

New Technology Approach Helps Caribbean School Continue Transforming Lives

The College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAATT) was founded with the goal of transforming the lives of its students and preparing them for employment, future studies, or both. Known for producing tech-savvy graduates, the institution realized it needed to modernize aspects of its student experience to continue fulfilling its mission.

Thanks to regional partners, TouchNet's leading commerce technology, and a well-paced marketing strategy, COSTAATT delivers a first-rate, student-centric payment experience that matches its academic offerings and outcomes.



When COSTAATT was established in October 2000 by the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago, preparing students for careers and advanced study in science, technology, and applied arts was among its primary objectives.

Since its founding, the College has become known for its successful track record of producing exceptionally work-ready graduates. But as the school outgrew its homegrown IT solutions, it became harder to deliver a student experience commensurate with the school's educational achievements.

Dr. Camille Samuel, Vice President of Student Affairs, explained that a perfect storm of institutional policies, cultural perceptions, and budget constraints left COSTAATT with a legacy IT system that could no longer keep pace with student expectations and was also problematic to maintain. The student experience needed to improve to match COSTAATT's reputation for academic excellence.

partnering
with TouchNet
has become
the cornerstone
for future
expansion

Finding itself at a crossroads, the institution opted to update its legacy systems with a combination of new technology, savvy marketing, and incremental updates that maximized its resources. Partnering with TouchNet to move to an advanced online payment system in 2018 played a large part in this strategy, which has proved hugely successful and become the cornerstone for future expansion.

Navigating the path to a better student experience

While the effort to update legacy systems was off to a good start, student perception and engagement were just some of the factors the leadership team had to contend with simultaneously. For example, because the student registration system and fee payments were two big areas students wanted modernized, the adoption of a new system and approach to campus commerce needed to be technology-driven by necessity. To successfully entrench the new technology at the College, a critical focus had to be placed on changing student perceptions and their distrust of online payments systems and digital transactions.

As a publicly funded institution, COSTAATT also had a limited budget for new solutions to accommodate its need for system efficiency and a better student experience. Despite the urgent need to update their legacy system, it was clear COSTAATT's leadership had to carefully choose their path forward. The updating of IT systems could no longer be done from a purely technological standpoint, without reference to key user requirements, if the College was serious about undergirding its relevance to the 21st Century student population. With the support of President Dr. Gillian Paul, Dr. Samuel secured the required funding for the strategic repositioning of IT within the college environment.



The mitigating power of partnerships

TouchNet, with decades of experience providing solutions to higher education institutions, was able to identify the school's constraints. Thanks to the integration with Ellucian's Banner student information system and a strategically designed solutions roadmap, TouchNet implemented an online payment system for tuition and other academic fees that students could access from any computer or mobile device. This system immediately lessened the pressure on school staff and improved the student experience because payments could be made anytime from anywhere. This improvement not only addressed the long lines at the cashier's office, but also mitigated the accessibility issues experienced at campuses in the country's rural areas.

Building confidence one transaction at a time

Of course, the long cashier lines during the registration cycle did not disappear overnight. Once the new system was in place, the team had to build student confidence in the technology. To ensure student acceptance, the school's IT team and TouchNet personnel made themselves available to guide users through account set up, pending payments, and other new processes. Their collective vigilance and commitment to immediate responses helped to ensure a successful transition, adoption, and trust in the new system.

Since the student launch of COSTAATT's online payment facility in September 2018, the system's usage rate has grown steadily as more students acknowledge it is both convenient and secure.

As is well-understood at COSTAATT, true change and lasting adoption cannot be rushed but is rather an outcome of deliberate behavioral analysis, consistent attention to stakeholder feedback, and entrenching learning in organizational systems. Dr. Samuel confirmed the statistical data from the first year's use of the payment system will be combined with student online payment feedback survey results to create another online payment campaign for the new academic year beginning August 2019. This campaign is expected to reinforce continued growth regarding system adoption.

Dr. Samuel and her colleagues are encouraged by their progress. "Integrating TouchNet's Payment Center to produce this new online environment was a big success for us," Samuel said. "It showed not just our capacity for excellence and dedication to enhancing the student experience at the College, but also our ability to listen and hear the specifics of what students were saying and to take those challenges head on."

**TouchNet
implemented an
online payment
system for
tuition and other
academic
fees**



Planning with an eye toward the future

After roughly three years of balancing priorities, stretching funding, nurturing partnerships, and building trust in new technology, Dr. Samuel is more than optimistic. She likens her school to a phoenix reclaiming its place among the country's technology elite and says COSTAATT is confident about its future.

The school's resurgence since modernizing its payment system has encouraged the College leaders to implement additional updates using TouchNet solutions. "From the time we launched the online payment facility via Payment Center, the very next project we started to work on was fully operationalizing the accounts receivable module in Banner and integrating this with TouchNet's payment platform," Dr. Samuel said. "The Board of Trustees is looking at this project with great excitement."

Thanks to the momentum created, the school is now 95 percent done updating its processing backlog, which means another important record keeping area will be modernized and up-to-date. This is also another hallmark achievement for student support. Students will be able to track their debt and payments made to the College instantly via their smart phones or laptops. Those seeking tuition support from the Government (via the Government Assistance for Tuition Grant [GATE] system) will be able to view and track their funding application status in real-time, in one location, upon project completion.

As Dr. Samuel contemplates COSTAATT's plans for the near future, her enthusiasm grows. For COSTAATT's annual 5K race — the school's largest public event, planned in conjunction with Mother's Day in 2019 — their freshly installed TouchNet Marketplace payment solution provided an opportunity for the school to reach new external audiences. Of the 476 people who completed the full registration process, almost 50 percent of the registered race participants (236) chose to process their payment via TouchNet's online payment platform, with a 49 percent first-time system user adoption rate. The 5K event provided a testing opportunity with their virtual storefront, with 28 merchandise orders fulfilled.

TouchNet Marketplace payment solution provided an opportunity for the school to reach new external audiences.



COSTAATT has pledged to continue their drive for greater adoption of these new tech-driven services and features. Further, as the 5K race time has moved to a more family-friendly Saturday afternoon to attract a larger number of community participants, the online payment system will now facilitate the ease with which members of the public can participate in the event.

According to Samuel, "Having the general public — people who are not affiliated with the College — interface with the online payment mechanism bodes well for the College as these individuals will get used to the core mechanism the College plans to use to promote other products and services." This is seen as an important next step in the school's efforts to retain its top technology spot. Judging by its strong partnerships and successes so far, the technology-fueled COSTAATT phoenix is here to stay.

TouchNet is a leading provider of integrated, comprehensive and secure commerce and credentials solutions for colleges and universities. Institutions of higher education rely on TouchNet to unify and secure payments, permissions and other related business transactions campuswide. TouchNet's unmatched integration, transparency and security gives institutions greater control over transactions, costs and compliance while providing greater operational efficiencies and self-service access to real-time information. TouchNet is a Global Payments company (NYSE: GPN). touchnet.com

touchnet

A Global Payments Company

touchnet.com/u-commerce