

Middle Tennessee State University

MTSU Makes it Mandatory, Simple and Successful

Direct Deposit, Bill+Payment™ Deliver Sizable Refund Savings ... and More

- Murfreesboro, Tennessee
- Public university, member Tennessee Board of Regents
- Founded: 1911
- Enrollment: Approx. 25,000
- Featured TouchNet technology: Bill+Payment

Here's how thousands of students used to get their refunds at Middle Tennessee State University: Over four days, they would take turns gathering in the old student union, waiting in long lines behind makeshift stations set up and manned by half of the business office staff, with printers and boxes of paper at each station.

What a difference a few years, a key decision and the right software can make.

The university took a huge step forward in 2006 by mandating that students receive their refunds via direct deposit. The following year, when MTSU implemented TouchNet Bill+Payment, the move really started to pay off.

Almost Perfect

The direct deposit mandate preceded a Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR)-wide ERP upgrade, which gave MTSU, six other TBR universities and 13 colleges a new student system. A year before the upgrade,



every refund-eligible student had to fill out a banking information form and provide the university with a voided paper check. Account and check routing data were then manually entered into the old finance system. The refund was deposited into the student's designated account or, if necessary or preferred, issued in the form of a prepaid debit card.

So, while MTSU virtually eliminated thousands of paper checks each year, they still had a lot of paper, along with the costs of processing, plus the challenge of storing it securely.

Banner Year

The TBR-wide ERP system upgrade came the following year, as did systemwide implementation of Bill+Payment.

"When we moved to the new ERP system, our old finance system couldn't retrieve all the banking information we had collected the previous year,"

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Middle Tennessee State University

said Becky Bussell, MTSU's bursar. "That's when we went out on our own and purchased the eRefunds module."

MTSU didn't have to manually collect and process student banking data all over again, or ever again. The self-service eRefunds solution enables students to enter their information directly, and maintain and update their personal banking information at any time.

Naturally, there was some pushback from a vocal minority, but Bussell said the biggest challenge for the institution was simply spreading the word to refund-eligible students, which thanks to increasing enrollment, had jumped to nearly 18,000.

"A few people didn't get the emails or see any of our advertising across campus and had to contact us, asking where their direct deposits were," Bussell said. "But they only had to wait an extra day or two."

For Middle Tennessee, it was a small price to pay for the more than \$250,000 it saves with the new refund model. "We now have more than 24,000 students signed up for direct deposit, and no need to store that many paper files containing PII (personal identifiable information)," Bussell said.

What's more, the university doesn't have to relinquish control of vast sums of money to a third-party "bank" twice a year. Best of all, the system is in place, delivering savings and security year after year.

Looking Back, Moving Forward

"Two years into it, I think students are very satisfied, plus



we don't have the lines anymore," Bussell said. "We've definitely recouped the cost of our investment, probably in check stock and manpower alone."

Speaking of staff hours and workload, she summed up the improvements this way: "Our enrollment has grown about 5 percent just since 2008, but we have not felt any impact in the business office."

Bussell also pointed to more than \$200,000 in new revenue generated through Bill+Payment's Payment Plan Manager. And in February 2009, MTSU went live with Marketplace™, enabling and securing the growing number of eCommerce transactions through uPay sites and uStores.

"We're gradually moving every merchant that accepts credit cards into Marketplace if they don't have their own cash receipt system," Bussell said.

"We



have a long waiting list, but it's what we have to do from a PCI compliance standpoint.

"That's a big part of why we use TouchNet ... to get us there." Simply, securely and successfully. ●

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+ Heartland