Payments in 2026: New Methods Grow, M&A Accelerates, and Sector Expertise Matters More than Ever

Executive Summary

The payments landscape in 2026 is more complex than at any point in its history. Account-to-account payments are challenging card dominance. Buy now, pay later (BNPL) has matured from novelty to expectation. Super apps are expanding beyond their original markets. Regional variations demand localized strategies. Mergers and acquisitions are reshaping the competitive landscape.

For enterprises operating across borders and verticals, particularly in complex sectors such as travel, understanding these trends is essential to remaining competitive.

As we explore in our latest whitepaper, Assessing the Global Payments Landscape, the pace of change is also creating opportunities. McKinsey's Global Payments Report notes that lower-yield account-to-account rails are taking a growing share of global payments revenues, especially in Europe. This shift creates an opening for more non-card payment providers and fintechs on the global stage. Meanwhile, BNPL has become an embedded part of the digital payment experience, reaching an estimated $70 billion in total transaction value in 2025, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond.

Regional variations persist, reinforcing the need for distinct payment strategies across markets. In India, for example, UPI facilitates over 20 billion transactions each month, a scale that makes integration mandatory for any enterprise with operations on the subcontinent. Similarly, Latin America continues to be an outlier in digital payments revenue growth, underscoring the need for merchants to support digital-first payment methods like Pix when entering or operating in this market.

Ralph A. Kaiser,
President, CEO & Chairman of UATP

Navigating Complexity Through Sector Expertise

Across all regions, the payments industry is experiencing a sustained wave of merger and acquisition activity. Global fintech companies attracted $116 billion in total investment in 2025, up from $95.5 billion the year prior, according to KPMG International's Pulse of Fintech H2'25. PwC predicts that payment providers will continue to attract M&A interest through 2026.

This consolidation often reveals gaps in sector-specific knowledge. A payment company with deep expertise in retail may acquire a competitor serving travel merchants, only to discover that the operational differences are greater than anticipated. Travel payments, for instance, involve complexities that retail transactions do not, including split payments across multiple suppliers, multi-leg itineraries, and regulatory requirements that vary by route and destination. Understanding those nuances is critical to a successful payment strategy.

For travel enterprises, partnering with a full-service payment provider that is conversant in the sector's complexities of the sector to manage them effectively is a critical advantage.

UATP is, as always, perhaps the most qualified partner in this respect. We offer solutions that improve efficiency, accelerate time to market, and simplify the complexities inherent in travel payments, enabling businesses to build smarter, more connected payment systems for sustainable growth in an evolving marketplace.

Download your copy of Assessing the Global Payments Landscape today.

The UATP Advantage

As the world's most secure closed-loop network, UATP combines a proven reputation with extensive industry expertise to design, create, and implement high-performance payment solutions at a competitive cost, without sacrificing quality of service.

To learn how UATP can help improve your payments strategy, visit www.uatp.com.

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