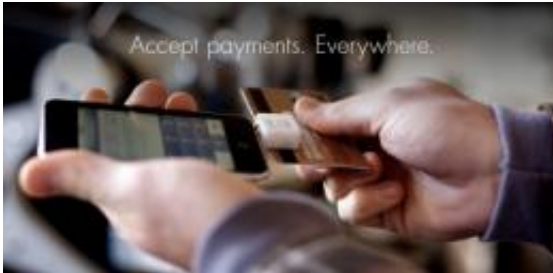


Pay babysitter on iPhone, says Twitter

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Microblogging service Twitter has branched into the market for electronic payments, unveiling a mini credit card swiper that plugs into the iPhone, at a European internet fair on Wednesday.

Twitter's founder Jack Dorsey told AFP the device, the "Square," aimed particularly to enable small transactions for "people like babysitters, dog walkers, golf instructors, flight instructors" to collect payment.

The small black square plugs into the phone's microphone socket, turning it into a card reader like the swipe machines widely used in US shops and restaurants. Its official launch is set for March.

"A lot of people in the world today are using plastic cards to pay people with... But receiving payments from them is very hard," he told AFP while demonstrating the device at LeWeb, an Internet forum in Paris.

"There's a number of people who are providing services, or selling something, that can't transact with credit cards today because of the complexity."

Specialist website TechCrunch reported a "feeding frenzy" of investor interest around the Square even ahead of LeWeb.

"This is a bold foray into a huge, and complicated, market: physical payments," wrote Techcrunch blogger Michael Arrington. "Square will be a huge win or it'll go out of business."

Billed as Europe's top Internet fair, LeWeb was expected to draw 2,000 visitors including major names such as networking site Facebook and Google plus start-ups looking for investors, its organisers said.

Some big names in "apps" -- the iPhone applications that provide everything from street maps to video games -- were also present, including the music-recognition app Shazam.

"I'm here because it's the European centre of the world today," said Laurent Nicolas, from e-commerce company Aventy, of the two-day event.

"It's a real networking place where I can meet a lot of people to, for instance, leverage our international expansion."

Dorsey, whose Twitter concept of real-time mini-blogs has become an online phenomenon since its 2006 launch, saw the recent economic slowdown as an opportunity for web entrepreneurs.

"The crisis has actually been helpful in terms of innovation for the payments industry," he said.

"There's been a clearing of the slate and people are really going down to the bare minimum and figuring out how we can actually innovate and build new things."

PayPal, a widely-used service for secure online payments, was at LeWeb touting PayPal X, a platform for complex and entirely web-based transactions. It is seeking partners to develop new applications for use on the platform.

"One of the areas we're really pushing is mobile," Paypal representative Amina Belghiti told AFP.

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