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Phones signal the virtual demise of ticket touts

Barcode concert passes can be sent direct to your mobile

By **Juliette Garside**

They have been regular fixtures at every major cultural or sporting event of the last century, they have pocketed millions from fans desperate to get into concerts and matches that had sold out months earlier ... but today signals the start of a revolution that could see ticket touts consigned to history's dustbin.

A revolutionary new system being pioneered by a group of Scottish firms, which sends a ticket barcode to your mobile phone, is being tested on a Primal Scream concert at Edinburgh's Corn Exchange on December 16. If it works it could mean the death-knell for paper tickets. Using the m-ticket system, those wanting tickets for Primal Scream will have the option of buying the new bar code tickets from a website set up for the promoter, Regular Music.

The site, which went live yesterday, works like an online shop, with customers being asked to submit their name, address, credit card and mobile phone numbers. Their credit details will be immediately checked, and the barcode ticket issued as a picture message to their mobile.

When fans arrive at the concert, doormen will ask to see the barcode on their phone. Using a scanner plugged into a PC, which in turn is linked to the ticketing agency's database via the internet, the barcode ticket will be scanned. The tickets can't be duplicated by forwarding them to other phones, because the computer will only accept one of each.

And the system eliminates touts because the doormen will check, visually rather than by computer, that the barcode message has been sent directly from the ticketing agency. This means touts cannot buy a stock of barcode tickets and forward them on to their customers.

The system allows fans to buy more than one ticket at a time from the site. They can either arrange for all the tickets to be sent to one phone, in which case everyone whose ticket is on that phone has to enter the venue together, or they can input a different mobile number for each ticket at the point of sale.

There are a few potential glitches. The ticketing data base could crash, leaving doormen unable to check whether barcodes have been duplicated. And some models of mobile, including the fairly standard Nokia 5110, can't receive picture messages.

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The scanner at the venue could fail, just as they often do at the super market. If this happens the barcode number, which runs alongside the image, will have to be typed in by hand.

There is one big advantage for fans. Unlike paper tickets, bar codes, if lost, can be replaced. If a customer has their phone stolen or accidentally deletes the barcode message, they can return to the website or call a helpline, and in exchange for an administration fee of £1 and the phone, e-mail and credit details they used to buy the original ticket, they will be issued with a replacement. Late availability tickets can be promoted via mobile messaging, with seats being sold right up until the last minute.

There are advantages for the venue and ticketing agency too. A picture message costs less than printing and posting a paper ticket. And the venue can tighten up on health and safety by automatically counting people as they enter.

The Primal Scream barcode trial has been set up by four Edinburgh companies. Mobile phone technology firm Mobiqua has developed and owns the barcode concept. Junior Jet Club has designed the website, and the database and e-commerce technology and server for operating the system has been supplied by MercuryTide.

Mobiqua director Ronnie Forbes is hoping to sell on the concept to some of the UK's largest ticketing agencies.

'In the transitional phase not everybody is going to be comfortable with having a ticket on their mobile. It is directed at the mobile generation. But in due course it could be used for theatre, sports events, you name it.'

David McBride of Regular Music said: 'Instant delivery of m-ticket means it will address many of the issues we face with queues, security and the admin that surrounds the paper ticket.'

'Most importantly, because the barcode is unique, it will reduce the problem we have with ticket touts. As the allocation of paper tickets is reduced, I don't see how the touts can stay in business. The fan will no longer be exploited.'



balance careers and obligations to friends and family

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Barcode concert passes can be sent direct to your mobile

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