

Winning tickets

Not only are they usually the first point of contact for a music fan attending a concert or festival, but they collect almost all of the money that fuels the rest of the live music industry. It's not therefore surprising that competition in the sector is fierce and adoption of technology is like an arms race. Christopher Barrett reports

Ticketing for live music events is a hugely competitive market, with a report commissioned by industry umbrella organisation UK Music suggesting that there were 30.9 million attendees at live music events in Britain, with 27 million attending concerts and 3.9 million going to festivals.

Even if that was five million people going to six shows a year each, it's still a lot of tickets to manage and money to collect. Everything the artiste, promoter, manager, agent and production company gets comes from that ticket revenue and largely through the bank accounts of the companies that sell them.

It is thought there are around 50 primary ticketing agencies and services, all constantly vying for market share.

The sector is dominated by major players, with Live Nation Entertainment-owned Ticketmaster leading the pack, followed by Vivendi-owned See Tickets, followed by Ticketline Network and others such as Eventim, AEG's AXS, The Ticket Factory, Skiddle, Eventbrite and Gigantic. Meanwhile, Amazon, despite a recent setback, is impatiently waiting in the wings and determined to enter the market.

Many are members of the Society of Ticket Agents and Retailers (STAR), which has a code of conduct and best practice.

Just as ticket sales have largely moved from physical outlets to online, particularly mobile devices, so the tickets themselves have metamorphosed, and can now be purchased in an array of formats, ranging from print-at-home to mobile,

smart cards and wrist bands.

However, while many fans are content to have nothing more than a barcode to gain entry to a show, there are those who still cherish a physical souvenir ticket.

Social media has become a ubiquitous tool, not only for marketing events and engaging with customers more closely, but enabling the collection, management and use of customer data in previously unimagined ways.

Ticketmaster (TM) describes itself as the global market leader in live event ticketing, overseeing 480 million ticket transactions per year.

In the UK alone it has more than 410,000 followers on its social media sites, and is enjoying a strong year of sales, including its busiest ever day with the on-sale of Ed Sheeran's stadium shows.



The Winning Ticket (primary ticketing)

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With market share all important for both established companies and new entrants, competition is intense, with one particular global operator with a ticketing division buying-up promoters and events, and thereby market share. However, it seems interlopers Amazon and Sky have faced unexpected setbacks.

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Technology used by Ticketline



Andrew Parsons

"This summer was one of our biggest to date, we staffed 142 box offices and scanned more than three million tickets at events including BBC Radio 1 Big Weekend [cap. 25,000], BBC 6 Music Festival [various venues] and the Reading [90,000] and Leeds [80,000] festivals," says TM UK MD Andrew Parsons.

As the concert and festival ticketing business has grown in scale in the past decade, so has the threat from fraudsters and touts.

More than 21,000 people have reported falling victim to ticket fraud in the last three years, and more than £17m has been lost to ticket

"It is time to embrace integrated communications, using traditional and digital media, with insightful data targeting"

James Lee

fraudsters during that period, according to a report by ecommerce fraud prevention firm Riskified. It says festival passes are four times more likely to be bought using fraudulent means than tickets to sporting events.

Parsons says Ticketmaster combats the problems by implementing measures including IP blocking, paperless ticketing and CAPTCHA – a computer programme able to distinguish humans from machines. The company also recently introduced its Verified Fan programme to the UK, after a successful roll-out in the US.

This initiative involves ticket buyers pre-registering for tickets. TM then examines the customer's social media activity to identify if they are a genuine fan, before they are sent a code allowing them to purchase a ticket.

"Verified Fan takes professional resellers and bots [robotic software that harvest tickets for resale] out of the equation before tickets even go on sale thus minimising resale activity," says Parsons. ►

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"There is a huge growth opportunity for this kind of technology, as more and more artistes seek to take control of the on-sale experience for fans."

Power of technology

Last year See Tickets sold more than 10 million tickets for 20,000 events, ranging from bands playing their local pub to stadium tours. It is the sole ticketing system provider for Glastonbury (cap. 140,000).

Social media is playing an increasingly important role for all ticketing operators, not least for See. Its customers can log into the service via their Facebook account and share their purchases with followers on Facebook, Twitter or Google Plus.

Recently launched initiatives include Fan Share, which See CEO Rob Wilmshurst describes as an ambassador system enabling fans to use social media to become advocates for events and earn rewards by driving ticket sales via their own channels.



"Unlike other rep systems in the marketplace, Fan Share is fully integrated into the client's dashboard so they have full visibility over sales," says Wilmshurst. "More importantly, it's free of charge to the event organiser."

"We're fighting a war with touts on a daily basis and have invested significant resource into trying to combat the issue"

Chris Pile

In May, See launched Waiting List, which allows customers to sign-up for alerts when extra tickets or a new date for their favourite artiste gets added.

"The whole process is entirely automated and has proven an effective way to sell extra tickets quickly when they get added to the system," says Wilmshurst.

"Crucially, it also gives the promoter visibility of any untapped demand and can inform their decision making on any additional dates."

Digging the data

Ticketline works with promoters such as Kennedy Street Enterprises, whose founder Danny Betesh helped to set-up the company, and LCC Live, and numerous venues throughout the UK.

Among its festival clients this year were Bestival (35,000), Victorious (85,000), Kendal

Calling (25,000) and Green Man (20,000).

Head of marketing James Lee says demand from clients for a white label self-service solution led it to launch Ticketlight earlier this year; which enables event owners to gain full control of ticketing.

Lee says the Ticketlight platform features a three-step event creation tool, a custom venue seat map, live reporting and real-time scanning. It can also be used within an event's Facebook page to sell tickets.

"We offer personal service with bespoke ticketing solutions catering to the exact requirements of our clients," says business development director Colette Grufferty.

As with all leading ticketing operations, the collection, analysis and use of data is key for Tickeline. Lee says the focus is on the quality of data and using it to create targeted marketing campaigns with built-in flexibility so that external market forces can be reacted to.

"The days of using just



Colette Grufferty



James Lee



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one digital channel are over, especially email," says Lee. "It is time to embrace integrated communications, using traditional and digital media, with insightful data targeting."

Founded in the US in 2006, self-service ticketing platform Eventbrite processed around 150 million tickets worldwide last year. Among the many events it works with in the UK are WOMAD (40,000), Secret Solstice (12,000) and LeeFest (5,000).

"In the past 12 months we've supported hundreds of thousands of events in the UK and processed more than 15 million tickets," says Eventbrite's UK & Ireland marketing director Marino Fresch.

The company is able to produce tickets in an array of formats including print-at-home, mobile and smartwatch, RFID, and the recently launched Native Facebook tickets.

"Consumers discover tickets on Facebook, purchase them right there and then, receive the tickets in the Facebook app and by email," says Fresch. "The system sells twice as many tickets compared to a re-direct from Facebook to Eventbrite."

He says the company was a pioneer when it came to providing its customers with fan data.

"We gave organisers real-time access to their event and attendee data when other ticketing companies guarded this information like a state secret," Fresch adds.

"Our customers can seamlessly synch their data to in-house solutions via our open APIs. Over the past 10 years these open interfaces have triggered an ecosystem of more than 170 integrations organisers can use alongside our platform, including Salesforce, Mailchimp and Sched."

Eventim UK, the British arm of pan-Europe ticketing giant CTS Eventim, is overseen by chairman Nick Blackburn.

For the year to the end of August, Eventim UK's ticket sales were up 22 per cent on the same period the previous year, according to Blackburn.

New developments at the company include the launch of customer loyalty scheme FanBonus, where benefits include cash-back vouchers, access to pre-sales, competitions and other offers.

Blackburn says the robustness of its purchasing platform has also helped encourage customer loyalty.

"The biggest pressure on us in terms of demand, this year, was Adele's stadium shows;

we proved to be the most resilient in dealing with that level of demand," he says.

"People on Twitter were guiding Adele fans to Eventim because we were the only platform working normally throughout the on-sale period."

Despite the strength of its ticketing platform, Blackburn says Eventim is up against stiff competition. ►



Hand-held access



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"It is a very tough market, I have been doing this for a long time and it is harder than ever to grow the business, because the promoters with the inventory, such as Live Nation, want to use their own platforms," he says.

Independent spirit

Established in 2007, Gigantic worked with more than 5,000 events last year, and sold in excess of one million tickets.

"Last year we worked on the Ed Sheeran arena and stadium on sales, Tramlines [50,000], as well as Live Nation-promoted events such as Depeche Mode and Guns N Roses, both at the London Stadium [80,000], and British Summer Time [65,000] at Hyde Park, promoted by AEG Presents," says Gigantic founder Mark Gasson.

"We pride ourselves on our friendly approach to ticketing, and being independent we do not need to answer to shareholders."

Earlier this year Gigantic launched a new promoter dashboard, which is soon to be enhanced with the roll-out of an iOS app enabling mobile and print-at-home tickets to be scanned, using a mobile device, and automatically validated against a live database.

Gasson says Gigantic works hard to stamp out touts, with on-sales monitored by its onsite team for bots activity.

"We automatically check if a particular customer, card or postcode has been used multiple



Mark Gasson

times," he says. "If so, all their orders are cancelled. A partnership with [ethical resale platform] Twickets enables access to its inventory via our website and helps customers purchase tickets securely for sold out events at face value or less."

Arena strengths

The Ticket Factory (TTF) consumer sales and marketing director Chris Pile says it was the first agent to take a stand against profiteering in the secondary ticketing market by partnering with Twickets.

"We're fighting a war with touts on a daily basis and have invested significant resource into trying to combat the issue," he says.

TTF was set up in 2007 to service the box office needs of its owner, Birmingham's NEC Group, which runs the Arena Birmingham (15,892) and Genting Arena (15,685). Since then the operation has grown substantially and last year it sold 2.5 million tickets for 1,620 events.

Another company actively rewarding its customers, The Ticket Factory recently helped NEC launch its Superfans fanclub initiative.

"It is a first of its kind, a membership scheme for

UK Arenas offering regular customers benefits," says Pile.

The company is marking its 10th anniversary with a Cheers to 10 years marketing campaign that includes extensive social media activity.

"We are extremely active on social media, with more than 51,000 followers on Twitter and 111,000 on Facebook," says Pile.

Access checks

Since its launch in August 2011, AEG-owned AXS has been adopted at AEG venues worldwide including London's The O2 (21,000).

AXS vice-president of marketing and digital services Daniel Brown says it combats fraud and



Daniel Brown

touts via key strategies including its AXS Waiting Room; which sees purchasers join a virtual queue before tickets go on sale, enabling AXS to filter out suspect buyers.

It also has a team working around the clock to minimise fraudulent transactions, and works with ticket security consultant Reg Walker from The Iridium Consultancy, who looks at detailed data sets and advises AXS on aggressive buying and fraudulent activity.

"Given the fact millions of tickets are sold per annum for shows by the biggest artistes in the world, AXS is still able to maintain an extremely low level of fraud," says Brown.

Meanwhile, focusing more on indie promoters and venues across the country, WeGotTickets specialises in grass roots venues and events, and last year issued a million tickets for 50,000 events.

Founder Dave Newton says the company has been paperless since its inception in 2000.

"The shift to mobile has allowed us to introduce barcode access control without having to take the environmentally backward step of using print-at-home," he says.

Newton insists that by going paperless it has been better able to combat

fraud and nefarious secondary operators.

"Paperless tickets have an inbuilt level of control that paper tickets just can't achieve," he explains. "Ticket transfer/reallocation takes place in an environment that we, and the event organisers, can control and the tickets remain explicitly tied to the original purchaser or the person they've transferred the ticket to."

WeGotTickets' customer service won it a STAR award this year, something Newton is very proud of.

"That has been at the heart of our company from day one, going above and beyond to service the ever-changing needs of the events industry," he says. ►



Dave Newton

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One stop site

Combined what's on guide and primary ticket agency Skiddle enables consumers to peruse shows and purchase tickets on a single site.

Last year it sold 2.5 million tickets for 42,000 events, including the Elbow tour and Belladrum Tartan Heart Festival (16,500).

Since launching in 2001, Skiddle has been

responsible for a string of innovations, and says it was the first ticketing website to offer promoters online management of their events and later the first to develop a ticket shop app on Facebook.

More recently it has launched initiatives including Re:Sell, a platform that allows customers to return and resell tickets to others; and Cool:Off, giving customers 72 hours to get a refund on

their purchase should their plans change.

"We can verify that tickets being returned and resold are genuine — there is no risk of buying a fraudulent ticket," says Skiddle co-founder Ben Sebborn. "We also only allow resale at face value to prevent ticket tout-ing for profit."

Working behind the scenes with event organisers, promoters and venues on around 500 events per year, Devon-based Ticket Zone is a specialist box office and ticketing service with more than 35 years experience in the industry.

The company works with all formats including souvenir tickets, soft tickets, print-at-home, smart cards and wrist bands.

Chief operating officer Wayne Munday says the company has found a balance between respecting old technology while embracing the new.

"Paper tickets are not dead, we are seeing year-on-year growth on physical tickets," says Munday. "If someone is spending a lot of money on a show they expect a souvenir ticket, it is part and parcel of the experience."



Ben Sebborn



Wayne Munday

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"We also only allow resale at face value to prevent ticket touting for profit"

Ben Sebborn

Among Ticket Zone's clients are Disney on Ice producer Feld Entertainment and Strictly Come Dancing Live.

A recent enhancement to Ticket Zone's contact centre services is the introduction of social media customer services.

"We provide issue resolution through our clients' Facebook and Twitter channels. We are seeing great results," says Munday.

He says Ticket Zone's wide range of box office services sets it apart in a market that has become increasingly crowded since the rise of etickets.

"Mainstream event organisers and producers require a deeper stack of services to ensure the customer journey and experience is seamless — it is these services that many of the new pure play internet-based ticketing services cannot deliver," says Munday.

Groupon, a platform enabling users to purchase vouchers for discounted experiences and products, teamed up with Live Nation



The Ticket Factory's ticket machines

Entertainment in 2011 to launch live events platform Groupon Live.

"This year has been a really big one for us; we've been involved in promoting some fantastic shows including Rod Stewart, Bryan Adams and Micky Flanagan," says director Patrick Smit, who adds that the site has more than 17 million Facebook likes.

"We use social media not just to advertise our live offers but also as a way of engaging with fans to encourage them to try something new," says Smith.

"Our analysis shows that more than 75 per cent of customers who bought a voucher for a live performance with us wouldn't have attended the show if they hadn't first seen it on Groupon." ■



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