

# *How To Avoid Getting Hacked, Jacked, or Whacked: A Brief Guide to Personal Financial Security*

“Show and Tell” has always been a favorite activity for kids of kindergarten age. A lot of adults like to play too—and some of them have some pretty cool stuff to show off. Others are content to tell the world about how much money they’ve made. Some of the richest will gladly offer details to magazines like *Forbes* so they can be published in one of their lists. In Mexico, this practice is less popular, since it can easily lead to getting an ear chopped off by a band of kidnapers.

The bad guys in the US have traditionally been a bit nicer, but they still make good use of the free information offered to them by their targets. When the famous bank robber Willie Sutton was asked why he chose to rob banks, he famously responded, “because that’s where the money is.” Though such criminals are clearly lacking in certain elements of common sense because of the lifestyle they have chosen, they are by no means completely impaired. They can still spot the obvious.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that one of the best ways to deter criminals is not to dangle valuables in front of them. Even taking this first simple step will significantly improve your chances of not becoming a victim. If you really must have the big house, fancy cars, and fine jewelry, you’d better take some precautions and live in a guarded, gated community and avoid any excursions to the other side of the tracks.

If you have something that someone else wants, and that person doesn’t have any scruples, then it is prudent to take some simple steps to protect yourself. The danger isn’t just limited to your money and your goods, because as long as you are connected to them in some way, someone may just decide to take you out of the way.

In addition to avoiding displays of material wealth, it is very important to limit information about your financial wealth. Keeping mum about business or investment successes will give us an added margin of safety, though our inner child will be squirming with the urge to blurt things out. If we are successful enough to draw media coverage, playing things down will be even more difficult. What kid could ever pass up the opportunity to get his picture in the paper if he accomplished something noteworthy? Yet anything that finds its way into the media finds its way into Google; and yes, criminals know how to use Google too.

The sharper tools in the shed can even hack into your computer, planting a virus or worm that will send back financial information such as bank account numbers

and passwords. If you have online access to your bank accounts, you should check them regularly and balance them religiously to make sure you haven't inadvertently wired a substantial amount of money to the Cayman Islands. Checking credit card receipts against the statement will alert you to that monthly \$1.99 charge that has no explanation. The guy over in Russia makes a killing when a million people like you assume it must have been for a cup of coffee that you just forgot about. When you see the big charge for the platinum jewelry from *Nieman Marcus*, you can call up the fraud center at the credit card company and get a refund. Wait two months and all bets are off.

Checking the phone bill is also a miserable necessity as well. Thieves don't just steal money and goods, they also steal services. They can tap into your phone number and charge up a lot of calls to their mother-in-law who lives in Nigeria. Speaking of Nigeria, if a lawyer with poor grammar skills sends you an email asking you to deposit a sum of money into a certain bank account so he can send you a lot more money that belongs to a dead rich guy, don't do it. He's lying.

Hacking is above the pay grade of most criminals, so they resort to something easier—dumpster diving. If you throw away anything besides the junk mail without shredding it, these bottom feeders will have access to lots of useful information—names, addresses, organizations you belong to, letters with your signature on them, bank account numbers, and your social security number (printed on tax returns which a lot of really organized people throw out every three years). All they have to do is bring the good stuff back to the smart guy who gives them their drug money and he'll be able to connect all the dots so he can take out a line of credit in your name.

Protecting yourself, your family, and your assets requires some forethought and the consistent implementation of certain protocols, but in the end the time and effort invested will be well worth it.