

Preventing Business Identity Theft

Nebraska businesses should take necessary precautions to protect themselves against the threat of business identity theft, Nebraska Secretary of State John Gale says.

Criminals look for ways to steal the identity of a legitimate business by gaining access to its bank accounts, credit cards and other sensitive company information, Gale said. Thieves then secure lines of credit with banks and retailers at the expense of the victim.

Take the following steps to protect your business from business identity theft:

--Periodically check your business information on the Nebraska secretary of state's website at www.sos.ne.gov.

--Monitor credit reports and sign up for a credit monitoring service.

--Monitor business accounts, bills and credit card statements and reconcile your statements on a regular basis.

--Do not provide your employer identification number (EIN), account numbers and other confidential information unless you have initiated the contact and have confirmed the identity of the requesting business or person.

--Store only those documents you must keep and keep them in a safe and secure location. Shred old or unnecessary documents that contain your business information.

--Ensure that your computers are secure and train employees to avoid phishing scams and emails that may contain malicious viruses.

If you believe your business is a victim of business identity theft, you should immediately take the following steps:

--Notify local and/or state law enforcement officials.

--Contact banks, credit-card providers and other creditors to notify them of the fraud.

--Report the crime to credit reporting agencies (e.g. Dun & Bradstreet, Equifax, Experian, TransUnion) and view your business credit report. The credit bureaus can put a "fraud alert" on your file that will tell creditors to contact you before opening accounts in your name.

--Request copies of documentation used to fraudulently open or access accounts.

"Business identity theft is a growing national problem," Gale said. "I want to educate business owners about the problem and provide guidelines to prevent it."