

Qatar University

Building a Vision Of the Future

University Responds to Students' Technology Expectations

- Doha, Qatar
- Public university
- Founded: 1977
- Enrollment: 16,000
- Featured: Bill+Payment, Marketplace



Students around the world are becoming more technologically savvy. Young people in Qatar, a country on the northeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula, are the highest percentage of users on apps like Twitter and WhatsApp in the entire Gulf region. Qatar is renowned across the world for its commitment to leading-edge technology and boasts the highest broadband penetration in the region. The students and faculty of Qatar University (QU) are excellent representatives of the country's drive to create and utilize progressive techniques, equipment, and processes. To help them become even more cutting edge, they needed a partner to support their goals.

A Vision Revealed

The university – with a vision for its future – implemented changes under what's referred to as the Reform Project. Changes began taking place in the mid-00s but were not without a unique set of challenges. "At the time, e-commerce was still relatively

new in Qatar," said Asad Nafees, section head of Qatar University's Business Technical Support Services. "It wasn't easy to use a major credit card online or find a bank that provided online transaction services."

QU challenged the area's tech norms and began facilitating online payments. "We didn't have any problems buying the system; it was convincing the vendors that they could make their solutions work here successfully," said Nafees. "TouchNet didn't see our unique circumstances as a problem. They were willing to go the distance and meet on campus to create a workable solution."

Now, said Nafees, Bill+Payment is considered part of the on-campus application family. "We can't imagine not having it. The ability to offer online refunds is a huge benefit," he said. "These used to take weeks or months to receive because of all the back-and-forth communications. Now, it's as simple as a few clicks."

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The Value of Convenience

QU was able to more fully utilize the value of what TouchNet offered when the university's College of Engineering hosted a major conference. "Wire transfer was the only way the conference was accepting registration payments. About a month before the event, we had received only four payments and it was a major cause for concern," said Nafees. "By leveraging all of the Marketplace capabilities, we had a plan in motion for success."

TouchNet fast-tracked implementation for the university. "We had a storefront set up and a few short weeks later, we had nearly 100 registrations. It turned into a complete success." It did not take long for other departments and offices on campus to recognize how Marketplace could help them reach their own goals.

QU's Continuing Education Office (CEO) caters to students taking short, noncredit courses for professional development or

prep classes such as the GRE and GMAT. Before Marketplace, one of their largest challenges was the problematic process wherein students had to fill out an interest indication form online, submit it, drive to campus, visit the office, pay the fees, and then wait to find out if their registration was confirmed. Refunds were also immensely difficult if the course was canceled or someone withdrew.

The old-fashioned processing resulted in low registration. Now, over 90 percent of the office's registrations are online and refunds take less than a day to complete. The office has gone from offering only 10 classes to 68. "Marketplace has become a central function for generating revenue. In only four and a half months, the university collected over 1 million riyals (or approximately US \$300,000) in online revenue," said Nafees.

Future Focused

In a recent QS Top University survey of the universities of the Middle East, QU was ranked in the top five of all schools, due in large part to the university's commitment to becoming a major center of scientific research and technology. It is a busy, exciting time for those on campus.

"A lot of the value TouchNet offers is convenience. Our stakeholders don't ever have to physically visit a cashier or a bank to pay their dues anymore," said Nafees. This value falls in line with students and faculty – connected to the world, open to new ideas and technology, and eager to learn more. ●

