

University of West Indies, St. Augustine

Bringing eCommerce to Trinidad and Tobago

Bill+Payment Transforms Student Experience at Prestigious Caribbean University

- St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago
- Public university
- Founded in 1960, with 18,395 students
- Part of the University of the West Indies System, founded in 1948
- Featured: Payment Gateway, Bill+Payment Client, Marketplace



There was steady growth in student numbers over the years but with the introduction of the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) programme the UWI saw a massive increase in enrollment.

Unfortunately, a lack of online banking systems meant students were facing extra travel, then waiting in long lines, just to pay their fees so that they could sign up for classes. Anyone just trying to attend a conference at the St. Augustine Campus faced similar obstacles to registration and hotel reservations.

The more the university grew, the lines for payment of fees become more burdensome and more complaints rolled in. The UWI needed a complete solution to a big payment challenge.

Starting From Scratch

Implementing online payments was obviously going to be a challenge. UWI's St. Augustine campus has the largest student enrolment of the UWI four (4)

Campuses. The UWI total student enrolment is in excess of 45,000.

"We are dealing with students from across the Caribbean," said Andre Taitt, UWI's accountant for Treasury and Investments. "In the past the students would have had to organize wire transfers or wait until they are on-site to make a payment."

The various currencies, banking institutions and governments all presented hurdles for students, as well as the fact that no local bank in Trinidad & Tobago was set up to receive electronic payments as a credit card processor. Before the UWI could make use of TouchNet's Bill+Payment, a new system would have to be built from the ground up.

"TouchNet went above and beyond to work with local banks to enable that local processing," said Nazir Alladin, Campus Chief Information Officer.

When the university began accepting online payments, it wasn't just the first school in Trinidad &

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Tobago to do so – UWI became the first ecommerce merchant in the country, period. It was an accomplishment made possible by TouchNet’s dedication to individualized customer service for schools.

Integration Makes All the Difference

“Previously, the University would have marketed its online registration, but students still had to come onsite or visit a bank for payment. With the online payment now an option, we can now say it is true online registration that can be completed from beginning to end,” said Daren Dhoray, the campus Webmaster.

Now, students can register, pay their tuition and enroll online, then simply arrive on campus for the first day of classes. They can also pay graduation fees and make purchases from online stores for conferences, remarking of exam scripts and online journals. All these solutions are fully integrated with the back office system (Ellucian Banner financial and student systems), providing information in real time to users and the administrative office. TouchNet’s systems were a game-changer, for students,

administrators and the school’s reputation in the Caribbean.

“In terms of paying online for registration and conferences, we are the first. From our surveys we have conducted with our students about their experience, they are all very happy. They no longer have to line up at a bank,” Alladin said.

TouchNet also transformed the University’s annual half-marathon, an international event hosting more than 1,000 athletes. It had faced similar challenges with sign-up and payment.

“The fees from the previous online payment system were extremely high and consumed most of the funds received, said Andre Taitt, UWI accountant for Treasury and Investments. “This year, with TouchNet, we received most of the funds.”

Looking Beyond Enrollment

TouchNet will also help the university as it launches another online journal. The first online journal launched with the TouchNet systems dealt with communication, the next online journal to be

launched deals with tropical agriculture. Anyone can purchase and download articles from these journals to study or implement into their own research.

The University’s profile is also getting a boost with every academic conference it hosts using TouchNet. International attendees can even book their hotel rooms online when they sign up.

“As word spreads, more and more conferences are coming on board to use the online payment system,” Taitt said.

UWI is looking forward to using TouchNet’s capabilities to its advantage in even more areas, thinking of itself as a merchant as well as an educational institution.

“We have Marketplace, that’s our next major step, to make that an income generator for the University,” Alladin said. ●

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