

Generations

A cashless way of doing business

Recently, I read about how fast-food restaurants are slowly changing to a “cashless” payment system and a prediction for the future is that it will catch on in all aspects of life where a payment has to be made and the only acceptable way of payment is by credit or debit card.

Thinking about my own wallet, it’s true, because, most often, I’ve got less than \$10 and a couple of dimes and nickels jiggling in the bottom of my purse. The good ole debit card has become the lifeline to my daily routine, but I never imagined that cash would someday be outlawed. It wasn’t that long ago when a “cash only” sign accompanied a cash register (notice the word “cash” next to register).

So, I did a little research on a cashless society and fast-food restaurants seem to be the first target category of the cash-barring theory. The scenario of the future seems to heading toward ordering a Big Mac at the drive-thru window, pulling up to the next window, and paying for the Big Mac with plastic rather than cash and not having any choice in the matter.

The aim is to alleviate those couple of seconds of searching for that extra 20 cents on the bill and keeping one’s cool while the driver behind you loses it and leans on the horn.

Why would an establishment want a plastic-only payment system? Well, the leading pro on a list of pros and cons was for quicker transactions because our racing society needs to get in and get out faster than a jackrabbit and no one wants to stand around for a millisecond to wait for the

person at the cash register grabbing the correct amount of change.



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Think Starbucks’ line, early in the morning, perhaps on the way to work where you can’t make it without the jolt of extra caffeine, and the person behind the counter is counting out change for the narcissistic person who had the nerve to use cash.

Multiply this person by the 25 people in back of you and the last person on the line is most likely ready to have a nervous breakdown.

Establishment safety is another pro because no burglar is tempted to steal a bunch of receipts from a plastic-only business. And the last employee out who has to carry the deposit bag has always been a target, so plastic only alleviates getting mugged for the bag at 2 a.m.

Employees also would not have to make daily bank runs to replenish change to refill a register, so owners have them for an extra hour.

So, what are the cons? The primary con is that some of us out there still pay with cash. Yes, there are baby-boomer dinosaurs still out there who insist on cash or a checkbook and no one is going to change their way of thinking.

Another thing to consider is that cash limits what you can buy and you don’t tend to overspend and purchase something on impulse with easy pull-out plastic.

Another con has to go to the young and unbanked people who haven’t had the luxury of establishing credit because Mom and Pop took care of the bills and

all they’ve got for a slice of pizza is a \$5 bill.

Also, ask a server about a cashless society and you’ll probably hear a lot of curse words. Servers tend to prefer cash tips to credit tips because not only can cash be used immediately, but none of their tips are lost to credit-card-processing fees. They don’t get paid a lot and tips help them supplement their income, so even if you pay your restaurant bill with plastic, leave a couple of greens on the table for a tip.

I guess the biggest con is that it might not be legal, but notice that I put that one last. There are lawmakers in Washington against the plastic-only way of doing business, arguing that it is discriminatory. We’ll see. Big business usually has the edge.

Visa is making a big pitch for a cashless future. Last year, it had a \$500,000 program of awarding a U.S.-based small-business restaurant \$10,000 if it opted into its cashless program. The money was to pay for technology upgrades such as installing platforms that accept payments from phones, smart watches or other devices. Winners haven’t been announced as yet, but Visa and IBM are working together to get the economy rolling in this direction.

In my next column, I’ll share with you some of the future predictions made at the 2017 WIRED Business Conference on how business will be conducted by the Year 2020.

Hint: Your fridge won’t be just for storing groceries anymore.

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