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The Summer of Fraud

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I believe where it all started is when I tried to buy pink grapefruit Method dish soap from a website that certainly looked like it was the Method soap website. My credit card didn't go through even though it should have, so I tried another one. Days later both of those credit cards alerted me to fraud attempts and I never got the soap.

Soon after, I started receiving calls that my Square register bank account had fraud on it from the accurate Square phone number. I think I had four new debit cards released to me over the next three months. It was high summer and I was busy and even though I think of myself as a skeptical person, I also know when I'm going fast I'm not being that careful. It always started with a call OR an official notification from Square that a charge had been declined. It was always the same caller, often with poor call quality. He said all the right things, made me do all kinds of verification … and I just thought he maybe wasn't the best at his job but in the end, the fraud was taken care of by (the real) Square. And I'd quickly move on.

On September 15 I watched this guy siphon over $3,000 from my account while I was on the phone with him. He told me Square would make sure the money was replaced in the next few days and it was really important that I do not sign on for the next few hours. Which is where the damn broke in my brain. What the heck did that mean? So I called the real Square and they were super friendly and said, "Ya, don't sign on if the guy said that." And I was really starting to freak out.

Then I got another call, a little while later, from a real Square representative saying, "Listen, you are going to keep going through this unless you delete your whole account. You'll have to start from scratch with your tax documents, etc., but otherwise, it's not going to stop." She said she would send a document via email with the details. She did, but I did NOT ask enough questions.

Within minutes I'd deleted my Square account and started a new one. What I didn't realize was that there wasn't a "quick restart" offered by Square—someone should have let me know to download my inventory before I deleted it because now I would have to start my entire inventory from scratch. Plus, because I was using the same email address for the new account, it was like the old account never existed. I couldn't even go in and harvest old information. I opened the shop the next day with limited inventory input, my tax info and perhaps way too much can-do spirit.

Through perseverance and nothing left to lose, I finally got in touch with my Square account rep who made everything make sense and put things right, quickly. Since then, I've had to restart my inventory, payroll, loyalty program and so much more, but here's the weird thing … this business is better for it. At the time, I dyed my hair "red velvet cake" because it was like I was going through a breakup or some traumatic event that I just needed to keep rolling through so I took it out on my hair.

I now have a beautiful, accurate, fresh inventory with photos and they're all linked directly to my website. I haven't gotten descriptions up on everything yet, but I am SO HAPPY with the inadvertent push this awful event forced me into. Previously, I had my register and my website and they never worked together; now it's one big happy family. Did it mean taking my old site off a service I'd used for 12-plus years? Yep. It was like all this work just came dumping on my head and it DID NOT STOP, but I did it and in the awfulness of it I had a chance to fix all the junk I messed up as a brand new business. I streamlined my inventory, reworked my loyalty, blasted out a new website and just now I get to sit and think about everything that happened. Here's what I want YOU to know.

This kind of fraud is going on with all kinds of register systems: If you get a fishy phone call, even if it's from the "right" number, hang up and call the main help line—it's called phishing and everyone is susceptible. Find out if you have an account rep BEFORE you need them. I could have saved myself some nightmares.

Because I had a bank account closed due to fraud, so many other things have gotten screwed up—like my electric bill isn't eligible for autopay because now I'm on their sketchy list. And your girl needs autopay REAL BAD. I'd send a payment to my credit card and then the account closed before it was completed and I ended up in AMEX jail where they put a freeze on all my accounts until they thought I was cute again.

Where I really went wrong on this is that I'm always skeptical of spam emails, but the caller using the official Square phone number on the caller ID really baffled me. This is apparently a thing now and the more independent business owners I speak with, the more I hear of this happening from every provider out there.

Listen, this is a success story. Square backed up all the money, supported the heck out of me and now I'm back and better than ever. That being said, I wouldn't wish it on anyone. Be careful out there! **GP**

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