

Ninety- seven percent of employees doubt businesses' ability to protect their customers from identity fraud

National Identity Fraud Prevention Week launches; partners publish unique advice guide for UK businesses at risk of financial loss and reputational damages

LONDON, 12 October 2009 – National Identity Fraud Prevention Week, the major annual awareness drive, begins today – and this year, campaign partners from across the public-private sector divide have come together to warn Britain's businesses of the risk identity fraud poses to them, their employees, their customers and their suppliers.

Two sets of independent research commissioned by Fellowes and the National Fraud Authority exclusively for National Identity Fraud Prevention Week (NIDFPW) show that one third of small and medium-sized businesses have been impacted by fraud – and that British consumers are experiencing a corresponding crisis in confidence, with only 3% feeling completely confident the organisations they deal with handle their personal data responsibly. The NIDFPW partners have therefore come together to publish a 28-page guide for businesses to launch a dedicated online resource centre, outlining the risks and offering tips on how to keep corporate data safe, and advice on how to overcome a breach should one occur. This invaluable resource will be available free of charge from today from the campaign's website, www.stop-idfraud.co.uk or by calling 00800 1810 1810*.

The NIDFPW partners work throughout the year to understand identity fraud trends and their impact upon our society and economy. The past twelve months' efforts have highlighted not only lack of understanding of the risks identity fraudsters pose amongst the business community – but also the shocking non-existence of relevant and resourceful information for those businesses trying to practise vigilance.

Independent research commissioned by Fellowes for this year's campaign shows that:

- Shockingly, only 64% of businesses have put in place a clear policy on how to handle documents with sensitive information – which no doubt goes some way to explaining why nearly one-third (32%) of employees admit to always throwing sensitive documents directly into the bin!
- The 97% of employees are therefore justified in their beliefs that their company does not completely protect customers' identities; furthermore, 64% of employees believe that bins are a bigger risk to customer details than computer systems or document theft
- Overall, 71% of UK employees think their companies should do more to ensure confidential documents are handled responsibly - and the UK is not alone. 66% of German, 70% of Belgian, 61% of Dutch and 85% of Irish employees agree that more should be done.

According to the NFA, when it comes to looking at the impact of fraud, 62% of businesses fear consequential financial loss, while 43% worry about the effect fraud could have on their reputation.

Government figures show that this fear of financial loss is a legitimate concern: identity fraud costs the UK economy over £1.2 billion annually – but a breach can have even more lasting consequences to a business' reputation, which companies can ill afford in hyper-competitive recession conditions. Clearly, businesses have a significant role to play in helping to protect themselves, their employees and their customers from identity fraud.

Identity fraud is not an issue that only affects people at work. The latest figures from CIFAS, the UK's Fraud Prevention Service, show that nearly 60,000 of us have fallen victim so far this year - a 36% increase when compared with the first nine months of 2008! The figures speak for themselves –the threat of identity fraud is real and current - yet people continue to ignore the advice that could keep their identity, their finances and their reputation safe:

- 44% of Britons STILL DON'T shred documents containing sensitive information before placing them in the bin

- Only 54% of us routinely check our financial statements – and just 45% of us follow-up missing post
- 69% report lost or stolen documents – a comparatively good statistic, it could be argued. But it's not good enough

National Identity Fraud Prevention Week aims to encourage businesses and consumers to take action now, ensuring that ID fraud prevention is practiced with vigilance at home and in the work place. Until this is done, instances of identity fraud are set to continue to increase, leaving more victims in its path.

This year's campaign is supported by the Association of Chief Police Officers, Metropolitan Police, Fellowes, the National Fraud Authority, the Federation of Small Businesses, Equifax, CIFAS - The UK's Fraud Prevention Service, Callcredit, Experian, the Home Office's Identity and Passport Service, the British Chambers of Commerce, the British Retail Consortium and the Royal Mail.

A series of quotes from partner organisations can be found in the notes to the editor, below.

Fellowes research was conducted by Dynamic Markets between 30 June and 6 July 2009, and includes a sample size of 3000 participants across Europe (1000 in the UK). The National Fraud Authority's research was conducted by YouGov from 15 to 17 September, and included a sample size of 531.

*International freephone

Notes to editors:

For more information, or to request an interview, please contact the National Identity Fraud Prevention Week press office:

Andrea Sommer
Andrea.Sommer@fleishmaneuropa.com
 020 7395 7016

Zuzana Borovska
Zuzana.borovska@fleishmaneuropa.com
 020 7395 7142

High resolution images are available for the media to view and download free of charge from www.stop-idfraud.co.uk

Top tips for businesses to beat identity fraudsters:

1. Develop an anti-fraud policy, clearly communicate it to all employees and check regularly to ensure it is being followed
2. Securely destroy all documents containing confidential or sensitive business information before disposing of them using a cross-cut or microshred shredder
3. Store confidential or sensitive information in a secure place and limit access

Additional tips can be found in the "Mind Your Own Business" guide or by visiting www.stop-idfraud.co.uk

Tyron Hill, official National Identity Fraud Prevention Week spokesperson, Fellowes, comments: "Businesses need to do more to inform their employees and reassure their customers that they are handling data responsibly. For example, it is shocking that nearly two in five employees still do not have access to shredders at work with which to destroy sensitive information. Today's customers are more vigilant and informed when making decisions – businesses that are seen to do more to protect data are at a competitive advantage over those that aren't, which can directly affect a business' bottom line, especially during the recession. With the right resources, businesses and consumers can work together to ensure identities stay protected. Visit www.stop-idfraud.co.uk now to find out what you can do to prevent identity fraud."

Tony Marsh, General Manager, Royal Mail Security: "Preventing ID fraud is mainly about good housekeeping. Don't discard documents, such as credit card receipts or utility bills without completely destroying them, they tell too much about you. Make sure that your mail delivery point is secure and can't be "picked" after delivery, and if you're going away, get someone to collect or move your mail for you or use Royal Mail's Keepsafe. If you're moving house put an official redirection in place, don't rely on people you don't know and may never have met to forward your mail, and if you live in premises with multiple addresses behind one front door consider fitting a robust locked external mail box. Don't get paranoid but make sure that your mail isn't insecure, that's when it gets targeted."

Catherine Bowen, Head of Crime Policy, British Retail Consortium: "The BRC is pleased to support the National Identity Fraud Prevention week. Over thirty million UK adults now buy online regularly. Retailers invest heavily to boost existing security measures but fraud is rising as the numbers shopping online increase. Identity Theft is the fastest growing fraud in the UK and has an impact on individuals, businesses and the economy. Everyone has a part to play in beating it."

Peter Hurst, CEO, CIFAS: "Although the effects of identity fraud on individuals are well-documented, less publicity has traditionally been given to advice for businesses about data security and the problems that businesses themselves can encounter if their corporate identity is stolen. The effects on businesses of a data breach, or of corporate identity fraud, can be financially damaging, operationally disruptive and a reputational disaster. The guide issued during National Identity Fraud Prevention Week provides valuable and practical advice on how to avoid these very difficult problems."

Neil Munroe, External Affairs Director, Equifax: "We think there is a real concern that the proprietors of small and medium sized businesses may be so focused on day to day survival in the current recession that they could miss other threats to their future, including the risk of identity fraud" said Neil Munroe, External Affairs Director, Equifax. "This year's National Identity Fraud Prevention Week is raising awareness of the all-important care of customer data to avoid an organisation allowing its customers' details to fall into the hands of fraudsters. Businesses of all sizes also need to be aware of the threat of fraudsters stealing their own identity for financial gain - it's not that hard to do but could see the downfall of organisations already under severe financial pressure."

Dr Bernard Herdan, CEO, National Fraud Authority: "Identity (ID) crime and related fraud has a devastating impact on individuals, businesses and the UK economy. In addition to this, the theft of an identity can also underpin a range of other serious crimes. It can be used to conceal criminal identities so organised gangs avoid detection. It can facilitate terrorism, human trafficking and the illegal drugs trade. By protecting your own identity you not only avoid becoming a victim of ID fraud but also help stop the wider crime it enables."

Mike Cherry, Home Affairs Chairman, Federation of Small Businesses: Our research shows that fraud costs each business around £800 a year. It's all the more important during the current economic climate that businesses are vigilant and aware of the variety of different ways in which their corporate identity can be used and abused. Businesses should access the campaign guide for businesses, think about prevention and put in place sound policies to manage sensitive information and data on clients, customers and staff'.

Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP, Home Secretary: "I welcome this opportunity to support National Identity Fraud Prevention Week 2009. It is vital that everyone takes appropriate steps to reduce the opportunities for criminals to use other people's identity to commit fraud. Identity fraud is a matter for all organisations, including businesses, and I am pleased that this year's campaign is targeting that sector. Together we can help to reduce identity fraud and the impact it has on victims."

Peter Lowton, ACPO Lead on Identity Crime and Assistant Chief Constable of Essex Police, said: Many policing operations show that identity crime is often used to resource serious and organised crime including

terrorism. By working with other agencies, the business community, and the public, we can reduce identity crime. The public need to protect themselves from falling victim to identity crime by taking simple steps such as keeping personal information secure. Not only should people ensure they destroy paper documents if they contain personal information but be aware of the vulnerabilities of ID theft in the virtual world. Criminals will go to great lengths to steal personal details. I urge people to ensure they have appropriate security measures on their computers at work and at home. The police service is committed to increasing the awareness of identity crime, preventing criminals from committing identity crime, and to enforce the law to ensure those responsible for such crimes are held to account. If anyone does find themselves a victim of this crime which results in a damaged credit record they should contact the Victim of Fraud Service, via any one of the three credit references agencies. This service will endeavour to restore their valuable credit record as soon as possible.”

Darryl Bowman, Director of CreditExpert, Experian comments: “We are still not doing enough to protect against identity fraud, while fraudsters continue to get more sophisticated. Protection is about being proactive and doing a few simple checks - such as monitoring personal and business credit reports, shredding all personal information before throwing it away and reading bank statements carefully. Take steps to find out about identity fraud and share what you learn with friends and colleagues - we can’t let ID fraudsters continue to use and abuse our personal or business-related private information.”

David Frost, British Chamber of Commerce, says: “Identity fraud is one of the fastest growing crimes that affect business today and it continues to grow. Costing business over £1 billion annually it is important that both Government and Business take action now. The British Chambers of Commerce has signed up to has signed up to National ID Fraud Week to push awareness of the dangers of fraud to businesses while offering simple solutions that can help avoid companies falling victim to fraud.”

Owen Frost, Head of Callcredit Check, Call Credit, says: “Identity fraud continues to be a constant threat to UK consumers with a very real risk that as economic times get harder fraud will increase sharply. It is up to all of us, individuals and organisations, to zealously protect personal data and minimise the risk of it falling into the wrong hands. If you do fall victim to ID fraud it is important to have an action plan for dealing with the problem as it can quickly spiral out of control; checking your credit report will allow you to see accounts open in your name and take action quickly to deal with any fraudulent ones.”

Detective Chief Superintendent Nigel Mawer, Head of the Met Police Economic and Specialist Crime Command, said: "The issue of Identity theft is not a something that will go away. With increasing developments in technology and constant increase in computer usage it is crucial that we continue to raise public awareness. By taking simple measures the public can protect their identity and ultimately avoid becoming a victim. This is not a victimless crime and can cause great personal distress. The Metropolitan Police Service continue to be committed to tackling those criminal networks who commit identity fraud through both physical and on-line theft. By working together and giving simple prevention advice we can stop these criminals benefiting and committing this crime."