

Paymaster to charge \$30 fee

published: Wednesday | July 12, 2006

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Paymaster Jamaica CEO, Audrey Marks displays the company's new membership card.

PAYMASTER JAMAICA Limited announced that they will be introducing a \$30 service fee starting next week Tuesday.

"The decision to impose the controversial charge comes on the heels of increasing operation fees, competition from our rivals and a need to sustain profits," said Audrey Marks, the company's chief executive officer (CEO) yesterday.

The company's main rival, Grace Kennedy's bill payment subsidiary Bill Express, had introduced a \$30 fee from March 1. Michael McNaughton, general manager of Grace Kennedy Payment Services Limited, which operates Bill Express, said then that the fee imposition was based on the improved service his company would offer.

The critical difference between the fee to be charged by the two companies is that the Paymaster fee will include the 16.5 per cent General Consumption Tax (GCT) while the GCT is in addition to the \$30 charged by Bill Express. The Paymaster fee will thus be about \$4.95 less than that for Bill Express.

Ms. Marks said she had agonised over the decision. "Because costs keep going up we have had to face the decision over and over at looking at implementing a transaction fee," she said at the Courtleigh Hotel in St. Andrew.

EASY DECISION

What might have made that decision easier was the recent disclosure by Brian Goldson the head of Grace Kennedy's Information Service Division, that despite the howl by consumer advocates since the company introduced the fees, it had lost relatively few clients. And, critically, Bill Express had improved its financial performance.

Marks said, "Even though we are growing, one has to remember that in an economy like Jamaica's, revenues are hard to keep up and hence we made the difficult decision to introduce the transaction charge."

She said the fee is intended to provide Paymaster with the resources to modernise the infrastructure and improve service delivery to clients and customers.

This is in light of the fact that there are plans to replicate their services in the rest of the Caribbean.

Marks also said that the company will be offering an alternative to the service charge, as the company will be launching a loyalty club, which will allow individual and corporate customers who become members, to pay a fixed annual membership fee.

"In exchange for joining the club," said Marks, "the charge for their bill payments will be waived" as the annual fee for the card will cover the cost for transacting business with Paymaster.

The cards, which are already available at the company's outlets, are of three types; the Standard Loyalty Club card for individual customers. It will attract an annual fee of \$650 (US\$10). There is also a Senior Club Card for persons 65 years and over, this will cost \$130 (US\$2). Corporate entities will be charged \$1,300 (US\$20) to access this service.