

Answering Call for Phone Tickets

By Reuters

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LOS ANGELES -- Can you hear me now? RepeatSeat hopes so, as it introduces cell-phone tickets to U.S. event-goers this year.

Teaming up with fellow ticketing firm U.K.-based Mobiqa, RepeatSeat will be the first company to offer the service to North American patrons, as early as May. The 4-year-old, Alberta, Canada-based RepeatSeat is hoping the alliance will attract more venues to its ticketing services.

"If you go out to dinner with someone and ask, 'What do you want to do tonight?' you can pull out the cell phone, log on to a venue's website and get the tickets sent to you while you're getting dessert," RepeatSeat president and CEO George Davidson says.

RepeatSeat's wireless technology, Davidson says, is compatible with nearly all current cell-phone models from such companies as Nokia, Ericsson, Samsung and Sony.

Customers can order tickets by either phoning a RepeatSeat client's box office or logging on to the venue's website. Within 30 seconds of completing the order, a customer receives a bar-code-encrypted ticket on their cell phone. At the venue, scanners read the ticket through the

phone's screen. The company will charge a convenience fee of \$1 per cell ticket.

The company has signed up two venues per week, on average, during the past two years. Its roster includes about 200 buildings, the majority of which are performing-arts centers.

RepeatSeat hopes the mobile innovation will rope in arena-size venues, allowing it to better compete with established companies like Ticketmaster.

"We started out with smaller business, but we are capable of ticketing any type of venue that is out there," RepeatSeat executive VP Robert Christianson says.

During the past year, wireless ticketing technology has spread throughout Europe, where cell systems are more advanced than in the United States. Having rolled out its mobile technology last August, Mobiqa now sells 20 percent of its tickets to people's cell phones.

Mobiqa is confident that Americans will welcome the opportunity to use cell tickets.

"It is true that Americans do not use cell phones as extensively as in other areas of the world," Mobiqa director Richard Phillips says. "However, the text-messaging market is exploding now in the U.S. Print-at-home is, of course, very popular. We see cell-phone ticketing as being the natural next step, as it eliminates all

the hassle associated with paper." David Goldberg, executive VP of strategy and business development at Ticketmaster, agrees the prospect of scrapping paper will draw customers. He says Ticketmaster has stepped up discussions with wireless companies to provide its clients with cell-phone capabilities soon.

Because of Americans' relatively slow acceptance of mobile technology, Goldberg says, no Ticketmaster venue clients are clamoring for the technology.

"But it's inevitable that we'll be doing these things in some fashion," he says, noting that consumers' quick adoption of Ticketmaster's print-at-home technology indicates "we'll probably get to that point on wireless as well."

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