



FEATURES

SAVE | EMAIL | PRINT | MOST POPULAR | RSS XML | REPRINTS

Oct. 23, 2006



21st-Century TICKETING

MOBILE MANIA, PART TWO

The Global Promise of M-Ticketing

Mobile Mania, Part 2

by Doris Toumarkine

While mobile ticketing (m-ticketing) for movies has just been birthed in the U.S., thanks to Mobile Box Office's venture with Michigan-based theatre circuit Emagine Entertainment, territories overseas have had a head start. If Europe, Asia and Oceania are ahead, it has much to do with their early embrace of mobile devices, communication via texting, and a penchant for technological innovation.

Yet m-ticketing--which has proved itself a viable service for live music and sports events--is still very much a fledgling ticketing alternative for movie theatres. Still, players overseas are betting that the increased appeal and convenience of mobile devices and wireless communication and the fast-evolving technology will make m-ticketing for movies a reality in all major markets.

The bottom line is getting more bottoms into seats, so exhibitors from Australia to Japan to Turkey are giving m-ticketing a shot, and enablers, technology companies and manufacturers are hoping to make it a business. And, of course, the phone carriers--like exhibitors--love increased traffic and are doing what they can to boost m-ticketing for movies.

In Japan in 2004, NTT DoCoMo, that country's largest cell-phone carrier, followed pioneering and cell-crazed Korea with a paper-based ticketing service that allows filmgoers to purchase tickets on their cell-phones and use the confirmation barcodes returned to their phones for scanning at theatre kiosks that print out the tickets. According to Karen Lurker, corporate communications manager for NTT DoCoMo USA, Inc., DoCoMo subscribers use the carrier's i-mode(tm) mobile e-mail/Internet service on their handsets that allow--thanks to an IC chip--a contact-less interface with automatic ticket machines at all 32 Toho Cinemas theatres. The chip uses FeliCa technology developed by Sony Corporation.

Subscribers do m-ticketing by downloading and installing DoCoMo's "mobile vit" application (Toho Cinemas' term for this service) to phones via DoCoMo's i-mode wireless Internet. I-mode enables the purchases and the handset's IC chips allow for the storage of information.

At the Toho theatres, filmgoers wave their "Osaifu Keita" handsets (cell-phones, to those of us stateside) in front of automatic ticket machines that print tickets. Tickets can be purchased two days before and up to 20 minutes before show time. "Osaifu" means wallet and "Keitai" means mobile

RELATED ARTICLES

- Related Articles**
- ▶ MOBILE MANIA
 - ▶ HIGH NOON, LOW PRICES
 - ▶ Beyond "Doomsday"
 - ▶ View more related articles

Quick links: One-click access to topics in this article.

- People**
- Karen Lurker
 - Don Cameron
 - Donal Foley
 - Paul Christy
 - Murray Holdaway

- Companies**
- NTT Docomo Inc.
 - Mobile Box Office
 - Sony
 - Lusomundo SA
 - United Cinemas International

- Concepts**
- movie tickets
 - mobile phones
 - DoCoMo subscribers
 - mobile devices
 - movie tickets

- Categories**
- Tickets
 - Sporting events
 - Airlines
 - Text messaging
 - Skills

SUBSCRIBE



SUBSCRIBE TO THE MAGAZINE

FILM GUIDES

- BLUE SHEETS
- DISTRIBUTION GUIDE
- EQUIPMENT GUIDE
- EXHIBITION GUIDE

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

UPCOMING SHOW



Celebrating 15 Years!
June 26-29
Amsterdam RAI

VNU EXPO FILM GROUP SHOWEST

SHOWEAST

CINEASIA

US BOX OFFICE TOP 5

1. Borat \$26.45
2. The Santa Clause 3 \$19.50
3. Flushed Away \$18.81
4. Saw III \$14.80
5. The Departed \$7.72

Weekend of Nov. 3-5
Estimates in millions.

more box office from [Reporters.com](#)

handset, so it's a phone with wallet functions. As is a custom in Japan, DoCoMo is striving to enthrone its phones beyond mere product and embed its notion of "Keitai" as part of people's lifestyles.

According to Lurker, as of June 30, 2006, 13.8 million of the over 51 million DoCoMo subscribers own a FeliCa-enabled handset, suggesting the *potential* number of subscribers who can use their handsets to purchase movie tickets.

DoCoMo has no demographic profile of its "m-ticket" user, nor could it provide an estimate regarding how many people get their theatre tickets via mobile phones. But the communications giant does project that there will be 18 million FeliCa-enabled handsets in the hands of subscribers by next March, so that the capability of using handsets to purchase movie tickets will be available to many more DoCoMo subscribers.

According to Toho Cinemas, the chain had 2.8 million movie audience members in August 2006, of which one percent used their "mobile vit" service to purchase tickets. These filmgoers represented users from all of the wireless carriers in Japan, including DoCoMo, au and Vodafone.

DoCoMo's service also helps distributors and cinemas with their marketing efforts. Says Lurker, "Half of DoCoMo's 51 million subscriber base has migrated to our high-speed 3G [third-generation] network, so that they can see movie trailers or short movie clips via our 'i-motion' video distribution."

Other corners of the globe can brag about their paperless m-ticketing, which is largely, but not always, barcode-based. One of the leaders in the field is four-year-old Edinburgh, Scotland-based Mobiqa, which began its m-ticketing service--with its trademarked Mobi-tickets--for music and sports fans. Mobiqa, partnering with Auckland, New Zealand-based cinema software leader Vista Entertainment Solutions, has just begun to reach out to filmgoers and cinemas. Vista is integrating Mobiqa's mobile-ticketing technology into its Cinema Management System of software for theatres.

Thriving as a live-event ticket provider, Mobiqa made what one media outlet called "rock concert history" last June with their "new-fangled mobile-ticketing system" used for a Guns N Roses concert in London's Hammersmith Apollo. All that m-ticketing concert-goers had to do at the door was open the appropriate text message on their cell-phones, which had a barcode that was scanned for entry.

Currently, its m-ticketing business is primarily in Europe and the U.K., but Mobiqa also has a large presence in Australia and is expanding its technology to about 30 countries, including Brazil, Norway and parts of Africa.

Mobiqa group sales and marketing director Don Cameron explains that "right now, the technology mainly serves ticketing for live music and sports events, but Mobiqa, like other companies, is moving into cinemas."

And Mobiqa's deal with Vista obviously signals it means "film" business. Cameron says the pact, which will allow mobile barcode tickets to be sent directly from Vista, will begin this fall and may first bring movie Mobi-tickets to the Philippines and Australia.

The Mobi-ticket advantage, say Cameron and Murray Holdaway, chief executive and director of Vista Entertainment Solutions, is convenience to filmgoers, allowing them more time to visit concession stands and view trailers and pre-shows. Vista's cinema software is already installed in over 20 countries worldwide, including the USA, Australia, U.K., Hong Kong, India, Mexico, Germany and Kenya.

Mobiqa's services, which include both mobile ticketing and mobile coupons, arrive at mobile phones via text messages (whether SMS or the more complex MMS/WAP) that are standard barcodes. In the case of movie theatres, filmgoers who buy Mobi-tickets will bring their mobile devices to the proper entry points where their handsets--serving as tickets--are swiped and read by scanners.

Cameron believes that while the U.S. is behind in m-ticketing, we may have an edge. He explains: "The U.S. can skip the simple SMS texting, go to MMS/WAP and have the capacity to build in images and eventually videos." Mobiqa recently appointed Jim Barczak as its U.S. rep.

In Portugal, the Lusomundo circuit, which serves nine million patrons annually, has also made its move into paperless, "no-line" m-ticketing. The country's largest chain recently offered filmgoers the option of m-ticketing made possible by NeoMedia's Gavitec AG, the German-based scanner manufacturer. TopSolutions, a Portuguese solution provider, also participated in Lusomundo's m-ticketing launch.

Lisbon moviegoers get tickets through a cash-free, web-based transaction or from special call centers. Mobile tickets arrive on their cell devices via simple text SMS as a two-dimensional, data-matrix barcode that provides exact information needed (e.g., theatre location, film title, starting time, reserved seat number). Phones are swiped at theatre entry points and read by the Gavitec scanners, which verify the electronic tickets in seconds with Lusomundo's database.

According to Christian Steinbold, Gavitec COO and head of sales and marketing, the Lusomundo initiative is working out "very well, although we won't have reliable empiric results until later this year." In doing business

directly with cinema chains, Steinbold explains that Gavitec implements both software and hardware solutions and charges for their different models via leases or straightforward sales.

Gavitec is also working on cinema initiatives in the Netherlands and, reaching much further east, may be serving Turkish cinemas with installations of stationary kiosk terminals that will interface with filmgoers' cell-phones.

Beyond Gavitec, NeoMedia Technologies, Inc. COO and NeoMedia Mobile president Martin Corbus is also promising a new cell-phone application called qode(r) that could "affect the movie industry by changing the dynamics of how it relates to its customers." He elaborates: "Basically, qode will fast-track moviegoers to all the multi-media capability of the Internet--wherever and whenever they want to. They'll now be able to click on codes printed on movie posters and ads to see a trailer right then and there on their cell-phone. They'll also be able to check out reviews, buy movie tickets, even buy movie-related merchandise online--right in their hand."

Meanwhile in Ireland, Fonaticket(tm), developed by Icora Mobile Technologies, which develops products for mobile phones for both ticketing and marketing solutions, recently did a movie m-ticketing trial that's also barcode-based. Dublin-based Icora co-founder Donal Foley reiterates the goal of "removing the queuing hassle or that of paper-based online ticket acquisition or bringing credit cards to a machine in the theatre. Or swiping their mobiles at a machine and getting paper tickets."

Fonatickets is yet another process to eliminate paper. Not unimportantly, Foley notes that "Fonatickets will also be the only way theatres can get demographic information on their consumers."

For now, Fonatickets is only in the Dublin area, but Foley says they are planning to expand further in Ireland and into the U.K. "In the long term, we're looking at the States. But we're a very small company at the moment."

Fonatickets did its first test and promotion in August at the UCI Tallacht theatre in Tallacht, a suburb in south Dublin. No money was involved as this screening was a promotion, but the event filled all seats, was problem-free and worked very well, says Foley.

The process began with cinemagoers logging onto the fonaticket.com website, entering their mobile phone numbers and then receiving special text messages containing unique barcodes, which, in a final step, were scanned by ushers upon arrival at the cinema.

Says Foley: "All tickets were scanned perfectly with a scanner provided by a supplier. The aim was to provide convenience to cinemagoers, but also to show that m-ticketing could allow cinemas to cut down on staff and work at the box office." And paper.

The Fonatickets trial was a sell-out screening of *Miami Vice*, which, not coincidentally, starred Ireland's own Colin Farrell. The company did its deal with United Cinemas International (UCI) and United International Pictures, the film's distributor in Ireland and the U.K. The screening, which took place three days before the movie's commercial release, provided UCI with consumer feedback and demographic information. A second Fonatickets/UCI promotion, with another of their Dublin theatres, is imminent. Fonatickets is hoping to move on to a real ticketing implementation deal with UCI, beginning in Ireland, then London and Manchester and beyond to about 100 other cinemas in the U.K.

In another corner of the globe, Sydney-based bCODE, a mobile-ticketing solutions provider, announced last June its mobile movie tickets launch at Sydney's Manly Cinemas, a privately owned multi-screen complex. bCODE's m-ticketing solution is based on standard SMS text messaging and, like Fonaticket and others, is paperless. But the bCODE mobile ticket is not barcode-based. It involves a series of characters that are a mix of letter, numbers and familiar signs (like the "equal" sign) which are read off mobile-device displays and checked for authenticity.

Beyond simple text, bCODE's scanner (a touch-screen-enabled reader) is connected via broadband-wireless and can display multimedia (special promotions, movie trailers, etc.). Customers using bCODE mobile tickets take their cell-phones directly to the bCODE reader, located where traditional paper tickets are collected. The reader uses a camera and optical character recognition to read and decode the text-based SMS bCODE. Phones are scanned on the reader, which can display any form of information that the venue requires, including the bearer's and movie's name and a particular showtime and screen and seat number. Additionally, the bCODE readers can display logos, advertising and film clips.

Says marketing director Paul Christy, "Given that we know what the customer is going to see, and at what time and location, the redemption could also trigger other actions on the reader. For example, if I was going to see *Batman Begins*, the reader at the time of redemption could give me the option of buying the ring tone, screensaver, mobile game or even physical merchandise related to the movie. We call this "Trigger Point Marketing." Its benefits are that such offers are contextually relevant, timely and not intrusive."

Unlike m-ticketing trials, the bCODE and Manly launch, which involved such films as *Cars*, *The Break-up*, *The Da Vinci Code* and *Water*, was real-world and the m-tickets were paid for. Christy calls it "bCODE's first real implementation, although small. Manly was useful for us to see in a 'real-world' environment how users interact with our bCODE reader when redeeming their bCODE cinema tickets.

"Overall, bCODE received an excellent reception from all those who used it," he continues, adding that the launch "grabbed headlines" and gained the company a "world first for mobile cinema ticketing." Additionally, "we learned a few things on the implementation side of things in terms of logistics, education of the user and placement of the reader on site." bCODE, per Christy, is already in advanced phases of discussions and technology trials with all of Australia's cinema chains, including Village Roadshow.

In South Korea, reserving movie tickets via mobile phone is "well-established," according to Lee Kyung Min, assistant manager at leading mobile-software company Directmedia. A paperless ticket service was also recently introduced, he says. Min cites SK Communications, KTF and CJ-CGV among the leading companies in the mobile movie-ticket revolution there.

Many m-ticket players concede that there remain many obstacles. There's the challenge of convincing early movers that m-ticketing is worth embracing while business models are still emerging. There are also cultural differences that come into play. Says Rome-based filmmaker and avid film fan Michel Zampino, who grew up in both France and Italy: "Cell use is less popular here in Italy where we have a very social people, who like to interact with one another rather than commune with machines. The French are a little less social and more prone to be mobile users, so m-ticketing has a bigger chance there."

All these obstacles aside, Barcelona-based writer, consultant and acknowledged mobile expert Rudy De Waele, a Belgian who tracks mobile lifestyle trends and runs a popular blog on the subject (m-trends.org), sees "ease of use as the big breakthrough." This will happen, he predicts, with the adoption of QR codes, which are two-dimensional matrix barcodes already used in other industries. QR refers to the "quick response" that allows mobile content to be decoded at high speeds.

DeWaele also points to other cell-phone technologies that may impact moviegoers, such as Image Recognition Software, which "will create a whole new layer of interactivity related to movie discovery, like mobile trailers distributed by operators or MVNO networks, and the ability to reserve your theatre tickets instantly where and when you want." Newer

data-centric MVNO (Mobile Virtual Network Operator) implementations let non-wireless entities like Helio reach into wireless space cheaply.

DeWaele also believes it will be easy to interact directly with any other media. In his crystal ball, he sees "a movie ad somewhere in a magazine, a bus stop or outdoor advertising ad and I'll have the possibility to take a camera-phone picture of the poster or ad or logo, send that to a SMS/MMS number and receive a link to the interactive website where I can view the trailer, see in which theatres the movie is featured and order my tickets straight from my mobile phone."

M-ticketing, like its core of cell-phone users, is young, promising, adventurous and has a lot to learn. But m-ticketing capabilities may well deliver a big "wow" factor, suggesting the impact of another "infant" of a few years back-the Internet.

[SAVE](#) | [EMAIL](#) | [PRINT](#) | [MOST POPULAR](#) | [RSS](#) [XML](#) | [REPRINTS](#)

© 2006 VNU eMedia. All rights reserved. [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).
