

South Georgia State College

Small School, Big Payoff

Benefits of Streamlined Billing, Payment Systems Aren't Reserved for Large Institutions

- Douglas, Georgia
- Public two-year college, University System of Georgia
- Founded: 1906
- Enrollment: 1,400
- Featured TouchNet technology: Payment Gateway, Bill+Payment



Business offices at big universities aren't the only ones in need of advanced billing and payment capabilities. And, as many smaller schools have found, they aren't the only ones who can afford the benefits.

Case in point: South Georgia State College.

Like most institutions large and small, the college of 1,400 students once dealt with long lines at cashier windows, frustrated students and staff, and mounting costs associated with paper bills and payments. That all changed when a relatively small investment in campus commerce technology yielded sizable returns.

Campus Profile

South Georgia State College is a two-year college with a long and distinguished tradition. Founded in 1906 in the town of Douglas, it was the first state-supported two-year college and one of the original institutions in the University System of Georgia.

The college may belong to one of the largest university systems in the country, yet the business office has autonomy in the realm of billing and payment systems. Integrating the Georgia system's chosen ERP software with TouchNet Payment Gateway gave South Georgia State College the same powerful payment engine as the other 34 schools in the system. Until recently, however, students and staff were still sputtering along with an antiquated online billing and payment system.

One Step Forward ...

Despite the major efficiencies delivered by ERP/ Payment Gateway integration on the back end, it was mostly the same old song and dance for the end users. Paying tuition and fees remained a stressful process, especially for the 60-75 percent of SGSC students who receive financial aid. Sure, students could make online payments. The outdated Web-

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based payment platform could accept them, but not much else.

The numbers students saw online didn't reflect in real time the deposits they made, classes they added/dropped or financial aid they received. Nor could parents or authorized parties view important financial data that affected them or their student. Without a proven, reliable and easily navigated online solution, students reluctantly stuck with the old standbys: waiting in line and calling the business office.

"Our phones would ring off the hook for a solid week before the start of each semester, everyone wanting to know how much they owed," said Peggy Dobbs, SGSC's director of Business Services. "And throughout the registration period, we felt like we just couldn't help everyone. My staff in other positions would have to leave their jobs to work as extra cashiers. It affected everyone – three times every year."

The hassle and expense of paper billing would always follow, often for multiple rounds as students added or dropped courses, changed addresses or were late with payment.

Solution in Sight

Through peer groups and the conference scene, Dobbs saw how

advanced billing and payment solutions had transformed the business office at other institutions. After a lengthy review of the market, she determined Bill+Payment was worth a look.

"My boss was aware of our challenges, and once she learned what Bill+Payment could do, she asked for the price," Dobbs said. "Our request was approved, and we purchased it with leftover funds at the end of the fiscal year."

That was 2006, a year in which online payments at SGSC totaled only \$40,000. In the first year after implementing Bill+Payment, online receivables jumped nearly eightfold, to more than \$300,000.

Automation Station

What a difference a year and the right technology can make. South Georgia now boasts an online, self-service business office that's never closed:

- Automated billing services eliminate paper billing, and the postage costs and staff hours that go with them.
- Students enjoy comprehensive, user-friendly online bill presentation, with access to

transactions and account data in real time, not hours or days.

- The college's transactions are swept daily, and the money hits its checking account that night.
- Sensitive transaction data and applications are secured in the TouchNet Certified DataCenter.
- Refunds stay under the school's control, and get to students faster.
- Overstaffing for peak periods is a thing of the past, as are long lines, backed-up phone lines, and stressed out students and staff.

"Today, we can actually help that student who comes to the cashier window during registration week," Dobbs said. "And we still get calls during peak times, but those calls are people who need real help rather than help with routine business."

"It's the best investment we have made in a long time," Dobbs added. "Bill+Payment helps our students help themselves, and it pays for itself." ●

