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with Kelly Keehn

coin

Keeping credit safe

Over the last year, I've conducted an informal experiment with my boyfriend and our credit cards.

When shopping for groceries, paying at restaurants and all general spending, I had him use my credit card. To my shock, the hundreds, if not thousands of purchases, made with my card, he was only questioned a handful of times.

OK, I thought. Kelley is a unisex name even though the extra "e" implies a female version. One card we experimented with even had the suffix "Miss" before my name. That didn't fare much better.

So with my boyfriend's permission, I then shopped around for months with his card. With a name like Wyatt, his name is unmistakably male. The result? Still, only a few cautious cashiers questioned the name on the card.

I'm also a typical Gen-X'er. I've been purchasing products and services on the Internet for years. As a result, I've had my credit card stolen on the Internet a number of times. Amounts ranging from the hard-to-notice \$9 phone card charge to a whopping US\$1,200 charge, VISA was at my side all the way. Other than the slight inconvenience of filling out an affidavit confirming that I didn't purchase said items, VISA returned all amounts.

So how does one protect themselves from credit fraud and potential abuse? The following tips should serve as a guideline:

- Watch your credit card statements carefully. Each month, check for items that shouldn't be there.
- Shred, shred, shred! Ensure you never throw away your credit card statements or receipts. Most of the latter now "x" out your number, but there are still a few cash registers around town that print your card number and expiry date on the receipt, which if thrown away, could be a thief's pot of gold.
- Never respond to phone or e-mail inducements to update your banking or credit card information. Whether a bank, web hosting company or others, these businesses will generally contact you via mail if they require information. Contact the company in question directly.
- Sign all of your cards as soon as they arrive and never keep your PIN in your wallet in case it's stolen. Many consumers are choosing, instead of signing their name at the back of the card to write, "see ID." Although, with my informal experiment, I'm not sure how often the back is even checked by most businesses before handing you back your card.
- Keep an eye on your card. If you don't trust the staff, consider paying with cash.
- Check your credit report often. You might be surprised what's on it: A collection agency you were never sent to, a hit on your record from a company you never sought credit from or perhaps more. You can receive your credit report for free by writing to either credit agencies or for a fee, you can purchase an instant and even detailed report online. Visit Equifax Canada at www.equifax.ca or TransUnion Canada at www.tuc.ca

When in doubt about a company, contact the Better Business Bureau or your credit card company directly.

Kelley Keehn is a financial expert, speaker, elder planning counsellor and author of four books, including [The Woman's Guide to Money](#) and [The Prosperity Factor for Kids](#). Her mission in life is "to make you feel good about money."

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