

**Roger Tomlinson, The Ticketing Institute and
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***Social influence: technology trends that encourage social
attendance***

Roger Tomlinson is an independent management and marketing consultant, working in the arts and entertainment sector internationally. He is a leading expert on integrated solutions and developing on-line technologies for ticketing and marketing and is particularly interested in the way digital technologies are changing how people can relate to arts organisations and how they can develop audiences. He produces www.TheTicketingInstitute.com the information website and produces his blog website www.brandinyourhand.ning.com. Books include *Full House; turning data into audiences*, *Aforo Completo* (in Spanish), *Boxing Clever*, *Developing and managing a website* as well as the Box Office Marketing Guides, *JobWatch* (about equal opportunities recruitment), and the *Data Protection Guide*. He regularly manages the procurement process for customer-facing technologies and works with arts organisations on the development of effective websites.

Ron Evans is a consumer psychologist and principal consultant at Group of Minds in San Jose, CA, USA. He is a leading developer and researcher at the intersection of culture and technology with a primary interest in exploring emerging technologies and their impact on consumer psychology/arts patron decision making, including the social influence of donation and ticket purchasing behaviour. He is an affiliate member of both the American Psychological Association and the Society for Consumer Psychology, and is a frequent speaker at conferences such as the National Arts Marketing Project (NAMPP), the Association for Performing Arts Service Organizations (APASO), and the National Guild for Community Arts Education.

This seminar looked at how our marketing, ticketing strategies and functionality are developing to respond to the way people use online connections when planning their social lives.

'The most popular breakout session of the whole conference'

Tim Wood chair: welcome to *'the most popular breakout session of the whole conference'* as the slide says.

Roger Tomlinson: I keep telling Ron that it's simply this is the only session which has capacity. All the others are full.

Ron Evans: No, it's because of me – I've come a long way and wanted to give me a good welcome. Isn't that right?

Delegates: Yes! [Ron had previously given them chocolate]

TW: Welcome social attenders. We have a content-rich session for you now.

RT: Unusually, for an AMA conference, we are doing this live over the net using 'Google Presenter' and you know those slides you wanted at the start to introduce GroupOfMinds – I just edited them out.

RE: That's okay Roger because I've taken out the 26 slides about The Ticketing Institute.

We're here to talk about social influence. What makes people choose to do things? You're going to go to a show. What are the things you go through in your mind which will make you decide to go? And can technology help that or is it hurting it or is technology not having an effect yet?

We will look at the purchase process, review approaches to ticketing, share a couple of case studies and look into the future.

What is social influence?

Emotions, opinions, behaviours; all these things are affected by others. When I come to the UK I never cross the street on my own, I always wait for someone else to cross the road and then I follow them. Even though I look left and right I cue off what others are doing.

There's a mobile food truck phenomenon in the USA and in San Jose they all come together, they let people know about it on Twitter – and when I go I always choose the longest line because they've been before and probably know the best one.

In 1958, Harvard psychologist, Herbert Kelman identified three broad varieties of social influence.

- Compliance is when people appear to agree with others, but actually keep their dissenting opinions private.
- Identification is when people are influenced by someone who is liked and respected, such as a famous celebrity.
- Internalisation is when people accept a belief or behaviour and agree both publicly and privately.

(Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_influence)

Statistics show that social media has an increasing influence on buying decisions. Last year, 68 percent of Americans said that social networks did not impact their buying decisions, according to BlogWorld New York. But this year, only 36 percent said that social networks had no influence on purchases. We're used to the idea of looking at the reviews on Amazon before deciding to buy.

One respondent said '*Facebook provides a framework for personal endorsements, which have influenced my purchases, but not the ads from Facebook itself.*'

RT: There is some interesting research to show that at the moment, Facebook has a challenge, because there's a significant number of users regard it as an extremely valuable tool but are reluctant to engage with the commercial opportunities because they don't trust what will happen to their personal information. One of the most worrying things is that the vast majority of Facebook users have not used their privacy settings to control what can be accessed and seen.

RE: Facebook hasn't helped us with this has it? Because they change it often, in the middle of the night, don't tell you etc.

In general, we're 'lemming like'. We don't want to stick out. Sometimes it's cultural or it could be individual. People often conform from a desire for security within a group, typically a group of a similar age, culture, religion or educational status.

In the nineteenth century at Opera they started using paid applause people (RT: 'the clacks'). They would be paid to sit in the front row and stand up and applaud and then others would feel they had to follow them because they wanted to conform.

Unwillingness to conform carries the risk of social rejection. This isn't always good but it's a fact of life.

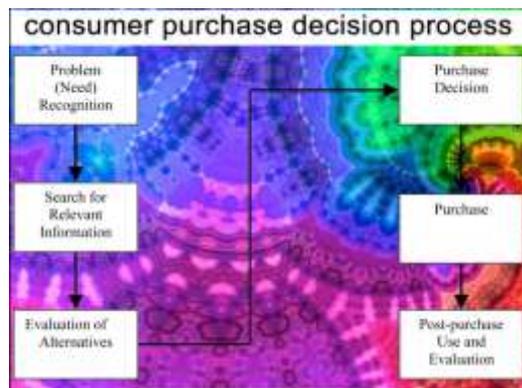
Validation is a strong element of conformity, confirming that what others are doing is good.

RT: Validation is interesting given what we're talking about this afternoon. If you go out to an event, it used to be that the only people who would know would be the people we went with or are directly connected to. But now, we post what we are going to see on Facebook or Twitter and it is 'virally exposed'. One venue director finds that if she posts something saying what she is going to there is an immediate flurry of bookings. There is a great deal of choice and people want validation from someone they trust about what is worth attending.

Alan Brown says these people are very important because they are the initiators who are bringing perhaps 80% of the audience into the auditorium. They're doing the old fashioned thing of word-of-mouth. We have some great research from the Arts Council in the 1990s which shows that word-of-mouth happens before the event, not after it – that's what most word-of-mouth is actually about.

Eventbrite has found, through its own research, that 40% of sharing through Facebook occurs pre-purchase. The other 60% of sharing occurs on the order confirmation page – saying 'I've bought this' and leaving a link. Eventbrite found from this analysis that it's ten times more effective for someone to have said that they have already purchased it compared to people saying they are thinking about going. This means in the technology we need to get the ability to close the sale as close as possible to the sharing process.

RE: Why do you share anything on Facebook? It's because we want people to know how cool we are, even if it's subtle and we aren't completely aware of it.



This is a cool slide and it's special for Brighton as it's nice and psychedelic.

Note that bottom right box – something we don't spend much time on in the arts. Wouldn't it be great if we gave people an affirmation of what they have decided?

Let's have a look at this process from an arts perspective.

[Ron then took the microphone down into the audience to discuss the following example]

'John the patron' is looking for an emotional experience this weekend.

- What is his problem/need? *Celebrate an occasion, Grandmother's 80th birthday and she wants to go out and do something.*
- How will he search for information? *Google, Time Out, What's On sites*
- What kind of alternatives is he likely to consider? *Stay at home and play Poker, go to a sporting event, go to the Brighton Dome.*
- What influences his decision to buy? *How much money he might win at Poker*
- How will he feel good about what he has purchased? *This is the best 80th birthday I've ever had – I hope to be around for my 81st.*

So I want you to think about when you have gone through this process and also to come up with something the company could have done to augment the effectiveness of any part of the cycle.

[Delegates worked in pairs, discussing this question]

Delegate: *I recently bought a pair of sunglasses. I went into three shops. In the first two the assistants didn't seem to know very much or have all the information. In the third one, the assistant was great – she knew everything about sunglasses and told me which ones suited me. I bought them there and then. I might have been able to go off and get them from Amazon £20 cheaper but I valued that level of information. And we were just relating that to our box office systems, in that when people buy online they like to get to the stage where they have all the information and then they decide to buy then or talk to the friends, but if they have to log in it's a big barrier.*

Delegate: *We had a similar conversation about buying a car – my first ever. I got really caught up in the evaluation of all the options which went on for ever and in the end I bought one from my friend.*

Delegate: *I had a similar experience with a bike and I wasn't sure I could face looking at all the alternatives. Then my friend offered me one and I bought it.*

RE: In the arts context that might be about being in the right place at the right time.

RT: Very often people have too much choice. There's the 'Bookstore Problem' which is that a significant number of people go into a bookshop and out again without buying anything because there is too much choice. Waterstones has a good solution to this as they get their staff to make a hand-written note about a book they like and then stick it next to the book. Those books fly off the shelves because someone is helping them to make a choice.

When Erica Whyman was speaking I was reminded of the Millward Brown research in the 1990s which showed that people used brochures to eliminate all the things they didn't want to see, sometimes narrowing it down until there was nothing left.

That's when the technology and social media seems to be taking us to an interesting place because it's helping us to sift out the choice.

RE: With restaurant menus that are too extensive I always get lost. I've always wanted an iPad restaurant menu so if I don't want any of the salads I can through those away, and eliminate everything until I've found what I want.

Who used to be a fantastic filter? Newspapers. But we have arts journalists no more.

RT: I thought you were married to one of the last arts journalists in the US.

RE: That's right but she is one of only four who are left.

Being personal

RT: The fundamental issue is that we are suddenly in a territory where we are communicating with specific people. I can't imagine there is anybody in the room who is carrying a mobile phone that is not theirs. And if it rings, that call will be for you. If we are communicating on that platform, we know who we are communicating with. If we connect this to our database we know exactly what our relationship is. We've crossed the line into this personal space. We're communicating with 'you' specifically.

Our Facebook pages are us: it may be a nuanced personal profile, but the pages are ours, with our content. And for us, that means that Facebook Fan Pages need to be about the "fans" and 'groups' as much as the 'events'. Some people consider Facebook a fairly closed tool because our friends are in a very special place and only those who are trusted may enter.

RE: That's why it's so weird when your friend gets on there and says I have Tupperware for sale. As soon as people seem to be selling to us we tune out.

RT: So what does personal mean in this context?

- Talking to me as a known individual, with a known history and pattern of behaviour?
- Showing some understanding of my social and economic circumstances?
- Checking on what I have recently done or already planned to do, before making further suggestions?
- Thinking about all the above to tailor any specific recommendations and offers to me as me?

RE: This is a recent report – which shows that car sales people still have the greatest influence on purchases. Why is that? Because we need to connect with people.

New Study Finds Dealership Salespeople have Greatest Influence on Buying, Leasing Decisions
 Posted on May 21, 2012 by D. Williams

According to a new study, dealership salespeople have more influence on consumers' buying decisions than all other marketing sources.

The findings of the study, conducted by Maritz Research marketing research firm of St. Louis, Missouri, are in contrast to the widely-held belief that consumers rely heavily on online marketing sources as the basis of their buying and leasing decisions.

According to the study of consumers who purchase or leased a vehicle in 20011, 21.98 percent reported that a salesperson had had the greatest impact on their decision to purchase or lease a vehicle. The survey also found that family members and friends had a large influence on buying decisions. Recommendations by family or friends were cited as the single largest factor in the decisions of 18.66 percent of respondents.

Maritz Research's vice president and strategic consultant Chris Travell said, "People buy from people." He added that online marketing sources, including social media, can "support the selling effort, but I believe it would be a mistake to believe

Interesting... we keep trying to scale social connections to take people out of the loop. We should be trying to make social more PERSONAL.

WOW

We keep trying to scale social connections and taking people out of the loop to leave an institutional voice but that's not what people want.

RT: Interesting that the family and friend recommendations are also important.

At Opera Australia, there is a social media person called Anna McDougal. She signs every post or comment '- Anna'. People start writing to her. She's the car sales person. Maybe the Opera Australia Facebook page won't have a logo in the future but a picture of Anna.

RE: Jackie Chang of Facebook's Platform Partnerships-Commerce emphasises that 'live events are inherently social' not least because the 'typical ticket purchase averages 2.7 tickets' so 'one person is usually buying for two or more'.

Jackie Chang says the traditional marketing formula to trigger purchases - AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Decision, Action) – 'does not reflect the social dimension of

negotiating attendance with friends and family'. A new formula is needed like the purchase decision making process we've been looking at.

Facebook sees its medium as increasingly being the mechanism by which people organise their social lives, and now, with Timeline, record the highlights of people's lives, which include many live entertainment experiences.

We did some research into what arts organisations in the UK and USA are using social media for. There are two flavours of activity. Many are using social media to help close the sale. It provides the re-enforcement to the typical AIDA cycle – they are trying to be a bit more persuasive, offering richer content, demonstrate values, showing relevance and they're doing that through Twitter and Facebook, triggering likes. So we need to be careful about what content we want people to share and to make the fan pages right.

The other thing we saw, especially in the US, is the use of social media as the actual sales channel. It might be that someone Tweets that they have bought a ticket and there is a deep link in that Twitter feed straight to that event and the part of the house it is a ticket for. But we're also seeing ticketing embedded in fan pages. So we need to think more about what we're doing to help close the sale and what we're doing in terms of the actual sales channel. So think about social decision-making and how friends book together.

RE: It makes a lot of sense, because you log in on Facebook and then you don't have to log in again or remember the weird password.

RT: Most people are using single log-in.

So we need to be rethinking how this works and investigating how we use the technology to do this. However, the technology is not always taking us in the direction we need.

We do need to think through what people need in order to plan their evenings out. We need to remember the nostalgia effect – reminding people how much they enjoyed certain things.

A recent survey of sports attenders in the USA showed that 20% of fans are inviting friends to go to events with them and many of these are new attenders. 14% of purchases are influenced by Facebook posts and higher priced seats are being bought which tends to suggest that people are using price at that point to validate the value of the experience.

Interesting successes in the UK include The Lowry – there's an interesting account of that on the AMA blog.

The argument goes that the technology is enabling us to do things which are absolutely natural.

Some researchers say social media that inter-connects is effectively part of our DNA, wired into our brains. What people are saying and more importantly doing in relation to your organisation is the key factor in the social context

So it is them inviting their friends, posting comments, clicking, Likes, notifying their closest friends, sending personal invites, which are the actions that matter. Validation, reinforcement, re-assurance can come most from your “fans”, on Facebook or similar, on Twitter. They are the ultimate ‘crowd-source’ for us.

Social media and ticketing

There are four different flavours of social media integration.

Flavour 1

Share icons on event page, pre-purchase



Likely the most often seen implementation, allows people to easily share a page with their friends, but isn't related to a purchase or specific friends. Just makes sharing easier.

Flavour 2

Ticketing system shows aggregate comments



New users visiting the page can see the social activity of strangers. Creates desire via a “bandwagon” effect, could help drive purchase “since everybody is doing it.” “Wisdom of crowds” similar to Amazon reviews, but by more trusted sources with faces.

Flavour 3

Autoshare of purchases - during purchase

Social networking

Put social networking to work for you

Social networking is the basis for how we use the Internet today and offers event organizers free and low-cost ways to market events and sell more tickets more easily and intelligently. In thinking about just this by integrating both to allow promoters and ticket buyers to quickly and easily distribute event listings to their friends, families and coworkers using any of the popular social networking and viral marketing engines available on the web.



The #1 marketing resource for your events is your ticket buyers. We give your patrons easy and convenient tools to market your events to their networks of friends, family and associates.

Users allowed to share their actual date, time, venue, etc. with their own personal network of friends. Deepens the social connection, allows others to decide to go with you (or not). Purchase acts as a testimonial by the purchaser, which could encourage friends to buy once someone they know has bought.

Flavour 4

See where your friends are sitting, join them



Via social connect, users can see where their friend(s) are sitting, and choose seats nearby (or as far away as possible). :) Allows groups of people to assemble with each person purchasing his/her own ticket. Introduces scarcity for limited seat availability near your friends, which drives ticket sales.

Eventio is working with TopTix and Patron Edge and have done this with Maccabi Haifa Football Club in Israel. The key thing is that they have completely rethought the whole process of how it might work in the Facebook environment. It's gone straight to achieving 15% of ticket sales.

Carol Jones is using this at Chapter Arts Centre – where you can also get reward points for sharing and recommending events to people.

You can also see the pictures coming down from peoples' Facebook profiles. Many suppliers have been shocked at just how much personal information comes down the Facebook API.

[RT/RE: Showed a sequence of ticketing practices in which you never leave Facebook. This might include choosing a seat and who sits there (eg. a season ticket holder at a football ground) and using the billing which is within Facebook.]

AudienceView has developed a 'white label solution' embedded into Facebook Fan Pages. Borrowing from Swedish practice where seats can be reserved on-line and paid for later, friends can book a group of seats, pay for their own and invite their friends to pay for themselves to join them. It has been deployed by The Ticket Factory, based at the NEC in Birmingham.

Facebook are trying to introduce more payment mechanisms. This includes a credit mechanism where you can buy points. You can also do one click purchasing right the way through. You're using your own payment gateway back in the venue, running it embedded in Facebook and making it the shortest possible purchase process.

RE: Now that Facebook is a publicly traded company you will see all sorts of things being used to try and make money.

There are even more zany things, such as 'Like Locker', in which you can only get a document by liking it on Facebook. There's also 'pay by a Tweet' – if someone shares information about the download they can get it for free.

The future

The Facebook 'want' button is coming. Be the first of your friends to say you want something that's coming into town.

RT: You guys believe in this but it's still speculation. It hasn't arrived yet. Many people are worried about the danger that Facebook decides to monetize much activity on Facebook. So, the question is, how are they going to use a 'want' button?

RE: At the moment you can only like it, share it, or comment on it, but what happens if you increase the things you can do?

RT: They're trying to see if there are ways in which social behaviour can be reflected in their technology.

RE: How many people have checked in to this venue on Foursquare or Facebook etc? The grand idea was that you would check in and your friend would see that you've checked in and stroll across the road but that doesn't really work because it's a big world and by the time you've noticed, they've probably gone. So one of the next steps might be 'future forecasting' – where are you going to be in 2 hours? 'Hey Ron let's all go to the pier together.'

Questions and answers

Andrew Ridal, Last Second Tickets: *This is great and exciting and I suspect that there are a lot of people in the audience who might be a bit scared. There are probably some easy ways of enabling people to engage with our organisation without going down a complex ticketing route – taking pictures of our venues and posting those to Facebook. That could be effective.*

RT: Andy McKim said we've learned that we set rules and we need to stop doing that and allow people to do what they want to do.

RE: At Disneyland they take your picture as you're going down Splash Mountain and you can buy it later. I've seen theatre companies thinking along similar sorts of lines. Imagine you're doing a seventeenth century piece and you can get your picture taken with one of the cast or something. That's not complicated.

RT: On Tuesday afternoon at the pop-up session, all of the ticketing suppliers demonstrated that they were working on going mobile, delivering social media tools and embedding ticketing in Facebook. I haven't seen that kind of concerted effort since internet ticketing started. The evidence in the US is that whenever people are implementing Facebook ticketing and getting the rest of the sharing and validation process right they are seeing a surge of sales – and they're saying new sales because they're not on the database. Interesting that from the Facebook ticketing operation we're getting the details of all the attenders, not just the one person who booked the tickets.

RE: That is awesome.

Ben Davis, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre: *Do you think there's a danger of being aggressively social? The example of a pre-written Tweet or Facebook post might put people off rather than encouraging more genuine social engagement?*

RT: I absolutely share your concern. I prefer the sharing mechanisms where you write in your own comment rather than it being fully automated. A number of the systems give you defaults so you can name the event and time etc, but I think it won't work unless it's genuinely personal. That's what we're trying to trigger.

RE: And this might be different strokes for different folks because I want you to give me something to help me post. I can still personalise it but the simpler it is, the easier it is to post and the more likely we'll get the compliance behaviour.

I launched a new website recently and I contacted all my friends and gave them sample Tweets etc and asked them to send it out. It got a very good response.

RT: It's this interesting definition of what a friend or a fan is. In the US, they have a much bigger expectation of 'fans' – that they will do things to help people to go. I think it is the sort of thing that Erica Whyman was talking about – the expectations around relationships.

Sally Goldsmith, Theatre Royal Stratford East: *I was interested in what you said about word-of-mouth being shared when the audience buys rather than when they've been. We have Facebook ticketing but it's quite basic at the moment. You can't weave it in with the messages. Until we have a more enhanced version we could email people when they've bought and tell them about other points like interval drinks*

and detail of the venue and performance. Thinking about the post-show and sending them a thank you email and giving them further opportunities to interact with us. So, I'm just thinking about all the customer contact points – should we be considering the customer journey when considering this?

RT: I think everything you've said there is valid and at the moment we don't have the answer of what is the social version of AIDA. I heard an interesting argument about fan pages, which is that fans ought to be able to design their own page about the venue. You could give them a kit of parts which they could tailor to their own needs. One thing we could say is that we can afford to live dangerously because the technology is evolving so fast. So we can try it and fail. You talk a lot about experimenting don't you?

RE: You guys are the experimenters. What an opportunity we have to try all sorts of new ideas. Your ticketing system might have this already or you might be an upgrade away from being able to do this sort of thing. Experimentation is the dream of all marketers. You could try A or B – which is better? Every marketing decision you make should have some kind of experiment based in it. A 1% difference makes a huge difference over time.

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