University of Kentucky
College of Agriculture, Food and Environment
Cooperative Extension Service

MONEY WISE

VALUING PEOPLE. VALUING MONEY.
MANAGING IN TOUGH TIMES INITIATIVE

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

PROTECT YOURSELF ONLINE

While being online doesn't always feel like a financial activity, it can lead to financial consequences if you aren't careful. Our personal information is the gateway to our financial accounts, so we must protect ourselves online. Use the following tips to protect your personal and financial information from scammers.

Download Security Software

One method that scammers may use to access your information is via malware. Malware is short for "malicious software" and it refers to a variety of viruses that cyber-attackers create to damage your computer and gain unauthorized access to your information. Scammers may embed malware in a link or an email.

To defend against malware, you can download security software that will protect against, or even remove, malware. Popular brands of security software include Norton, McAfee, and Kaspersky Anti-Virus. In most cases, this software should cost you less than $50. Some may even be available for free download. If you already have security software downloaded, be sure that it is up to date.

Trust Your Intuition

Phishing refers to a variety of scams that try to trick consumers into providing private information. They often involve fake emails,

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copycat websites, or pop-ups on your computer that ask you to divulge your Social Security numbers, usernames, and passwords.

Phishing scammers will often reel you in by posing as legitimate, trusted, or well-known companies or individuals. They may even pose as a family member. However, there are often red flags. If you think something seems suspicious about an email or an offer seems too good to be true, you are probably right.

Don't respond to an email asking you to divulge information. Instead, call the number listed on a company's website (and not the number provided in the email) to verify whether an email is authentic.

Many phishing scams rely on fear tactics to get you to share your information. They may tell you that something bad will happen, such as a fine or a frozen account, if you don't act immediately. Trust your intuition. If you have any reservations, be deliberate and investigate the claim on your own.

Activate Two-Factor Authentication
You have probably used two-factor authentication, even though you may not have known it. Two-factor authentication requires you to enter a password and an additional piece of personal information, such as the name of your first pet or the street where you grew up. Other types of two-factor authentication may be a code sent to your email or phone that you must enter, or a fingerprint scan or face recognition on your phone. Using any of these second-step features will help safeguard your account, even if scammers get access to your password.

Back Up Your Files
Get into the habit of backing up your files into the cloud or onto an external hard dive. That way, even if a scammer penetrates your security software and compromises your computer, your information is protected somewhere else.

Report Phishing
Help the Federal Trade Commission protect consumers by reporting phishing attempts. Forward phishing emails to spam@uce.gov. If the scammers posed as a legitimate company, email that company to make them aware that they are being impersonated. You can also file a report with the Federal Trade Commission at FTC.gov/complaint.

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