

# Barcodes Rock 'n' Tickets Roll

*Barcodes helped an idealistic band bypass the 800-pound gorilla of ticket-brokering. In a novel application, the technology combines inventory and account management to ban counterfeit and scalped tickets from rock concerts.*

By Joni Blecher

**B**arcodes are certainly not new. They're in supermarkets, video stores and libraries. They're perfect for inventory and management of huge amounts of items.

It shouldn't be surprising that a socially conscious band, known to the alternative rock music world as Pearl Jam, made barcodes work for them — and for their conscience.

Pearl Jam is a band that sticks to their convictions. Fans wanted Pearl Jam to go on tour, but Pearl Jam didn't want to do business with the colossal event tикeter Ticketmaster.

They also wanted everyone to have an equal opportunity to purchase tickets and eliminate scalpers and counterfeit tickets.

To handle the logistics, Pearl Jam teamed up with Fillmore Mercantile, a private merchant banking company. It was a big order, but Fillmore Mercantile was up to the task.

One of Fillmore Mercantile's subsidiaries is FT & T Ticketing, a company that specializes in providing barcode solutions for ticketed events. Pearl Jam fans contacted FT & T to buy tickets for the concert.

FT & T Ticketing uses barcodes to personalize tickets for each individual. Included in the barcode is a security code to ensure the right person is using



the right ticket. This helps prevent scalpers from duplicating tickets and selling them at outrageous prices. It saves all involved a lot of time and money.

Though the tickets were sold on the phone through FT & T, they could also be purchased through the Internet at [www.snafzone.com](http://www.snafzone.com). However, sticking to Pearl Jam's fairness creed, tickets were available only by phone on the initial day of the sale. After all, not

everyone has access to the Internet, and Pearl Jam didn't want to restrict their concerts to the Internet elite.

Tickets only became available on the Internet after the first sales were completed and extra tickets became available.

## THE HOT TICKET

The way it works is simple. When someone calls to purchase a ticket, an account is opened for them. Even if they don't actually get to buy tickets, they still have an account opened. Those people are put on a waiting list. The account information includes different variables: name, address, phone number and credit card information.

Pearl Jam wanted people purchasing tickets to partake in a fair and equal lottery system. Fillmore used an IVR (Interactive Voice Response) system to collect concert reservations. They set up about 4,000 telephone trunk lines. The reservation request was recorded and then downloaded into the account system. There, preferences were determined and tickets were assigned on a first-come, first-served basis.

The system Fillmore set up combined the benefits of inventory and account management systems. For

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example, if a credit card (account information) was declined or you didn't complete payment for the tickets (your check bounced), those tickets (namely, the inventory) would still be available. At any time, Fillmore knew how many tickets were available and how many people still wanted tickets.

Other parameters were set up as well. At the band's request, each caller could only purchase four tickets. An account was closed once four tickets were ordered and that account could not be allotted any more tickets.

The inventory was tracked using barcodes. Every seat had a barcode number. As seats were assigned, the seat and customer information was encrypted into a barcode sequence. Fillmore could always tell seat assignments from either the customer account or the seat location.

The barcodes were printed on each ticket. The barcodes also helped eliminate scalpers, counterfeit tickets

and people who didn't pay for their tickets. At any moment, even right up to the performance, the ticket could become invalid. The system worked very much like these fancy new hotel room keys that change with every new room occupant.

Let's say you ordered a ticket. Paid for it with a check. But the check bounced. And you never made good on the check. Your ticket wasn't gonna get you in the concert. And neither were your good looks.

Fillmore Mercantile was ready for illegal barcodes. After all, Pearl Jam tickets are a hot commodity.

They wrote an algorithm that checked to see if there were duplicate barcodes or if the barcode was valid in the database.

This algorithm could differentiate between bad and live tickets. In fact, it worked so well that approximately 2,000 patrons who held counterfeit or unpaid tickets were stopped at the

door and turned away.

At the show, tickets were swiped through barcode-reading machines that the people admitting fans into the concert wore on belts around their waist. The barcode reader gave a signal when the ticket was valid.

This system let FT & T keep track of where people sat at the show — or even if they didn't attend it at all. The method provided other valuable information as well, like how often fans purchased tickets.

Customer usage tracking is important, because you need to understand who your customers are, how often they purchase from you and their preferences. It helps socially responsible bands like Pearl Jam understand what their customers are interested in and their economic bottom line.

Next time you or anyone you know needs to stage a complex multicity megaevent, spread some of Pearl Jam's barcode wisdom. ☐