

12:00 - 13:30

NEW TECHNOLOGY-JUST THE TICKET?



Peter Tudor

(Room 1, Lower Ground Floor, Royal Garden]

Chairman:

- **Peter Tudor** (Wembley Arena, UK)

Tickets are perishable like lettuces, promoters ought to use **eBay** themselves, and the UK seems to be more prone to ticket abuse than many other European countries. These were among some of the more unusual sentiments expressed at the **ILMC** session on ticketing this year.

With a panel drawn from all aspects of the touring industry, and some lively contributions from the floor, the session covered the full range of issues currently affecting the way our customers are currently accessing gigs.

Gigi Dryer's Aloud.com 'Emap's ticketing website' was the first interactive UK ticket shop in 1997, and relaunched in 2003 with an editorially rich site that promotes tickets through content, engaging with fans as well as providing crossover to **Emap** brands from **Kerrang** to **Smash Hits**.

From her research **Gigi** has established that consumers will be using technology more and more ' and have higher expectations of the service they want to receive. Technology has made purchasing a ticket easier, and digital media and multi-channel choices need to be embraced by all concerned.

But if traditional paper tickets are not quite a thing of the past, **Ronnie Forbes** of **Mobiqa** was keen to expound the virtues of the use of mobile phones as the ticket of the future. At the point of purchase, the customer elects to have the mobi-ticket sent to their mobile, with a unique bar code which - on arrival at the gig - gives access to the venue. This is not just a future option ' events from Scotland to Australia have already incorporated the **Mobiqa** technology as another option for their customers.

Print@Home ticketing already in operation in a number of territories.

Bernard Laufer of **DEAG** explained that at the point of purchase the customer is given the option of choosing to download their ticket onto a sheet of A4 from their own printer. As well as the unique bar code and the relevant seating information, the page can include advertising, offers, and venue information.

But is this what the fans want? **Guido Karp** is not so sure. He's has been shifting large volumes of tickets through his **Fans United** business by making the ticket buying process more exciting with added extras to incentivise the customers. He also questions what happens when your mobile dies/changes/is stolen or when you want to buy the ticket as a present for someone else?

Souvenir tickets generate the excitement of gig-going from the moment of purchase ' they may be less convenient but they are more exciting for the fans. As an example, **Guido** cited the recent **Ramstein** tour for which **Fans United** shifted some 177,000 tickets.

On the other hand, as **Ronnie** pointed out, the new generation of mobile phones will allow the vendor to add in extras such as music video streaming, along with other options like vouchers and special offer promotions, creating that excitement.

The key to all of this is the venue installing the access control equipment, having confidence that it will be secure and fraud proof, and extending the customer dialogue beyond just providing seat and row number. But we seem to need convincing: very few of the audience had started to use these new technologies, and there was some scepticism in the room about the security of the new options, in particular the ease with which a print@home ticket might be photocopied.

The challenge of the new technologies is ensuring that fraud is eliminated, and given the ongoing issues of etouting across Europe, any advances that can sort this out would be welcome.

Pete Wilson of UK promoter **3A Entertainment** has certainly had some problems with the new

etouts' operating on the web. Within 24 hours of his **Kylie** tour going on sale there were hundreds of tickets on **eBay**, and he's been working with the venues to cancel/refund over 12,000 tickets. As he pointed out, it's not just the occasional ticket holder doing this *'there are multiple purchasers at work, and the touts are using eBay'* either to shift tickets themselves or to get access to tickets being sold.

An outsider might look at this and query why we are not simply happy to be selling tickets. But **Geoff Huckstep** from **Nottingham Arena** explained the aftermath of the issues arising from etouting. Non-existent tickets, mis-sold tickets, marked-up tickets are all problems for audiences, and venue staff get the brunt of it on the night. **Geoff** warned that one bad experience can deter people from coming to future shows: the more people are ripped off, the less they can afford in future.

The **National Arenas Association** is calling for more education for customers, positive information. As **Bernard** emphasized, education is also the key for the new technologies 'as customers need to know that simply copying bar codes is no guarantee of accessing the gig. **Flemming Schmidt** of **CCE/DKB Motor** agreed that *'having been reluctant to embrace the print@home opportunity'* he was now convinced that this was the way forward.

Touting in the UK is legal for theatre/music tickets, but not for football tickets. The laws vary across Europe. **Flemming** explained that it is illegal to sell a ticket for more than face value in Denmark, but that it happens nonetheless. He is lobbying for the law to be tightened, and is keen on using technology to make the ticket more personalized to the purchaser so that they cannot be sold on. But the other problem is that some of these rogue agents are not registered in the country in which they selling. So EU legislation may be the key.

eBay is less of an issue in Europe at the moment, but is growing. One of the promoters present disclosed that he had sold some tickets for his own gigs on **eBay** complete with a modest mark up though no one else in the room was prepared to admit to this!

A new development in auction sites is already in use in the US. **Paul La Fontaine** of **Ticketmaster** explained that **Ticketmaster's** variable pricing model' has already proved successful, allowing the customer to set the price but with the revenue going to the talent/promoter rather than the tout. **Ticketmaster** expect to introduce it in Europe soon.

So are we charging too little for tickets? Does etouting demonstrate what ticket prices should be? Or are tickets so expensive that people need to subsidize their trip to see the show by buying more? And do we therefore risk reducing our audience by cracking down on them?

And if we refunded tickets would this eliminate the problem? Are we encouraging the customer to put tickets up for auction? Can this work for the live entertainment industry, where the key Box Office objective is usually to sell out as quickly as possible. If a show isn't sold out, then promoters are naturally reluctant to refund in the hope of reselling.

Ticketmaster have exchange/refund websites mainly for sports events, where face-value reselling happens.

Jonathan Browne is working with the UK's **Concert Promoters Association** and the **NAA** to look at some of these issues following the recent **OFT** report. He explained that **STAR** (the UK's **Society of Ticket Agents and Retailers**) was established to provide consumer information on the whole ticket buying process and most legitimate agents are members. The **Office of Fair Trading** report had been positive about the primary market, but raised concerns over ticket touts. However, the **OFT** aims to use existing legislation to combat the problem. **Paul Sergeant**, of the **Millennium Stadium** believes that the current law is simply not tight enough, as he has learned from the multiple **eBay** sellers for the Tsunami benefit concert in Cardiff this year.

The **ILMC** session raised lots of questions, and we can hopefully follow up with some of the answers in 2006. Technology may be the key to the current problems - but we need to get it installed, get the customers educated for wise buying, and get some legislation in place to enforce it all.

Peter Tudor (National Arenas Association)