year begins it is not unusual for most of us to make some New Year's resolutions. This year I thought it best to remind all of our clients, but especially the Boomers, about online fraud and security.

The Financial Consumer Agency of Canada has brought out some simple tips that can help protect you from fraud. Below I will highlight a few of the best tips but for a complete list I would suggest checking out <http://www.fcac-acfc.gc.ca> to find information on a wide range of topics.

Tips:

While it is great to use the "free" or public wireless internet at home and abroad be careful as these sites are also unsecured and we should all limit our exposure to them. The best way to protect yourself is to use secure internet access which shows a lock symbol in the browser window and the site's address begins with "https".

Be careful when using social networking sites (a great way to connect with family and friends) but sharing too much information can lead to problems. Be sure to use the enhanced privacy settings and only allow approved people to access your profile. It is perfectly acceptable to not accept a friend request from someone you don't know. Further you should limit posting your home address, telephone number, children's names, names of schools or specific details about when you will be out of town. If you post your Birthday, do not post your year of birth. Please, please, please ensure that you use different passwords for different applications like social networking sites, email, online banking and please change these passwords often.

If you do become a victim of fraud or identity theft be sure to contact the police, us and other financial institutions you are dealing with so the proper authorities including Canada's two credit rating agencies, TransUnion and Equifax are notified.

Finally when dealing with charities be careful to confirm the registration number of the charity. Ensure you will receive a receipt. Confirm how much of your donation goes directly to helping others versus going towards administration or fundraising costs.

What do I mean by confirmation of the charity? Be sure you are dealing with the charity you wish to deal with. There are many copycat charities (similar names to well-known charities that have been established to fool you). Be careful about giving out personal information. Don't feel pressured to give out your credit card number, your social insurance number or bank account information....this information is not needed for you to make a donation. Be sure that you don't send cash in the mail and be sure to make cheques payable to an organization not an individual. If you suspect fraud you can call Phonebusters, the Canadian Anti-Fraud call centre at 1-888-495-8501. If you are unsure about a charity you can check with Canada Revenue Agency at <http://www.cra.gc.ca/donors> for more information about charitable organizations that are recognized in Canada.

We are living in an increasingly digital world. Smart phones, I- pads, laptops, banking and investment applications are growing in use. Our technology allows us more access to everything but with that access comes the need for more security and awareness on protecting ourselves in the digital world. I hope these tips help you learn about the need to be responsible users of technology and ensure you don't make it easy for your identity to be compromised.