VISA Acceptence Risk Standard (VARS) Reviews

As the payment acceptance ecosystem diversifies, to support an ever more increasing number of channels, the value chain becomes more complex with multiple stakeholders participating in the model.

Acquirers play a pivotal role in enabling an ever-growing cardholder base by facilitating access to global card payment networks. In turn acquirers must evidence compliance with VISA Acceptance Risk Standards (VARS): acquirers commit to applying appropriate due diligence and risk monitoring practices to ensure the suitability, integrity and legality of their acceptance channels.

Under the umbrella of the VISA Ecosystem Risk Programme, VARS provides stakeholders with a risk control framework to limit financial and reputational damage whilst protecting the integrity of the payment network. VISA acts as a regulatory body, providing oversight through its rules, regulations and suite of monitoring programmes. If a member of the Visa Network is identified as non-compliant or fails to implement an approved remediation plan, VISA may impose penalties.

The VARS set requirements which acquirers need to adhere to, to minimise risk to the community of payment stakeholders. The VARS is divided across three key risk types, Business, Operational and Legal and Regulatory. Overall, the onus is on the acquirers to evidence their readiness to meet the challenges of the payment acceptance model and to apply appropriate and proportionate risk remediation controls if they wish to contract external parties such as merchants, third party agents and ATM suppliers. The greater the perceived risk the more the card schemes will expect acquirers to demonstrate resilience and preparedness.

How AJC Can Help

AJC is a VISA approved and trusted independent VARS assessor. We specialise in examining and evaluating risk mitigating approaches, as well as guiding acquirers in their risk remediation journey, offering an unbiased view and realistic recommendations proportionate to the risk.

AJC operates globally from its UK headquarters, with a team of over 30 experienced consultants. Our experts cover regions including mainland Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the USA, and Australia and have the capability of engaging in various languages, such as French, German, and Russian, to best serve our clients.

How AJC Can Help cont.

Our ever-growing list of clients demonstrates our commitment and ability to tailor compliance and remediation solutions, catering to the specific demands of the high risk merchant sector. We take pride in our ability to adapt to the unique requirements of each client.

AJC became a VISA approved auditor in 2019.

AJC's VARS Audit Services

AJC holds a distinctive position among the limited number of VISA approved firms, offering valuable assistance and assurance to acquiring businesses via bespoke reviews and remediation approaches, whether they engage with merchants directly or through third-party agents or ATM providers.

Our VARS experts specialise in understanding the evolving risks faced by those in the payment ecosystem including Third Party agents and those in high-risk. Our consultants comprise of practitioners and former senior executives from the card schemes and prominent acquiring banks, ensuring the execution of each engagement is handled with the appropriate diligence and expertise.

Our process involves examining the acquirer's risk mitigating approach at every step of the life cycle of the merchant, agent or ATM supplier. AJC may undertake investigation and resolution of exception items and recommend a mitigation plan (if required) when a merchant and/or agent is operating out of acceptable bounds. Our expertise allows us to assess any areas where VISA compliance may not be met and define specific recommendations to address gaps in:

- Underwriting practices
- Transaction monitoring
- Settlement procedures
- Third party agent models
- High-Risk Merchants
- Policies, processes and procedures

Typically, our team engages directly over a period of five days to generate a comprehensive assessment report. The report provides a gap analysis and offers bespoke recommendations to remedy the challenges experienced by the acquirer.

Our approach includes:

- Gap Analysis and evaluation of the current status of operations, policies, processes, and procedures.
- Assessment of current operations against VISA rules, requirements, and regulations to pinpoint areas of non-compliance.
- Recommendations to address these gaps, ensuring adherence to card scheme network rules, and providing reporting to VISA (as required).
- Ongoing support for the implementation of corrective measures, including follow-up to ensure sustained compliance with the implemented corrections.

Our services are tailored to each individual business, aimed at delivering outstanding value and the appropriate, proportionate solution.