

The Holiday Shopping Season Is Open Season for Identity Thieves

(BOSTON, Mass. – Dec. 6, 2005 - IDTheftSecurity.com) Surveys last month predicted that online shopping would enjoy a jump in popularity this holiday season, now well underway. Research, reported early this week, indicated that the increase over last year's numbers could be significant. The news of this data underscores a need for consumer vigilance, according to a security industry expert; identity thieves certainly are scrambling for the possible bonanza awaiting them.

“Whenever a consumer reveals her credit card or banking account number during a shopping transaction,” said Robert Siciliano, president of IDTheftSecurity.com, “she leaves herself vulnerable to identity thieves. It is critical for consumers to shop wisely by treating their personal information as they would anything else they consider valuable.” Author of "The Safety Minute: 01" and an upcoming book, "Identity Theft Pandemic: Curing the Identity Theft Virus," Siciliano presents identity theft workshops to Fortune 500 companies nationwide.

The Dallas Morning News and others have reported research from comScore Networks, a “global information provider and consultancy.” The findings show that sales online this holiday shopping season will see a 24 percent increase over last year's numbers. Although the online medium remains a niche for holiday sales, the percentage rise translates to more than \$15 billion.

A survey by Harris Interactive (commissioned by Sun Microsystems), as reported by *PC World* on Nov. 29, forecast similar jumps in online shopping for the 2005 holiday season. Of the 2000 survey respondents, 67 percent said they would cease shopping at an online retailer if they were to learn their personal data had been compromised. A survey from Forrester Research, also cited in the *PC World* article, produced comparable findings.

“When research suggests that consumers are wising up to identity theft, it is good news, especially during the holiday season,” said Siciliano. “But other news suggests that companies are still not doing enough to safeguard the identities of those who shop online. Companies need to catch up, or those selling in an important market niche, the Web, will go out of business.”

On Nov. 26, *The Wall Street Journal* looked at Congressional effort to combat identity theft. The report suggested that elected officials are fighting resistance from various industries, and in-fighting within certain industries is slowing progress. For instance, according to the article, small banks are fighting large banks over reissuing costs associated with credit card and debit card replacement—often one of the first activities to follow identity theft once a victim finds out about the crime.

“If industry wants to have petty arguments and play chicken with consumers' personal financial information even as elected officials try to fix the situation,” said Siciliano, “then companies that mishandle this sensitive data deserve to go out of business.”

“Industry has been negligent for quite some time,” Siciliano concluded. “And yet their marketers simultaneously -- and heavily -- promote the notion of shopping online for the holiday season. The threat they have all created, to the economy and national security, is severe.”

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Robert Siciliano has been widely quoted and televised since high-profile data breaches highlighted the problem of identity theft earlier this year. He provides consumer education solutions to Fortune 500 companies and their clients and leads personal safety and security seminars nationwide. Siciliano has been featured on CNN, MSNBC, Fox News, “The Suze Orman Show,” “ABC News with Sam Donaldson,” “The Montel Williams Show,” “Maury Povich,” “Sally Jesse Raphael,” and “The Howard Stern Show.”

The media may reach Siciliano at 1 (888) SICILIANO (742-4542). Visit his Web site, www.IDTheftSecurity.com, or his blog, www.IDTheftSecurity.blogspot.com. Siciliano’s full contact information follows:

Robert Siciliano
Personal Security Expert
PHONE: 888-SICILIANO (742-4542)
FAX: 877-2-FAX-NOW (232-9669)
E-MAIL: Robert@IDTheftSecurity.com
<http://www.idtheftsecurity.com/>

The media are encouraged to get in touch with Siciliano directly. They may also contact:

Brent W. Skinner, President
STETrevisions
PHONE: 617-875-4859
FAX: 866-663-6557
E-MAIL: BrentSkinner@STETrevisions.com