



Tips to prevent credit card fraud

Last week we discussed the origins of credit cards, their development and future. This week we will discuss a very important aspect of owning a credit card- preventing you from becoming a victim of credit card fraud. Credit cards are quickly becoming the preferred means of payment for transacting business so it is becoming almost impossible to fathom one surviving without owning one card. Furthermore, some businesses like hotels and car rental companies require you have a credit card on file with them as security.

All the risks associated with credit card ownership can be alleviated if we handle our cards with a certain level of precaution and responsibility. Credit card fraud has become a very lucrative business and fraudsters are coming up with all kinds of schemes to get your money. The two common ways of doing this are through “Phishing” sites and hacking the data bases of commonly used sites.

Recently we have seen an increase in the number of ‘phishing’ sites. These sites are created to mimic real websites and request information from you. For example your date of birth, bank account information and credit card numbers. Usually one would receive an email telling them that they need to update some information on their account and a link would be provided. This link would take you directly to a site that appears similar to your online banking site. This is however, a front as the link is simply a cover for a data base created by hackers to collect your information.

To ensure that you do not become a victim of ‘phishing’ never divulge any personal or banking information via email. If you receive an email telling you that you need to update your card or banking information call your bank first before taking any action. The hackers have gotten so proficient that they even provide numbers to call and use logos and branding similar to the actual company. When contacting your financial institution do not use the numbers that they include in the email.

Luckily, we are a small society so it is easy to get the correct contact details for all the local financial institutions.

Another way to avoid falling victim to fraudsters is to review your statements monthly. This may seem obvious but a number of people receive the statement and never bother to review the transactions. They may check what the minimum payment is but that is it, and especially in a case where you are a heavy user of the card it is easy to hide transactions among your legitimate ones. Also it is important that you keep your statements in a safe place or dispose of them properly. In the more developed countries potential hackers go

through the garbage to look for old statements which they can then use to access your information.

When shopping it is common for the store employee to take your card and sometimes go to the back or somewhere out of sight. Part of protecting your card is ensuring that it is always in your sight. Keep an eye on the individuals handling your card and ensure that when swiping the card the transaction is not processed twice. You should also make certain that your card information is not there for all to see.

It is important that on receiving a credit card that one signs that card immediately. Anyone getting a card without a signature can sign that card and in some situations can go ahead and purchase items with it. In addition we would like you to observe the following:

1. Be aware of your surroundings when using your card
2. Treat your card like cash and guard it accordingly
3. Save your receipts
4. If you suspect an ATM Machine has been tampered with do not use it.
5. Keep you PIN Secret
6. avoid processing transactions at internet cafes

Although the list of things to remember may seem exhaustive some of it is simply common sense. Be mindful of the fact that your card is a gate way to your finances. If someone walks up to you and asks for your bank account information you would not give it to them so think of your credit card along the same lines. As with everything else credit cards if used carelessly can cause problems; but you card is an asset, it can provide convenience, quick access to funds and a plethora of benefits. Vigilance should be on two fronts, first at the point of purchase and then in reviewing your monthly statements, so be smart and use your card wisely. If you have any questions please call our Card Services Department at Bank of Saint Lucia Limited at 456-6000 or visit us at www.bankofsaintlucia.com