

# Octopus Card expands into worthy causes

Payment system teams up with flag-selling charities to develop portable readers for electronic donations.

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In a landmark deal between Octopus Cards and the Hong Kong Council of Social Services, up to 30 charities could be giving you a "doot" as well as a thank you when you shell out to help the needy. The first flag-selling event using the Octopus card will be led by the Baptist Oi Kwan Social Service on December 17. A swipe of the card will charge the donor a fixed amount of HK\$5.

"At a time when Hongkongers often carry an Octopus card instead of spare change, it is important that flag-selling moves into the digital age," said Christine Fang Meng-sang, council chief executive.

Two volunteers will pair up, so people can have the option of donating by Octopus or putting money into the traditional collection bags. The system will also help the council compare the popularity of donating by Octopus versus cash.

The HK\$5 fixed limit came from deliberations from experienced organisations that the amount is generally acceptable to the public.

Sunny Cheung Yiu-tong, chief executive of the Octopus group, said a fixed amount was preferable. "This prevents volunteers or donors from keying in the wrong amount because we don't have a system of refunding the donor."

Following a similar charity drive in 2009, when wheelchair-bound collectors accepted donations using Octopus card readers, the firm developed 110 portable card readers specifically for flag-selling. The machines are lighter than those used in 2009, and have a tilt sensor installed so it reads only cards tilted horizontally by the volunteer, preventing volunteers from accidentally swiping Octopus cards belonging to unaware passers-by.

Octopus Cards waived handling, administration and transaction fees for the pilot programme. "We have no plans of charging [the council] for the Octopus readers after the pilot programme," said Cheung. "We are Hong Kong's home-grown company, and we want to give back."

Non-profit organisations may use up to 100 card readers, with 10 as backup, for flag-selling, and the price of renting one card reader is HK\$35, which the charity pays the council for costs such as charging the machines' batteries, and calculating and transferring the amount raised. Fang said non-profit groups were consulted and were happy with the price.

Cheung said Octopus can transfer all the funds to the council by the next working day. Fang said the council sends a cheque to the charity within seven days.