

# Cash is king, or is it?

## *The wallet- and cash-less experiment*

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Very often I see men carry a wallet filled with plastic: multiple debit and credit cards plus a bunch of loyalty programs and membership cards. Then, some even top it off with stinky paper money and sticky metal coins! It made me wonder if I can free up one pocket by ditching the wallet?

So what did my wallet look like? My wallet contains:

- personal debit card
- personal credit card
- corporate debit card
- shared debit card (with my girlfriend)
- drivers licence
- health insurance card
- public transport chip card
- some paper money
- a card indicating I volunteer as organ donor
- a paper list with "in case of emergency" phone numbers

These were the things I thought were wise to be in my wallet that I carry pretty much all the time. But then I decided to really think about how much I really used these items. The first step to get rid of the wallet, is to identify the things you really do with it.

## **Identify actual use**

Of course I use my wallet to make payments, usually with my personal debit card. Only sometimes I use another card. Most places I go accept electronic payments using some kind of credit or debit card. If electronic payments are not accepted, an ATM is usually nearby allowing me to get some cash if it is really necessary.

I never needed my health insurance card (lucky me); and I know by experience that Dutch hospitals and care providers have a computer system that allows them to verify insurance details and donor info by entering your name and date of birth. So the health insurance card and organ donor card can be left out.

I mostly travel by bike, moped or car. Only once or twice a month I use the public transport. For public transport in the Netherlands you need a special chip card. Not all metro stations and bus stops sell them. So when travelling with public transport, I need that card, only then, not all the time!

In the Netherlands it is required by law to be able to present a valid ID, if you fail to do this the fine is about 90 euros. In practice, I have been asked for an ID during traffic checks or whenever I pick up a package at the local post office.

After some serious consideration, I reduced the functional requirements of my wallet to just: making payments and being able to identify myself.

## **Optimising payments: smartphone**

It seems silly in this modern, connected, world that I carry four (!) bank cards. I just want to be able to pay and somehow make sure that it is done from the right source of money. I don't care about the card I use. Can I ditch the cards all together?

Obviously the future of payments is mobile. Since almost everybody carries a smartphone it is only logical that both the major smartphone forces in the world are breaking ground on mobile payments. I am talking about Apple Pay and Google Wallet. Sadly, mobile payment support in the Netherlands is still in its infancy and at best it is very fragmented. So, at least for now, it seems that I need at least one widely accepted bank card to make payments.

If I carry just one bank card, which one should it be? I figured out that most of my payments are personal, non-corporate. Paying for groceries, coffee, or a sandwich. Only once or twice a month I use my corporate card. With banking apps I can quickly transfer money from one account to another: making it easy to leave the infrequently used banking cards at home. In the Netherlands (and its neighbouring countries) debit cards (Maestro / PIN) are best accepted followed by credit cards. Therefore I choose my private debit card as "the one", but if I would live in the United States it might have been my private credit card.

## Packing it together

Ideally I want to get rid of the wallet, but I need to carry two plastic cards: a bank card and my drivers license. I thought about glueing or taping them together. But then it hit me: the smartphone I use is large enough to stick one or two cards between the case and phone.



*The iPhone case is large enough to hide cards.*

Unlike smartphone payments in the Netherlands, contactless payments (through an NFC chip in the bank card) are now widely accepted. You just need to hold the bank card within range of the payment terminal to make a payment. For small payments (under 50 euros) most Dutch banks allow you to make the payment without entering a PIN code. What most people don't know is that contactless payments also work for larger amounts, there still is no need to present the bank card (you're just prompted to enter a PIN on the terminal).





*Stacking two plastic cards is easy*

Since radio waves can easily traverse through a rubber iPhone case, I tried to stick the NFC-bank card and drivers licence just behind my phone. The flexible rubber case nicely concealed the cards and the phone rarely became any thicker. Brilliant simplicity... or so I thought!



*The iPhone with case is only slightly thicker.*

## Field testing

A friend of my owns a bar and he kindly allowed me to use his payment terminal to test the "smartphone with hidden contactless bank card"-setup. It did not work! The terminal did not recognise my bank card if it is tucked away between my phone and case. Removing the phone and presenting the rubber case with card did work.

Even although I do not use the Apple Pay in my iPhone, the NFC chip inside the phone seems to interfere with the bank card signal. I tried turning on flight mode (killing all

radio chips) and even turning the phone off entirely. The combination still didn't work contactless. Every time I wanted to make a payment I had to fiddle to get the bank card out of the case... meh!



*Just like any other iPhone: but this one has an NFC contactless bank card and ID hidden it it!*

## **Refining the concept**

After some searching I found another smartphone case with two card sleeves on its back. It is still a minimal package, but it allows much easier access to one or two cards. That is great for the card I use for payments. Since I rarely need my ID, I decided to tuck that one away between the case and the phone. This actually works well in practice.

In addition to the new case I also installed the app "Card Mate Pro" to easily keep a digital copy of my other cards (including loyalty programs and membership cards). Digitising a card is just as easy as taking a photo. It is a simple app that works very well.



*This case allows easy access to the payment card while hiding the ID inside.*

## Experience after weeks of testing

As I have gone without a wallet and cash for some time now, I can say it works and I really like it. I went to Germany and Belgium and it all worked great. There were a few times when I encountered a shop that didn't accept any bank cards. That wasn't a real problem: I either got some cash from a nearby ATM or I found another store to get whatever it was I wanted. One of the exceptions was a (small) ferry over the Maas river, for this reason I have placed some coins in my car and my bike's saddle pocket.

Another thing I didn't think about upfront, was the public transport chip card. Sometimes, when the weather is very bad, I leave the bike at home or at work and take the metro or bus. But due to the unpredictable nature of the weather, I had a hard time deciding when I needed to take with me the chip card. Sometimes I wanted to take the metro, but then my public transport card was at my location but at my destination! The solution was to buy another card and to make sure that both my work and home have a public transport chip card "at stand by".

So in the end I did it: no longer I carry a separate wallet. I like the empty pocket in my pants and the simplicity of just having to take my phone with me.