

REPORT

*Federal Trade Commission
Overview of the
Identity Theft Program*

October 1998 – September 2003



September 2003

FTC Identity Theft Program

In 1998, Congress enacted the Identity Theft and Assumption Deterrence Act (“the Identity Theft Act” or “the Act”),¹ directing the Federal Trade Commission to establish the federal government’s central repository for identity theft complaints and to provide victim assistance and consumer education. Specifically, Congress directed the Commission to establish procedures to: (1) log the receipt of complaints by victims of identity theft; (2) provide identity theft victims with informational materials; and (3) refer complaints to appropriate entities, including the major national consumer reporting agencies and law enforcement agencies.² The attached timeline illustrates significant milestones in the Commission’s Identity Theft Program. Figure 1. The core initiatives of the program seek to assist victims, educate consumers, law enforcement and the business community, and maintain and disseminate information from the Identity Theft Data Clearinghouse (“Clearinghouse”).

I. Assisting Identity Theft Victims

On November 1, 1999, the Commission began collecting complaints from consumers via a toll-free telephone number, 1-877-ID THEFT (438-4338). From conception through 2002, the number of complaints the FTC received doubled every year. From January through July of this year, the Commission already has received over 131,000 complaints with a projected total of 210,000 by year’s end. Figure 2. Callers to the telephone hotline receive counseling from specially trained personnel who provide general information about identity theft, help guide victims through the steps needed to resolve the problems resulting from the misuse of their identities, and advise victims having particular problems

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¹ Pub. L. No. 105-318, 112 Stat. 3007 (1998) (codified at 18 U.S.C. § 1028).

² Id. at 3010.

⁴ *See ID Theft: When Bad Things Happen to Your Good Name: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Technology, Terrorism and Government Information of the Senate Judiciary Comm. 106*

would meet the needs of criminal law enforcement. Access to the Clearinghouse via the FTC's secure Web site became available in July, 2000. To ensure that the database operates as a national clearinghouse for complaints, the FTC has solicited complaints from other sources. For example, in

⁵ The FTC also provides a "Hot Search" investigative assistance function. In situations where a law enforcement officer's search is unusually complex and the timeframe is tight, they are able to send us an email at idtsearch@ftc.gov, and we will assist them using our more powerful in-house search tools, as time permits.

⁶ The referral program complements the regular use of the database by all law enforcers from their desk top computers.

⁷ Charts that summarize 2002 data from the Clearinghouse can be found at www.consumer.gov/idtheft and www.consumer.gov/sentinel.

⁸ The Commission testified on July 9 and 10, 2003 before the House Committee on Financial Services and the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs respectively. The testimony can be found at <http://www.ftc.gov/os/2003/07/fcratest.html> and <http://www.ftc.gov/os/2003/07/fcrasenatest.htm>.

⁹ The Commission supports the Treasury Department's proposals, and has recommended two additional proposals regarding the duty of furnishers to respond to disputes directed to them by consumers and the clarification of the application of the FCRA to investigations of employee misconduct.

Number of Complaints Entered Into the IDT Data Clearinghouse 1999-2003



Federal Trade Commission
Created September 2003

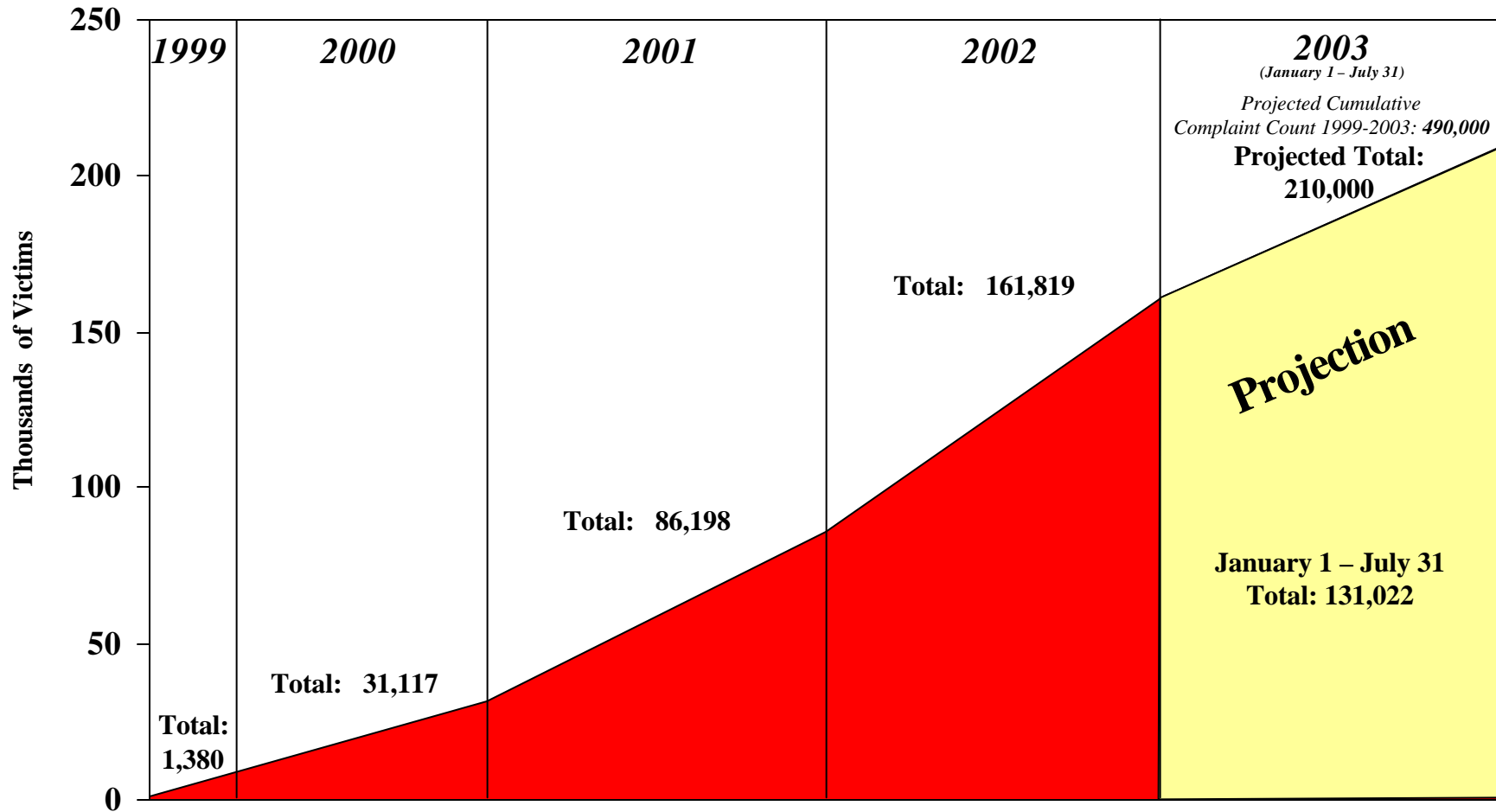
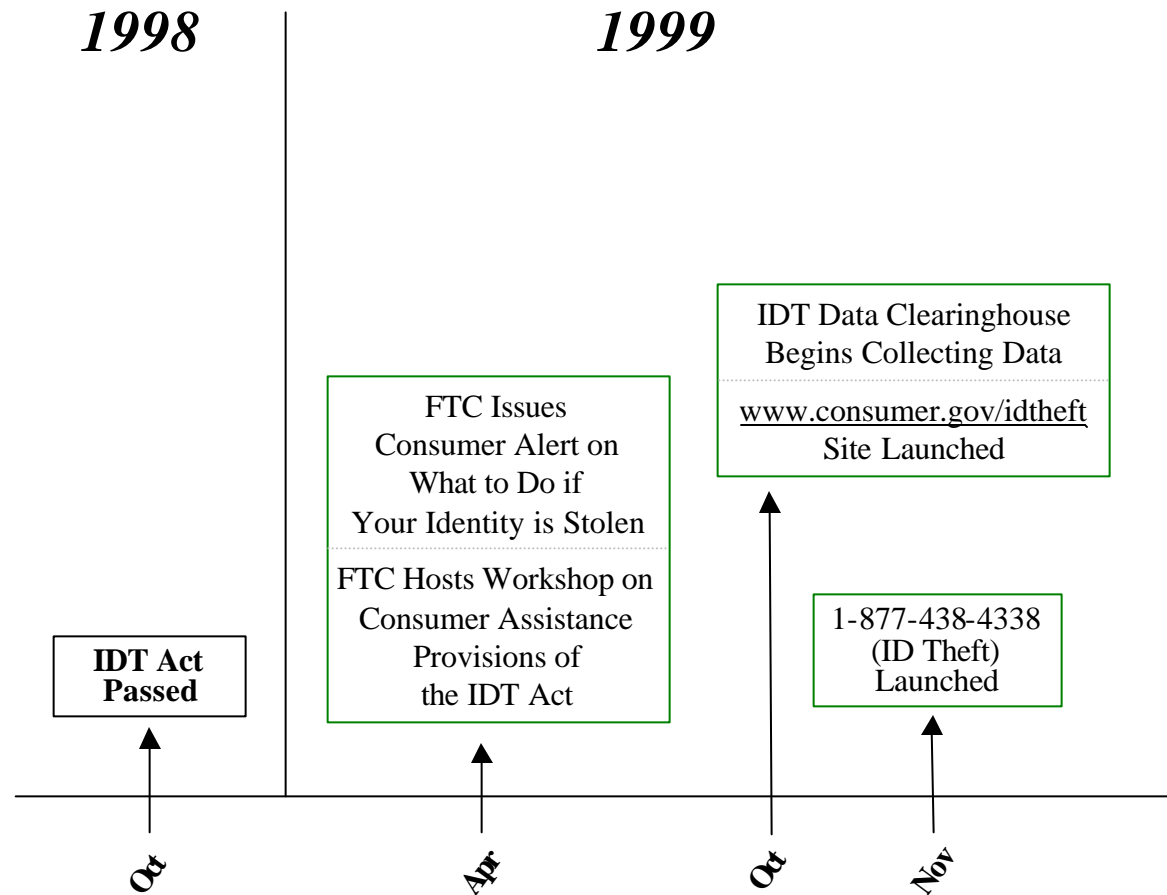


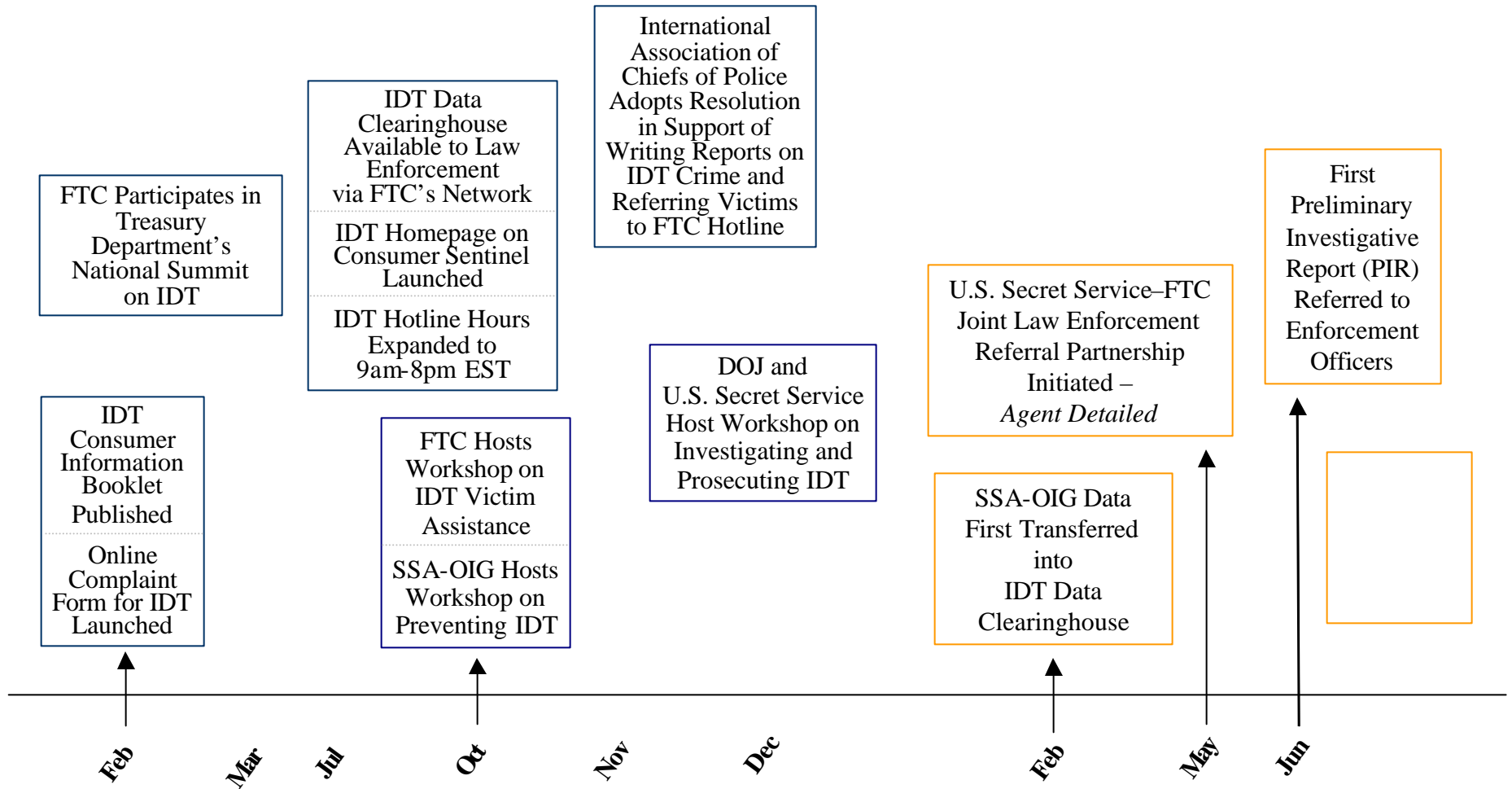
Figure 1

TIMELINE of FTC's IDENTITY THEFT (IDT) PROGRAM

1998-1999



2000



2002

2003

(includes scheduled events as of July 31)

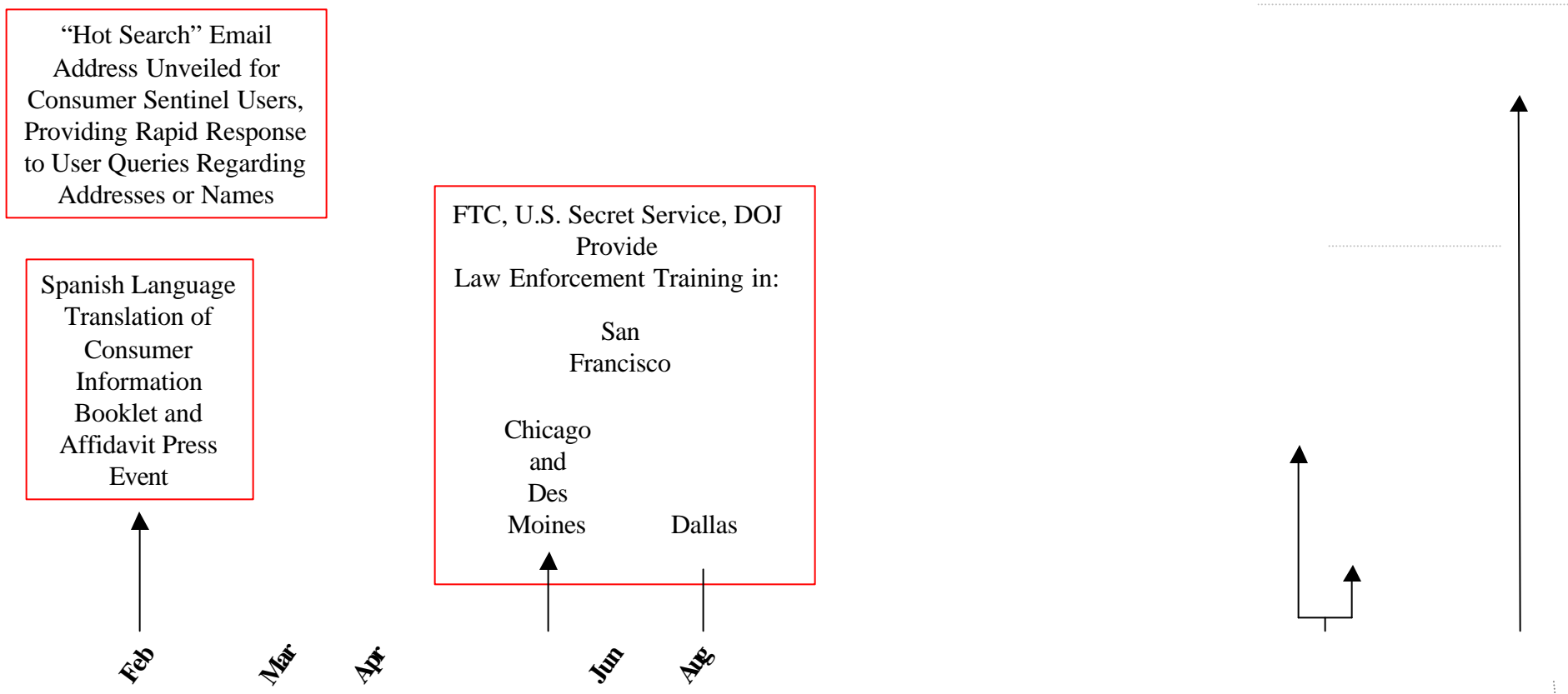


Figure 2(C)

TIMELINE of FTC's IDENTITY THEFT (IDT) PROGRAM 2000-2003



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	2000	2001	2002		2003 <i>(January 1 – July 31)</i>	
Annual Count of Consumer Information Booklets and Affidavits Distributed¹	English: 156,706	English: 282,055	English: 641,695	Spanish: 25,471	English: 278,300+	Spanish: 44,600+
Cumulative Total of Law Enforcement Departments with Access to IDT Data Clearinghouse	150+	250+	500+		670+	
Annual Count of Preliminary Investigative Reports Referred to Law Enforcement		4	21		6	

¹The Spanish language translation of the consumer information booklet and affidavit was released February 2002. Also, since January 2003, most bulk requests have been fulfilled with 10 printed copies plus a copy of the CD-ROM version.

Figure 2(D)