



GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO  
MINISTRY OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

# *Wi Day 2019*

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ADDRESS

SENATOR THE HONOURABLE PAULA GOPEE-SCOON,  
MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY

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14<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER, 2019

## **Salutations**

1. Mr. Aldwyn Wayne – Chief Executive Officer, Wipay
2. Ms. Sacha Thompson – Chief Operating Officer, Wipay
3. Ms. Denyse Ramnarine- General Manager, Electronic Channels & Payments, Republic Bank
4. Mr. Jorge Salum – Senior Director, Business Development- Visa, Keynote Speaker
5. Master Christie Anne Morris Alleyne- Court Executive Administrator- Caribbean Court Of Justice
6. Members Of The Media
7. Specially Invited Guests
8. Ladies And Gentlemen.

## Introduction

It is truly a pleasure to join you today to deliver remarks at this signal event - WIDAY 2019. As Minister with responsibility for trade and industry, I am always supportive of initiatives that focus on reducing the time and cost of doing business, enhance convenience and reduce bureaucracy in undertaking business transactions. WiPay is one such company that has accepted this challenge. To this end, I wish to acknowledge the work of WiPay in building and developing a feasible payment solution that facilitates greater adoption and use of e-commerce platforms in business and trade.

There is no doubt that digitalization is transforming the way business is done and drives fundamental change in business models and markets.

Directing our attention to MSMEs, globally it is estimated that two billion individuals and 200 million micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in emerging economies lack access to banking facilities. Even those with access must often pay high fees for a limited range of products and this limits their capacity. Ultimately, economic growth suffers. But financial technology-fintech, offers a solution and could transform the lives and economic prospects of individuals, businesses, and governments across the developing world, boosting Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and making the aspiration of financial inclusion a reality.

A 2019 report from the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), finds that widespread adoption and use of digital finance could increase the GDPs of all emerging economies by 6 percent, or a total of \$3.7 trillion, by 2025. This additional GDP could create up to 95 million new jobs across all sectors of the economy.

The Caribbean, including Trinidad and Tobago, has traditionally experienced challenges with providing affordable digital payment platforms. To address this dilemma WiPay has developed a uniquely 'inclusive' platform that is secure, flexible and simple to use. This platform allows anyone connected to the internet to move money quickly, safely and easily.

The major benefit of this is that it gives those without access to the formal banking system an introduction to formal financial services. To businesses, it offers benefits in the form of automated and instantaneous operations, enhanced participation in international value chains, increased market access and reach, improved internal and market efficiency, low barriers to entry and lower transaction costs. A cost effective and efficient payment system, in turn, influences a country's trading regime and affects its trade performance.

### Government Initiatives

#### New Trade Policy

Trinidad and Tobago is a trading nation and the Government remains resolved to enhancing this country's position in the multilateral trading arena. A tangible manifestation of this is the recent launch of the Trinidad and Tobago Trade Policy (2019-2023). One of the main aims of the Policy is to improve the facilitative environment to enable local businesses to increase international trade and within traditional and non-traditional markets.

In order for this to be realized, we have to not only create an enabling environment to make trading easier but we have to ensure that there is a reliable and cost effective payments system that is easily available to all businesses especially MSMEs.

#### E-Commerce Policy and Strategy

The Government has been at the forefront in promoting the adoption and use of e-commerce in Trinidad and Tobago through the National E-commerce Strategy (2018-2021). Its main objective is to create an enabling environment, including the necessary legislative framework that facilitates and promotes e-commerce. During consultations with various public and private stakeholders for the development of this Strategy it was evident that facilitating online payments was one of the biggest obstacles to e-commerce adoption in Trinidad and Tobago.

#### E-Payments

Efforts are underway to provide key Government payment services electronically. To effect this, in March 2019, the Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) Policy was developed and approved by Cabinet to support the implementation of electronic payments or facilitate e-Payments in the public sector. In fact, the Judiciary launched CourtPay on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018 which is an electronic system introduced to provide a safe, accessible and convenient means of transacting payments at the Courts.

Within the Executive Branch of Government, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and its agencies will be among the first government bodies to fully implement e-payments.

The Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standard's (TTBS) e-Store for the sale of National Standards was launched on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2019. This new system facilitates the electronic purchase of Trinidad and Tobago National Standards, both Compulsory and Voluntary, via the TTBS website using a credit card.

Additionally, payments for the services under the Legal Metrology Division is currently being done via the TTBS website and facilitated by Republic Bank Limited in collaboration with WiPay. This allows for online requests for *Verification of Measuring Devices for use in Trade* and will undoubtedly save

entrepreneurs time and money as vendors can now use the new electronic payment portal to pay for this service. This will bring about a significantly easier payment process for Gas Stations, Couriers (incl. TTPost), Supermarkets, Weighbridge Stations and more recently, Market Vendors throughout Trinidad and Tobago. At the Tunapuna market the majority of vendors are utilizing the cash voucher option. Thus far it has been a fairly smooth process. Rishi Singh, one of the vendors, tells us that this will help his business a lot. As the normal procedure to pay would have been going to the bank *“now I could pay in the market one time.”*

The current process to make a payment for TTBS inspection services requires brokers to visit a local bank or the TTBS head office to make cash/cheque deposits. By the end of November 2019, the TTBS will utilize its online payment facility for the processing and payment of inspection fees to be conducted online.

The MTI is working closely with the TTBS to complete testing over the next couple of weeks, after which once launched, the following benefits will be realized:

- Elimination of travelling time and waiting times by brokers at payment locations (i.e. banks).
- Ability to make payments 24 hours a day, reducing the need to schedule business around limited banking hours for brokers.
- Immediate receipt of funds and facilitation of TTBS processing and quicker border clearance for brokers and importers.
- Improved monitoring and reconciliation of receipts, increasing the integrity of financial records at the TTBS.

#### WIDAY 2019

Given the significance accorded to e-payments, many countries have already forged ahead in promoting universal access to and use of electronic financial services. Trinidad and Tobago is soon to adopt and implement a payment system that is cost effective. With a population of approximately 1.4 million people there are approximately 200,000 credit card holders. What this tell us is that an estimated 80% of the population is excluded financially from participating in the digital economy and this is what we are attempting to fix.

Locally, MSMEs which comprise 90% of businesses in T&T, have stated that using the existing payment options was too expensive for their operations and consequently, a significant amount of trade is foregone if they are not able to sell their goods and services online. However, there are solutions.

Today WiPay will be launching a new WiPay App and Card. This, I understand, is the first of its kind in Trinidad and Tobago and will significantly revolutionize the way business is done in the country. This new method of making online payments proves to be a real game changer in e-commerce in Trinidad and Tobago as it is expected to significantly increase e-commerce usage and adoption thereby increasing the

value and volume of trade taking place locally. It will allow individuals and firms, who do not have a credit card, to make online payments via the new Card and App, thereby promoting “*financial inclusion*”. Financial inclusion will allow persons and MSMEs in particular to conduct many everyday financial transactions more efficiently and safely and expand their access to credit options.

A 2019 World Bank study entitled, *Financial Inclusion for Economic growth and Development*, indicates that financial inclusion lowers the Government’s administrative costs. I am sure the representative from the Judiciary, as well as the TTBS, can attest to this as it allows for more efficient operations and satisfied customers.

### Conclusion

Government is actively working to increase the adoption and use of e-commerce in Trinidad and Tobago while firms such as WiPay are making it happen by providing a reliable and cost effective e-payment solution. Together we are getting it done! In closing, I congratulate the WiPay team on the trailblazing work and accomplishments. I commend Mr. Wayne for his foresight and tenacity in creating a product that not only satisfies a need in the local e-payment landscape but also helps small entrepreneurs to grow their businesses.

I thank you.