

Electronic Transactions Association

1101 16th Street NW, Suite 402
Washington, DC 20036
202/828-2635
www.electran.org

ETA Chief Executive Officer

Carla Balakgie

ETA Director, Communications & PR

Thomas Goldsmith

Transaction Trends

Publishing office:
Stratton Publishing & Marketing Inc.
5285 Shawnee Road, Suite 510
Alexandria, VA 22312
703/914-9200

Publisher

Debra Stratton

Associate Publisher/Editor

Angela Hickman Brady

Managing Editor

Josephine Rossi

Art Director

Janelle Welch

Contributing Writers

Richard H. Gamble, Bryan Ochalla,
Julie Ritzer Ross

Advertising Sales

James Byles (202/973-6448)
Gene Schuyler (703/286-5959)

Editorial Intern

Emily Cook

Ad Production/Billing

Carrie Wood

Editorial Policy:



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President's Message

Making It in a Tough World

As an industry, we're starting to see the shape of the year ahead, and for now it's not a pretty picture. Retail consumer spending during the year-end holidays was disappointing, to say the least. Other measures of consumer confidence and willingness to spend also aren't encouraging. Congress and President Obama are about to unveil a massive stimulus package that could come very close to \$1 trillion, yet no one is sure whether it, or any other measure, will be helpful, especially in the short run.

In such a challenging environment, what's the right strategy? Can your organization grow, rather than just survive?



In this month's cover story (page 10), we asked writer Richard Gamble to see what some industry experts think it will take to make it through a tough climate and, more important, what you might do to grow while those around you stand pat or shrink. Some of what he found may encourage some innovative thinking—especially the idea that what you can do to help your merchant customers survive can also help you expand, even in a shrinking economy.

Along those lines, writer David Fish zeroes in on several ideas that combine local knowledge and local relationships with prepaid and loyalty programs to boost the bottom line of small retailers and create a competitive advantage for smaller ISOs. You can read more on page 18.

This month, we also take a look at the emerging niche of decoupled debit cards and what they might mean for debit transactions. Some of the biggest issuers are looking at these products, which could be a big spur to ACH if they catch on. See page 14 for the scoop.

We also look at retailers' embrace of multiple check conversion technologies. Despite the declining volume of checks, they're gaining traction among savvy ISOs who find their customers eager to be more efficient processing the checks they do receive. Check it out in ISO Corner, on page 8.

As you can see by this lineup, those who create each issue of *Transaction Trends* have shifted gears a little to reflect what's going on around us. As always, they're eager to hear what you're experiencing in your organization and in your market, as well as what topics you think are relevant in this difficult environment.

Sincerely,

Nick Baxter

Nick Baxter serves as president of ETA and is senior vice president of First National Bank, Omaha, NE.

Tell us what you think about *Transaction Trends* and share your story ideas. E-mail: jrossi@electran.org.