Executive Summary

Much has been written on the digital divide, whereby less affluent citizens are (or will be) left out of the “next wave” of progress due to the financial costs prohibiting their participation in the broadband society being formed. Little has been written about the transformation of the electronic payment receipt process, and how participation in e-payment requires a credit card or MasterCard/Visa debit card to complete online transactions. This has the effect of excluding the cash and check-based society from participation, and directly impacts not only the digital divide but also the ROI of these e-payment solutions to the government entity providing them. The City of Denton has worked to address this “techonomic” divide by developing equitability in payment options.

Background

Established in 1857, Denton is the county seat of Denton County, and was named for John B. Denton. John Denton was a lawyer, preacher, and a soldier. His grave is on the courthouse
lawn in the center of Denton’s historic downtown square. The centerpiece of the downtown square is the old Denton County Courthouse, which was erected in 1896 and restored in 1987. The courthouse contains a museum highlighting historic photographs and artifacts from the city’s founding to the present.

Denton is the proud home of two public universities—Texas Woman’s University and the University of North Texas, the 3rd largest university in the State of Texas, with a combined enrollment of approximately 40,000 students.

Denton’s current estimated population is over 100,000 residents. The city is a full-service municipality, providing electric, water, solid waste, drainage, fiber optic, airport, public transit, ambulance, and traditional public services to residents and businesses in the community. There are 1,237 full-time employees of the city. Forty-three buildings comprise the campus, which are connected with single-mode fiber optic cables, enabling gigabit connectivity from any city facility or from the mall. The city limits encompass 70 square miles, and this is expected to increase with the population. Denton will have over 200,000 residents by 2020.

The City of Denton is a manager/council form of government, whereby the City Council appoints the city manager, city attorney, and municipal court judge. The city manager is responsible for hiring the division managers in the organization and accountable for the smooth operation of city services. A detailed organization chart can be found on the city’s Web site www.cityofdenton.com.

The city has embraced the practice of outcome management from the Carver Governance model. Outcomes define where the city is going, what will be accomplished, for whom and at what cost over the next several years. Several outcome statements have been defined and can be found in the department-specific strategic plans or white papers on the city’s Web site.

These outcome statements have been defined to the detail the council wants to describe them, and focus on the aspects of the organization that come into direct and continuous contact with the citizens. As an internal service provider, the key to success for Technology Services is to partner with our stakeholders to understand, achieve, and if possible to enhance the desired outcomes.

One of these areas where Technology Services has been able to better understand and enhance the desired outcomes has been in the development of e-government solutions. In response to a directive from the City Council, facilitation for electronic access to government services were developed and deployed beginning in 1999. After only a year’s worth of data, it became apparent that our electronic payment processing was impacted by both demographic preferences and the famous “digital divide”. The concept of the “digital divide” was first espoused by Larry Irving, who, as a technology advisor to the Clinton Administration, pointed out how socio-economic differences between communities impact the way computers and the Internet are utilized. In more specific terms, less affluent citizens are (or will be) left out of the “next wave” of progress due to the financial costs prohibiting their participation in the broadband society being formed. Little has been written about the transformation of the electronic payment receipt process, and how participation in e-payment requires a credit card or MasterCard/Visa debit card to complete online transactions. This has the effect of excluding the cash and check-based society from participation, and directly impacts not only the digital divide but also the Return On Investment (ROI) of these e-payment solutions to the government entity providing them.
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