

# Thunes Special Session of the Payment Solution Seekers group – 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2024

## Attendees

- Christophe Bourbier, Thunes, Global Head of New Ventures & Exco Member
- Kivu Mihigo Nkezabera, DT One/Thunes, Network & Partnerships Management Director – Africa
- Nanz Lim, Thunes, Head of Platform Products
- Sam Kragel, Thunes, Solution Delivery Manager - Americas
- Hassan Issa, Thunes, Delivery Director Thunes Collections
- Rory Crew, the CALP Network, Technical Advisor-Data and Digitalisation

Implementing organisations represented: Medair, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), IOM, IFRC, UNDP, Terrachrome, Aviation Without Borders USA, Turkish Red Crescent, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), UNHCR, World Vision International (WVI), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Action Against Hunger Spain, WFP, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Concern Worldwide, Somali Cash Consortium, UNICEF, GiveDirectly & UNHCR.

## Slide deck

[Click to open full PDF deck](#)



## Context

The Payment Solution Seekers group is convened by the CALP Network to support Cash and Voucher Assistance (CVA) implementing organisations that are pursuing or exploring complex or multi-country payment solutions.

The Group holds Special Sessions with payment stakeholders to increase the surface area between implementing organisations and other actors in the CVA delivery supply chain, particularly with private sector payment companies.

## Overview

The session began with Rory thanking Thunes for attending, gave a brief presentation on the characteristics of humanitarian CVA interventions. Thunes then presented their history, showcased some of their relevant services, demoed a live instantaneous top-up to a session participant's phone in Kenya and then took questions for c. 20 minutes.

### Key takeaways

- Thunes makes cross-border payments; their partner company, DT One, is focused on airtime top-ups and digital vouchers/gift cards.
- Their aim is to make payments as easy, cheap and quick as sending a WhatsApp, including near real-time success/failure confirmations.
- Under one contract and one platform (accessible via APIs also) Thunes can offer airtime top-ups, cross-border payments (to people or organisations) and payments/receipts (e.g., donations).
- Airtime top-ups are quicker, easier and have more coverage. In part because they cannot be cashed out there are fewer KYC issues.
- They use the term payout partners, where we call them last-mile FSPs. Payout partners are added based on customer demand or intelligence on payment flows. 50% of the company is dedicated to adding new payout partners.
- Fees tend to be set-up costs, a fixed and percentage transaction fee plus any foreign currency conversion fees.
- Thunes will require a minimum commitment and understanding of volumes
- Thunes doesn't have significant experience in the humanitarian space but is keen to learn more.
- Thunes has pre-funded escrow accounts in countries allowing them to process instantaneous payments.
- They prefer flexibility in contracting to allow them to respond to market events.
- Their engagement to delivery timeline is c. one to two months.

### Summary

#### **Thunes's platform**

Thunes is a global payments infrastructure company, "that helps banks, financial institutions, mobile money operators, wallet and also NGOs to receive ... and ... send money abroad."

Their platform enables cross-border payments in real time, with a low cost, high transparency, and a wide coverage. There are broadly three different products or services being all offered under their one platform.

1. The first service is allowing NGOs to receive donations from anyone/anywhere in the world.
2. The second service, is sending money to over 130 countries and to a range of different payout providers such as bank accounts, digital wallets and Over-the-Counter. What sets Thunes apart from other cross-border payment providers is their service works in almost real-time. 95% of transactions are done within 30 seconds, regardless of country. They know almost immediately if a transaction was successful or not, similar to seeing the blue tick when a WhatsApp message has been delivered.
3. The third service is airtime top-up, which is delivered by their sister company, DT One, and works in over 170 countries.

### **How they work**

Thune's main clients are Money Transmitter Operators (MTOs) and payout partners. They work with large merchants such as Uber and Deliveroo but are stepping into the humanitarian world. Their closest experience to date has been working with United Nations Federal Credit Union (UNFCU) and the United Methodist Church on an Ebola SMS and airtime campaign in Liberia.

They recognise they're not in the NGO world, but believe the global infrastructure they have built is a good fit for humanitarian CVA.

They're interested in exploring twin services with humanitarians, Thunes and DT One. And are keen to adapt to our situation – it shouldn't take years but could take just months to get sign-off and compliance validation. One contract could cover all 3 services listed above. The services can also be offered via an API. Once a client signs up – they have one team that helps from beginning to end with a single point of contact (plus a backup). They will have weekly checkups too. With an aim of going live in a month or two.

### **How Thunes chooses its payout partners?**

There are two considerations, adding a new country and adding a new delivery mechanism. Thunes will monitor flows, to see where money is going and what delivery mechanisms are used locally. They also respond based on client's/customer demands/requests. Almost half the company is “dedicated to adding new payout partners.”

### **As easy as a WhatsApp**

Thunes come from the from a vision that they believe that payment anywhere in the world, a payment from France to Kenya, a payment from Kenya to US, a payment from US to Venezuela, should be as quick as instantaneous, as easy and as inexpensive as a WhatsApp message.

Compare this to the SWIFT network which is rather old fashioned and often takes a lot of time. And you don't always know where the transfer is, whereas in WhatsApp there is a little blue tick when it's been delivered. It's also more difficult to send to phones using traditional delivery channels.

### **History of Thunes**

Thunes was launched in 2018 and was initially named TransferTo. They have partnered with DT One to facilitate transfers between mobile operators in Africa. They each focus on their area Thunes on

cross-border payments, DTOne on digital products e.g., Airtime, e-cards, digital gift vouchers etc. In 2021 Thunes acquired Lemontik a European Payment Methods Platform, which increased their capacity to offer taking payments internationally and making payments into digital wallets etc.

In 2022 they received a silver medal for Sustainability from Ecovadis and joined the UN Global Compact, committing to taking action in support of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2024 they partnered with tree-planting initiative, Handprint, an Impact-as-a-Service firm, planting one tree for every 5,000 transactions processed.

They have 400 employees and 20 offices. A medium-sized company in the payments world and operates in 130 countries. They operate in 80 currencies.

### **DT One and airtime**

DT One recognised that diaspora communities often wanted to send money overseas, as did organisations. And instead of having agreements with every mobile operator they could just sign-up once with DTOne. Use cases for airtime top-ups also include topping up enumerators' data/airtime on their devices when working in communities.

One benefit of airtime top-up is that there are no KYC requirements as it cannot be cashed out, and the coverage tends to be wider. It can also be done quickly.

Kivu demonstrated topping up a session participant's prepaid phone that can be done through a portal or via an API.

### **Challenges and risks faced**

One challenge Thunes discussed was sending bulk funds across borders i.e., flows that were made up of many co-mingled transactions from different sources. E.g., Thunes does not work with adult entertainment companies – so they need to understand the sources of transactions.

NRC raised the issue of working with USD and how this delays transactions because of the additional compliance checks required by the US Treasury. Thunes confirmed they can work in the EURO. Thune has partner banks, or escrow banks in many countries with dollars on deposit – allowing them to move money around the world through partnerships with banks such as Barclays and JP Morgan. This pre-funding contributes to the speed. Therefore NGOs don't have to pre-finance. Thunes does Treasury management based on NGO's forecast currency needs.

### **Cost structures and minimum commitments**

(These sessions do not mention pricing to avoid conflicting with procurement processes but do discuss cost/fee structures.)

Thunes has a pricing structure that is simple and negotiable. The fees tend to be:

- Set-up fees
- Transaction fees
  - o Thunes, a fixed fee plus percentage
  - o DT One, a percentage with no fixed fee
- FX fees

There would also be a minimum commitment. Rory explained the challenges of a minimum commitment presented to NGOs due to funding cycles. They need to understand the length and volume of expected partnerships.

### **Flexibility in contracting**

Thunes preferred their contracts to be “as flexible as possible” in terms of services and fees to allow them to respond to things that happen in markets. This is in line with their entrepreneurial approach. But are more rigid when it comes to compliance.

### **Other notes**

- The group thanked Thunes for their interest in the humanitarian cash space and for coming and presenting their work.

### **Closing**

If you are interested in joining the Payment Solution Seekers group, please contact [rory.crew@calpnetwork.org](mailto:rory.crew@calpnetwork.org). It focuses on CVA implementing organisations with an interest in complex multi-country payment solutions. It includes people from programmes, finance, logistics, legal, operations and project teams.