

## **A Report from the Billboard Touring Conference: Managing the Keys to the Kingdom (and Whose Kingdom is it Anyway?)**

**By Carla Varriale**

On November 3, 2010, I had the privilege of moderating “Ticketing: Managing the Keys to the Kingdom” at Billboard Magazine’s 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Touring Conference in New York. The ticketing panel, which tends to be contentious – particularly with regard to the advent of paperless ticketing and the role of the primary versus the secondary markets, was uncharacteristically calm this year. The panel seemed united in interest with regard to discussing ways to improve the customer experience and the ability to sell more tickets to live music and other events (a non-essential luxury item) in a soft economy.

The panelists, made up of nationally recognized ticketing executives including Nathan Hubbard of Ticketmaster, Chris Tsakalakis, President of Stub Hub, Jeff Kreinik, Vice President of Marketing of Front Gate Tickets, David Butler, President of Paciolan, Lynsie Camuso, President of ShowClix and David Goldberg, an “independent ticketing consultant” who has had a long history in the e-commerce and the ticketing industries, opined on topical challenges in the ticketing industry, such as setting prices, the presence of service fees, the need for transparency to the customer and the effect of the recession on the live music business, particularly with respect to the prospect of “distressed” inventory.

Given the challenge of the soft economy, the panel focused on opportunities to enhance ticket sales presented by social media such as Facebook and Twitter and the use of mobile technology. According to the panel, harnessing social networking and mobile technology is essential, particularly in order to reach the important under age 30 demographic. The panel identified solutions to benefit artists, venues and promoters (and, presumably, ticket sellers). The ability to monetize social networking and mobile technology were things they all agreed that the ticketing industry had barely “scratched the surface” of. The panelists concurred that there was still more “headroom” to be explored. One technological tool that the panel embraced is based upon technology that facilitated “mining” customer data from the ticketing transaction, via “cookies.” A “cookie” is a small amount of data, including an anonymous unique identifier that is sent to a browser from a website's computer that is then stored on the host computer's hard drive. Simply put, and despite their seemingly cute name, "cookies" are used to collect and compile certain statistical data that can then be used to track the movements of consumers and to profile them. Based upon the information gathered and the profile created, the critical data can be used facilitate targeted marketing based upon the consumer’s prior purchases.

With respect to questions of whether obtaining such data from customers who made online ticketing purchases was problematic based on privacy grounds (and whether it was consistent with the panel’s consumer conscious theme this year), and whether the artist, the venue or the promoter “owned” that data, the panel demurred. Some panelists, however, noted that consent is obtained and that some sites allow customers to create their own profile. This begs the question of whether this data, arguably “the keys to the kingdom” as much as the ticket itself, is owned by the artist, venue, promoter, ticketing company or someone else. Who can sell, share or retain that valuable information is likely to be a topic of further discussion for the ticketing industry.