New study from the Ponemon Institute reveals how online behavior leaves consumers vulnerable to identity theft

Irvine, Calif., June 21, 2010 — The use of social media can increase consumer vulnerability to identity theft because of the amount and type of personal information people share on these networks. However, consumers do little or nothing to protect themselves, according to a recent study conducted by the Ponemon Institute and sponsored by ProtectMyID.com®, Experian’s multilayered identity theft detection, protection and fraud resolution product.1

Although more than 80 percent of study respondents expressed concern about their security while using social media, more than half of these same individuals admitted they do not take any steps to actively protect themselves. This data clearly demonstrates that while people may acknowledge that security is important, many do nothing to protect their information online. Other key findings from the survey include the following:

- Approximately 65 percent of users do not set high privacy or security settings in their social media sites.
- More than 90 percent of users do not review a given Website’s privacy policy before engaging in use.
- Approximately 40 percent of all respondents share their physical home address through social media applications.
- Surprisingly, people who have been victims of identity theft are just as likely to be lax in securing their personal information online. Study results from identity theft victims and non-victims are virtually identical.

“The study results are extremely telling, especially about measures that users take, or fail to take, in order to protect their identity while using social networks,” said Dr. Larry Ponemon, chairman and founder of the Ponemon Institute. “I was surprised that those who had experienced identity theft in the past weren’t taking stronger measures to protect their identity. No matter who you are, if you want to increase social networking safety, you must take the necessary steps to protect your information.”

Even though most respondents expressed concern about online security and privacy, nearly 90 percent did not feel that identity theft is a likely risk from using social media sites. Accordingly, individuals continue to use social media despite acknowledged potential dangers.

- More than 60 percent of users are either not confident or unsure of their social media provider’s ability to protect their identity

1Survey conducted by The Ponemon Institute in June 2010
Approximately 44 percent of individuals said if they discovered that a social media provider did not adequately protect their privacy or security, they would continue to use the site.

Nearly 60 percent of respondents are either not confident or unsure that their network of social media friends only includes people they know and can trust.

“Social networking sites give users the ability to share personal information, but they need to keep sensitive information out of easily-accessed public profiles,” said Jennifer Leuer, general manager of ProtectMyID.com. “If people aren’t careful, identity thieves can quickly gather all the information they need to commit fraud, and that’s why it’s so important to be selective about the information shared and use a product like ProtectMyID.com, since it provides early fraud detection and resolution.”

Minimize risk to protect valuable information – One alarming study result showed that while consumers recognize the importance of online privacy and security, most are not taking important protective measures to help guard their personal information. To help educate and inform social network users, ProtectMyID.com offers these tips for protection against online identity theft:

- **Review and customize security settings** – Research your social network’s default account settings and make sure to customize your personal privacy settings in order to only share information with people you choose. Approximately 65 percent of users do not use a high privacy or security setting.

- **Review the privacy policy** – Make sure to thoroughly review the privacy policy of any social networking site before using the site in order to understand how your data can be accessed and shared. More than 90 percent of individuals do not do so, according to the study.

- **Pick a password that can’t be cracked** – Do not choose a password that incorporates common information, such as a pet’s name or your hometown. Approximately 40 percent of those surveyed said they use a password known to individuals other than themselves.

- **Log off when you leave** – Always log off or enable a secure screen saver when you are away from your computer or it is not in use. More than 80 percent of respondents leave their computers unsecured.

- **Install and update antivirus software** – Make sure that your computer has antivirus software that is always up-to-date in order to maximize protection against keystroke loggers and other malware commonly used for identity theft. Nearly 70 percent of respondents stated that they do not use any form of antivirus protection on their computer.

- **Make sure your wireless network connection is secure**. If you are operating on a wireless network, always make sure that the network is secure to avoid exposing your personal information while it is in transmission. Approximately 75 percent of individuals said that they use an unsecured network.
About the Ponemon Institute®
The Ponemon Institute is dedicated to advancing responsible information and privacy management practices in business and government. To achieve this objective, the Institute conducts independent research, educates leaders from the private and public sectors, and verifies the privacy and data protection practices of organizations in a variety of industries.

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ProtectMyID.com® is a leading, full-service provider of proactive identity theft detection, protection and fraud resolution. ProtectMyID.com offers comprehensive identity theft protection products supported by experienced identity theft resolution professionals who deliver personal attention that clients can rely on. ProtectMyID.com is a Website owned by ConsumerInfo.com, Inc., an Experian company. For more information about how ProtectMyID.com helps consumers protect themselves against identity theft, visit http://www.ProtectMyID.com.

About Experian
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