WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An apparatus for processing a transaction, comprising:

an electronic processor programmed to execute a set of instructions;

a data storage device coupled to the processor; and

the set of instructions contained in the data storage device, wherein when the set of instructions are executed by the processor, the apparatus processes the transaction by

receiving an authorization request message for the transaction;

processing the authorization request message to obtain an account identifier for an account used to conduct the transaction, the account identifier not including information identifying an issuer for the account;

accessing a data storage element that includes information associating the account identifier with information identifying the issuer for the account;

obtaining the information identifying the issuer for the account from the data storage element;

providing the authorization request message to the issuer using the information identifying the issuer for the account obtained from the data storage element; and

receiving from the issuer for the account an authorization response message containing a decision from the issuer whether to approve or deny the transaction.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the account identifier is a payment account identifier comprising a string of numeric or alphanumeric data.

3. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the string of numeric or alphanumeric data corresponds to a payment account number or payment device identifier associated with a credit card, debit card, or smart card.

4. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the data storage element is a database and the account identifier is used to retrieve the information identifying the issuer for the account from the database.

5. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the data storage element is a table containing data and the account identifier is used to retrieve the information identifying the issuer for the account from the table.

6. A method for processing a transaction, comprising:

receiving an authorization request message for the transaction;

processing the authorization request message to obtain an account identifier for an account used to conduct the transaction, the account identifier not including information identifying an issuer for the account;

determining, based on the account identifier, an issuer for the account;

providing the authorization request message to the issuer using the information identifying the issuer for the account; and

receiving from the issuer for the account an authorization response message containing a decision from the issuer whether to approve or deny the transaction.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein determining, based on the account identifier, an issuer for the account further comprises:

accessing a data storage element that includes information associating the account identifier with information identifying the issuer for the account; and

obtaining the information identifying the issuer for the account from the data storage element.

8. The method of claim 6, wherein the account identifier is a string of numeric or alphanumeric data.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein the string of numeric or alphanumeric data corresponds to an account number or payment device identifier associated with a credit card, debit card, or smart card.

10. The method of claim 7, wherein the data storage element is a database and the account identifier is used to retrieve the information identifying the issuer for the account from the database.

11. The method of claim 7, wherein the data storage element is a table containing data and the account identifier is used to retrieve the information identifying the issuer for the account from the table.

12. A payment device for conducting a transaction, comprising:

a device substrate;

a payment device identifier visibly located on the device substrate, the payment device identifier not including information identifying an issuer for the payment device; and

a data storage region contained on or within the payment device, the data storage region further comprising

a first data storage sub-region containing data corresponding to the payment device identifier; and

a second data storage sub-region electronically isolated from the first data storage sub region and containing data identifying the issuer of the payment device.

13. The payment device of claim 12, wherein the data storage region is a magnetic stripe.

14. The payment device of claim 12, wherein the data storage region is located in an embedded chip.

15. The payment device of claim 13, wherein the first data storage sub-region is a first track of the magnetic stripe and the second data storage sub-region is a second data track of the magnetic stripe.

16. The payment device of claim 14, wherein the first data storage sub-region is a first memory location of the embedded chip and the second data storage sub-region is a second memory location of the embedded chip.

17. The payment device of claim 12, wherein the payment device identifier is a numeric or alphanumeric string.

18. The payment device of claim 14, further comprising a contactless interface operative to enable communication and data transfer between the payment device and a second device.

19. The payment device of claim 18, wherein the second device is a point of sale terminal.

20. The payment device of claim 18, wherein the second device is a device reader.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An apparatus for processing a transaction, comprising:

an electronic processor programmed to execute a set of instructions, wherein when the set of instructions are executed by the processor, the apparatus processes the transaction by:

receiving an authorization request message for the transaction that comprises an account identifier for an account used to conduct the transaction, the account identifier not including information identifying an issuer for the account, and an issuer identifier data string that is separate from the account identifier;

determining the issuer associated with the issuer identifier data string;

providing the authorization request message to the issuer, wherein the issuer identifier data string is used to route the authorization request message; and

receiving from the issuer for the account an authorization response message containing a decision from the issuer whether to approve or deny the transaction.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the account identifier is a payment account identifier comprising a string of numeric or alphanumeric data.

3. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the string of numeric or alphanumeric data corresponds to a payment account number or payment device identifier associated with a credit card, debit card, or smart card.

4. A method for processing a transaction, comprising:

receiving an authorization request message for the transaction, wherein the authorization request message comprises an account identifier for an account used to conduct the transaction, the account identifier not including information identifying an issuer for the account, and an issuer identifier data string that is separate from the account identifier;

determining, based on the issuer identifier data string, an issuer for the account;

providing the authorization request message to the issuer, wherein the issuer identifier data string is used to route the authorization request message; and

receiving from the issuer for the account an authorization response message containing a decision from the issuer whether to approve or deny the transaction.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein the account identifier is a string of numeric or alphanumeric data.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein the string of numeric or alphanumeric data corresponds to an account number or payment device identifier associated with a credit card, debit card, or smart card.

7. A payment device for conducting a transaction, comprising:

a device substrate;

a payment device identifier visibly located on the device substrate, the payment device identifier not including information identifying an issuer for the payment device; and

a data storage region contained on or within the payment device, the data storage region further comprising

a first data storage sub-region containing data corresponding to the payment device identifier; and

a second data storage sub-region electronically isolated from the first data storage sub region and containing data identifying the issuer of the payment device.

8. The payment device of claim 7, wherein the data storage region is a magnetic stripe.

9. The payment device of claim 7, wherein the data storage region is located in an embedded chip.

10. The payment device of claim 8, wherein the first data storage sub-region is a first track of the magnetic stripe and the second data storage sub-region is a second data track of the magnetic stripe.

11. The payment device of claim 9, wherein the first data storage sub-region is a first memory location of the embedded chip and the second data storage sub-region is a second memory location of the embedded chip.

12. The payment device of claim 7, wherein the payment device identifier is a numeric or alphanumeric string.

13. The payment device of claim 9, further comprising a contactless interface operative to enable communication and data transfer between the payment device and a second device.

14. The payment device of claim 13, wherein the second device is a point of sale terminal.

15. The payment device of claim 13, wherein the second device is a device reader.