

Huge increase in cases of identity theft through social media

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A service dedicated to preventing fraud, Cifas, reports that there has been a sharp increase in the use of social media to commit identity fraud. LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter are a veritable mine of personal information, particularly in cases where privacy settings are not scrupulously guarded and kept updated, and the number of cases of identity theft increased from 94,500 in 2014 to over 148,000 in 2015 according to the Cifas report.

The effects of identity fraud are wide-reaching: perhaps best understood is the impact that identity theft has upon a person's credit score. An employer, lender or landlord will routinely check the credit score of any applicant seeking a job, credit or tenancy respectively, and if that applicant has been the unknowing victim of fraud then they may find that they are rejected for having a poor credit score. This is because fraudsters use the information they steal from social media sites to illegally gain access to credit in the name of their victim. When that credit is not repaid, the victim's credit score is greatly affected and it becomes very difficult for that person to gain future credit without dealing with the need to prove that fraud has taken place.

A less well-known effect of identity theft is that which impacts on the victim's 'social report'. A social report contains a score based on that person's use of social media – certain phrases, contacts and even photographs can add to the overall analysis of their personality type, lifestyle and trustworthiness. Lenders, employers and landlords are increasingly checking social reports to verify identity and determine the honesty and reliability of a person who is seeking credit, a job or a tenancy for example. A fraudster who can access a person's social media profiles can do considerable damage to their social score.

If someone has been the victim of an identity theft or fraud, it is important that they not only check their credit report and take steps to repair any damage wrought, but also check their social report and score to check for erroneous entries or incorrect data. This may require the use of specialist tools to correct problematic entries and these can be accessed through [Credit Angel](#), when accessing one's own social score and report.

A company spokesman for Credit Angel, says that "Social media data can act as an incredibly powerful and accurate means of assessing a person's lifestyle, attitude to lending, use of alcohol or drugs and many other factors that make up their day-to-day life. This can be checked alongside that person's traditional credit score by a range of people including potential employers. Having a fraudster create havoc on one's Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn accounts can create a misleading impression that can ultimately affect whether the victim of the fraud is granted credit, a tenancy or a job, for instance. It is vital that if fraud is suspected, the victim check their Social Report and Score as well as their credit report and take steps to remedy any issues before they cause lasting damage."

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