

How to Protect Your Personal Information



In this age of electronic information storage and powerful computers, your personal information can be collected, shared and matched with a click of a button. However, maintaining as much control as possible over your personal information can go a long way toward protecting your privacy. Below are some practical tips on how you can protect your personal information yourself:

General

- Give out as little personal information as possible. If you are being asked for your birthdate, email address, or other details, ask why. Don't provide it if you don't have to.
- Think carefully before posting information about yourself online to avoid regrets later.
- Know how your personal information will be used. Ask questions and read privacy policies.
- Ensure your computer has the newest version of your Internet browser; install up-to-date software and virus protection; and make sure your wireless network is secure.
- Secure mobile devices with hard-to-guess passwords and avoid storing sensitive information on them.
- Put sensitive paper documents in a shredder – not the recycling bin.
- Many retail stores ask for your name, address and telephone number when you make a purchase. If the store cannot give you a satisfactory reason for collecting the information, don't give it out.
- Information collected on product warranty cards is very often used for marketing purposes. You are not required to send in a filled warranty card - your receipt is all you need to make a warranty claim.
- Charities and other fund-raising organizations often share donor lists with one another. If you make a donation and do not want your personal information to be given to any other charities, enclose a note with your payment.
- If you don't want your personal information out there, avoid filling out ballots for "free draws" or other promotions. These are surefire ways to get your name, address and telephone number on a junk mail or telemarketing list.
- Many stores offer "rewards" or "points" programs. Often stores see your participation as consent to share your information without directly asking for your permission.
- Look through a copy of any magazines to which you subscribe. Most mention they may give your name and address to other companies for one reason or another. They also offer you the opportunity to opt out of this "service". Do it!
- Every time you make a call, dial *67 on your telephone (1167 on old rotary dial phones) to prevent your name and number from being displayed.

Mobile Devices

- Educate yourself about your mobile devices and how to enable or add privacy and security tools.
- Limit the personal information that is stored on mobile devices to that which is absolutely necessary.
- Ensure that mobile devices are protected with hard-to-guess passwords. Never rely on factory setting passwords.
- Use an automatic lock feature so that a password is required to access information on mobile devices.
- Consider using an up-to-date encryption technology to provide added protection for personal information on mobile devices. Without encryption, personal information is vulnerable to unauthorized access.
- Install and run anti-virus; anti-spyware and firewall programs on your mobile device – and keep those programs up-to-date.
- Don't send personal data over public wireless networks – at cafés, for example – unless you have added security such as a Virtual Private Network (VPN). Public wireless networks may or may not be secure and there is a risk that others may be able to capture data sent over these networks.
- Never leave your mobile device unattended in a public place or a vehicle.
- Ensure that data stored on mobile devices that are no longer needed is purged prior to disposal.

Faxing

- Fax only personal information that must be transmitted immediately. Send other urgent information by hand.
- Always confirm that the receiver has taken appropriate precautions to prevent anyone else from seeing the faxed documents.
- Before sending a fax, check that the receiver's number is correct, then verify in the machine's display window that you have keyed it in correctly.
- If you must send personal information, always complete the fax cover sheet, clearly identifying both sender and intended receiver. The cover sheet should include a warning that the information is intended for the named recipient only, as well as a request to contact you if the transmission was misdirected.
- Call the recipient to verify that he or she received the complete transmission.
- Fax only the personal information which you would feel comfortable discussing over the telephone.
- If your fax machine is equipped, use the feature requiring the receiver to enter a password before the machine will print the fax. This ensures that only the intended receiver can retrieve the document. Similarly, ask the sender to make sure that you must supply a password to retrieve the document.