



Phones are just the ticket

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ROCK music fans attending a concert in Edinburgh last week were the first to use a mobile phone technology that will make waiting or queuing for concert tickets a thing of the past.

They were able to obtain tickets for the Primal Scream concert at the Corn Exchange in the form of a barcode sent directly to their phones. Door staff read the message using a scanning device similar to that used at supermarket checkouts.

Ticketing companies and promoters were impressed by the m-ticket system, which has widespread potential and could put touts and forgers out of business.

The system for the concert was pulled together by an alliance of Scottish firms led by mobile technology specialist **Mobiqa**. It worked with MercuryTide, which provided an online purchasing system, concert promoter Regular Music, and web design company Junior Jet Club.

Computer scientist Ronnie Forbes, whose Edinburgh-based company **Mobiqa** is backed by a consortium of business angels, is now looking to extend the technology to other ticket-based

events and operations.

Based on standard short messaging system (SMS) technology, it could be used by cinema chains, sports stadiums, airlines, lotteries, and for providing proof of delivery for courier services. It might also be used for big events such as the Edinburgh Festival or Hogmanay party.

He said that if such a system had been used for last week's football cup-tie between Aston Villa and Liverpool, the chaos that held up the game for 80 minutes could have been avoided.

"Our technology would have enabled the tickets to be delivered instantly, and could have provided a solution to the queues and delays," he said.

Forbes, 37, is in the process of patenting the technology he developed after the collapse in May of MobileActive, a wireless marketing company for whom he was technical director.

"There is a global opportunity here, and there has been a lot of interest," he said. "There are hundreds of millions of tickets sold for all kinds of events. We are talking to a number of ticketing agencies and looking at other applications such as cinemas and shopping coupons. We have also been speaking to Camelot."

Forbes is appointing a commercial director next month who will be helping take the technology into Europe and the United States. The instant delivery of the m-ticket overcomes problems of postal delays and security associated with paper tickets. It reduces costs to ticketing distributors and allows for unsold seats to be promoted later and more easily.

David McBride, a concert promoter at Regular Music, said: "Most importantly, because the bar-code is unique and is sent to mobile phones, it will reduce the problem we have with ticket touts."

A small percentage of m-tickets were made available for Monday's event in order to test the system. But it went so smoothly that the allocation at the next event will be stepped up.

Forbes said: "We were pleased to see how people accepted it and how they saw it as a cool thing to do. Representatives of ticketing agencies were there watching what was going on."

Bruce Findlay, former manager of Simple Minds, admitted he was sceptical of the technology until he saw it in action.

"I was really impressed. I am not a big fan of technology and mobile phones drive me insane," he said, "but I sat at the door watching people using it and it was absolutely brilliant. It will take away a lot of the hassle for a lot of people. I have been a victim of ticket touts and this is a great innovation.

"A lot of youngsters have mobile phones, and to them this will become the accepted way of buying tickets. It will be a great move forward for the industry because more people are going to concerts nowadays, so more tickets have to be distributed."

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