

An Analysis of Technology's Aid and Hindrance of Community in Local Music

by

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	Page 2
Background on Brooklyn DIY.....	Page 2
Short History of Music Promotion.....	Page 3
Online Ticketing Services and Their Role.....	Page 5
Ticketfly, Ticketmaster, and Facebook Events	Page 7
The Problems and Addressing These Services	Page 10
- Problem A: Connecting Fans to Shows	Page 11
- Problem B: Coordinating and Promotion	Page 13
- Problem C: Nurturing Niche Music Communities	Page 15
Recommendations (Conclusion)	Page 17
- Sustaining Niche Music Communities	Page 17
- AdHoc Presents	Page 18
- Opportunities for Further Research	Page 23
Works Cited	Page 29

Introduction

This paper aims to explore the question: to what extent are music event services aiding niche markets of the music industry to achieve their goal of fostering community?¹ The following research will discuss the role of technology, specifically music event services, in aiding local music communities and how much of their interaction actually helps or hurts these communities. By examining the similarities and differences between the music community in Brooklyn, NY and the larger music industry in which it is contained, the research will explore the necessity of cultivating and sustaining these local music scenes in an industry that is ostensibly more focused on raising profits. The research will also analyze the need for community building in the 21st century as a result of a changing music industry relying on new norms of digital tools in order to service audience communication.

Background on Brooklyn DIY

The current music scene in Brooklyn, NY consists of numerous venues, some well-established, some makeshift. These humble efforts of makeshift venues come in the form of houses, apartments and basements of musicians, friends of musicians and other contemporaries identifying as fans who want to support their local music scene. Located in neighborhoods such as Bedford Stuyvesant, Bushwick, Williamsburg, and Ridgewood (Queens) are memorable venues that are and have been an integral part of helping to nurture the Brooklyn DIY music scene since it arose in the mid-2000s. These venues consist of the following: The Silent Barn,

¹ Music event service is a term that is used in this paper to refer to companies like Ticketfly, Ticketmaster, Facebook Events, SongKick, StubHub etc. Ticketing services are included as well as services that provide information on live music events. Niche market refers to niche local music communities (for our purposes Brooklyn, NY).

285 Kent, Shea Stadium BK, Palisades, The Glove, DBTS, Scully's Den, Ridgewood Community College, Alphaville, Bohemian Grove, Flowers for All Occasions and more. DIY—"Do It Yourself"—ethos refers to the ethic of self-sufficiency through completing tasks without the aid of a paid expert. There are also non-DIY spaces that are continuously helping to support the musicians who reside and make their livelihood in Brooklyn, including Baby's All Right, Market Hotel, Music Hall of Williamsburg, Bowery Ballroom, Villain, Brooklyn Bowl, Knitting Factory Brooklyn, etc. These venues, past and present, have created a prominent culture of underground music² in Brooklyn.

Despite these grassroots efforts for sustaining positive and thriving community, online services complicate this process further. Marketing techniques used across social media platforms and ticketing services are now ingrained into almost every piece of the show-creation process. Given this, it is necessary to differentiate meaning between the terms *show* and *concert*. For the purposes of this paper, the term *show* is defined as a live music event, usually less than 1,000 capacity, not to be confused with the term *concert* – a live music event that appeals to a larger audience above 1,000 persons.

Short History of Music Promotion

Since music became commercially viable and rock music specifically entered the foreground of American youth culture in the 1960s, record labels and marketing directors have used various tactics to sell their products to their target audience. "Most music we hear today is filtered through such a system, where the primary function of all the major firms is, explicitly, to

² Underground music refers to music that consists of indie, punk, post-punk, and other genres that don't receive a lot of recognition from broader audiences.

make the best return to their shareholders” (Harris). Harris writes in reference to how the corporate music industry operates. While the evolution of music promotion in recent years has since demolished the barrier to entry through its democratic prowess of accessibility by online means, it does not come without its own set of flaws and some aspects remain the same. The music industry as we see it today exists in different pockets and levels of corporate involvement. However, there are at least some areas of niche music communities around the world where corporate executives do not exist. DIY opened the door for students of music and even hobbyists to create, record, and self-release their own music without relying on a well-established record label to sell their art in exchange for a profit. “When only a few firms control a big chunk of the market, and particularly when those firms feel under threat, the music industry can work directly against the interests of music” (Harris). Herein lies the core of the problem that begins to dictate the rest of actions being taken by ticketing services and other technologies subservient to the powerful record label executives.

Songs of the past were released through radio stations and placed in retail stores with a huge reliance on record labels. In order to achieve this feat, labels would front the money to sell-in product to the retailer or distributor. In turn, they would spend even more money on promotional advertisements for TV and radio, making sure those products were ultimately sold-through. Sell-in refers to the negotiations made with retail stores and sell-through is the product that is ultimately sold to the end consumer (Gatti). In order for record labels to retain successful relationships, there was a need to convince the retail stores to sell their product and then prove to them that there would be consumers interested in buying. This was usually achieved by using sell sheets—marketing documents drafted by the labels that detailed all of the highlights, awards and

stats of an artist, which addressed their monetary value with regard to their public presence or place in popular culture.

As it stands now, at the end of 2018, there are many more ways in which artists can offer distribution without having their artistic careers kept in a stronghold by industry executives. There are more opportunities and different means of distribution channels—pipelines by which goods and services are sold from vendor to consumer—that allow artists to self-promote and reap the majority of their profits (Gatti). Started in 2008, Bandcamp.com is a great example of how musicians turned to online means to self-release their music. The service offers musicians the ability to upload their music to their platform free of charge and sell their music at whatever price they see fit for their market and demographic. However, artists do not have control over their ticket sales and the services that venues or promoters use.

Online Ticketing Services and Their Role

Ticketing services such as Ticketfly and Ticketmaster work by collaborating with venues (or promoters) in a contractual manner so that every venue can only be tied to one ticketing service. This means that usually each venue is only able to sell tickets through their allied ticketing provider. Furthermore, each venue and therefore each talent buyer/promoter³ is beholden to that ticketing service in order to sell tickets to the shows they work to curate. Ticketmaster, one of the largest global ticketing providers alongside StubHub and services similar in size, have already been cultivating customers and information on their user base since the introduction of the internet. Now, they inherently have a very strong hand in ticket sales due

³ Talent Buyer/Promoter, someone who books bands for venues at which they work, or for events they are hired to organize.

to the nature of their sheer size as a company as well as their developed brand, which is well known among music lovers throughout the world. Venues often choose Ticketmaster because they are assured they will sell the most tickets on that platform (Harper). As concluded by Forbes, Ticketmaster is the largest ticketing service company in the industry (Mitchell). They have financial resources that give them an extreme amount of leeway, where smaller services do not have that privilege. They sell more tickets than any other service. “Ticketmaster has used this to its advantage by moving the industry toward very aggressive ticketing deals between ticketing companies and their venue clients” (Harper).

Ticketfly, Ticketmaster and other services alike each have their own quirks and unique features that play to their individualized audience and user base. Popular Brooklyn-based venues like Alphaville, Baby’s All Right, Murmrr Ballroom, Trans-Pecos, Market Hotel, and The Park Church Co-op use the service Ticketfly because of its claim of easy usability and its involvement in servicing smaller venues. Ticketfly appeals to smaller venues and communities because of the way they treat their users. They employ a different approach than Ticketmaster, which has been widely criticized in the past for their mistreatment of customers and partners (Brooks). In 2016, Ticketmaster settled a consumer class action lawsuit for \$400 million dollars, in which they were required to pay out their customers in the form of discount codes and vouchers. *Schlesinger v. Ticketmaster* was a case that affected 50 million people dating back to October 1999, who unknowingly were paying high overcharge fees for almost fifteen years (Chong). Due to their involvement in stadium sized concerts and arenas, Ticketmaster operates under a different business model than Ticketfly, but how is the music industry impacted when smaller music event services and apps are absorbed by large entities? Ticketmaster’s amalgamation with Live Nation

(the largest concert promoter in the country) in 2010 only exemplifies this. “Over the past 30 years, the company has killed or eaten nearly every competitor: Ticketron, TicketWeb, TicketsNow, Paciolan, and Musictoday” (Knopper). This is pertinent because it does not allow the music industry to cultivate the unique opportunities that these smaller services have to offer or what they may have to offer if given the opportunity to expand within their niche markets.

Ticketfly, Ticketmaster, and Facebook Events

Ticketfly was started by Andrew Dreskin, one of the co-founders of the first online ticketing service Ticketweb, which Ticketmaster purchased in 2000. Using his previous experience of business development with Ticketweb and his newfound knowledge of operating a music technology company, he set out to create a new ticketing service while trying to make as “few mistakes” as possible (Brooks). The Ticketfly platform prioritizes music events, and other small areas of entertainment like comedy. Their user interface is fairly simple and straightforward. Their service is most beneficial for buying tickets to shows you’re already aware of, which is to say their discovery algorithm is not very strong. Ticketfly has started to increase their market share in order to compete with industry legends like Ticketmaster and Stubhub. The more money they receive in investments, the more powerful they hope to become. This is dangerous because Ticketfly is using its new growth and clout to create a larger entity that has potential to forgo the needs of smaller music communities that use their service. Similar to Ticketmaster’s chain of acquisitions, a growth cycle like this one has often been proven to show less involvement or care for smaller operations as a part of this change. After a series D round of \$50 million in funding in July 2015, Dreskin mentioned in his marketing plan that, “Quite

honestly, we think we can bring a level of innovation unforeseen to the large venues, and promoters in the country, including professional sports teams” (Brooks). Series D refers to the fifth round of investments from venture capitalists, following a seed investment, and series A through C (Popp).

One large struggle that growing companies face in the uncertainty of the longevity of their company is continuing to serve as a necessary product to their consumer base. Ticketfly is looking to grow in a way that will make it easier for promoters and venues to sell tickets, for customers to buy those tickets, and to ensure more capital for new projects, but also grow in ways that will help form new customers. It may never be the intention to alienate one’s base, because if one did it would not be a very good marketing tactic, but when a company grows there are certain demographics who may feel excluded.

As of now, Ticketmaster differs in that they have a much wider audience appeal which includes concerts, sporting events, arts and theater (Broadway shows), and other family-friendly oriented events. Their site is more conducive to searchable techniques with accurate results. In other words, if one is looking to discover a particular event, by searching a few keywords, one will most likely find the event they are looking to attend. The ease of this searchability is made possible by Ticketmaster’s massive data collection in the form of native events created through their platform as well as web-scraping and partnering with companies such as Live Nation, House of Blues, TicketWeb and TicketsNow. Their vast catalogue of events can also become problematic. It makes their user experience cluttered and endless. This could make it more difficult for the consumer to make a decision based on the number of possible options they are presented with.

Ticketmaster's angle for customer satisfaction takes place outside of the internet. In July of 2017, popular technology blog *The Verge* published an article that detailed Ticketmaster's new ticketing system, one that can passively admit attendees into events using smartphones to reduce their customers' entry wait time. The service is called Presence and is currently operating at 32 venues across North America. A full global roll out is expected over the next four years (Garun).

What Ticketfly and Ticketmaster have in common is that they do not facilitate online communication between friends or peers regarding events. This is where Facebook Events come into play. When an event is created through Ticketfly's backend, all of the information for the event is generated into a Facebook Event under the Facebook page of the promoter account who created it. This is Ticketfly's way of using social integration through live music events. Since billions of people are already on Facebook, it seems fitting that this would be the best course of action for Ticketfly. It gives them yet another massive platform to promote the sale of their events and in turn brings them more site visits and purchases. Facebook Events are a means by which any Facebook user or Facebook Page administrator can create a dynamic event page that is integrated into their social platform. In Brooklyn DIY, Facebook Events are used to promote the majority of shows that take place. In the case of one company, AdHoc Presents books 600+ shows per year, all of which are promoted using Facebook Events and this equates to 100k+ tickets sold annually (Leichtung). Facebook's user experience, while not perfect, has made it easy for concert promoters and concertgoers to share, bookmark and invite their friends to events.

The Problems and Addressing These Services

In an interview, critically acclaimed musician, Richard D. James, better known as Aphex Twin, details his experience on the live music industry by saying, “I'm getting paid quite a lot of money for doing these gigs and then the ticket prices go up. I was feeling a bit guilty about that so I thought if people are really bothered and they get there early they can pick up some limited stuff for the gig and then they can make money [back by reselling it].” This was in response to a decision that was made by the venue and promoter of the event to sell tickets at a price that James did not feel was fair to his fanbase. It is important to see the creative energy and force that musicians have when it comes to supporting their fans in making sure they do not feel alienated. In an effort to keep fans at ease with the looming ticket price, Aphex Twin decided to offer up a limited 12" LP and cassette to those who attended the concert early (Nosnitsky). This was another incentive for getting fans to agree to pay the price the venue and promoter were asking.

There are a few reasons why ticket prices are often set to a high price point. However, with regard to major pop concert tickets, prices worldwide increase at a rate faster than inflation. “In North America, average ticket prices overall increased by 20% between 2010 and 2015. According to trade publication Pollstar’s end of year report in 2015, the price of tickets to live music hit an all-time high that year, with an average cost of \$74.25. This decreased by 2% in the first half of 2016, but tickets for Drake, Adele, Rihanna, Beyoncé, and Lady Gaga still appeared on sale for hundreds, sometimes thousands of dollars” (Cliff). Another cause of drastically high ticket prices, comes from ticket scalpers on StubHub or eBay. Ticket scalpers—those who buy tickets at face value with the intention of re-selling them at higher prices to turn a profit—are nothing new to the live events industry. Services like StubHub are sometimes convenient yet

they are extremely problematic as they allow anyone to resell tickets by gauging the demand and ultimately reaping an individual profit, often selling at a higher price than the artist is asking.

“StubHub gets in on the act by providing a market for brokers to resell their tickets to consumers” (Randall).

Today, managers, promoters, venues, ticketing agencies, re-sellers and even fans all have a hand in dictating ticket prices. Is it possible to balance customer satisfaction and artist reciprocity with growth of power in an industry? The following sections aim to explore this and why it is imperative for musicians to retain a tight knit relationship with their fans as a result.

Problem A: Connecting Fans to Shows

A common problem and struggle amongst concertgoers has always been finding out about the shows they care about and want to attend. It is often hard to easily locate when one's favorite artists are playing in their area. Platforms discussed thus far including Ticketmaster, Ticketfly, Facebook Events, StubHub and formerly SongKick, all have recommender systems and email newsletters. Recommender systems are computer programs that algorithmically seek to predict the "rating" or "preference" that a user would give to an item. However, are algorithmic suggestions and email newsletters the best course of action? It is not uncommon for users to receive an email from these platforms suggesting which upcoming shows they will be interested in, when in fact it seems these services may barely know their users.

“I think [email] newsletters are really cool because you’re getting a direct message from someone. I really enjoy Patreon. I pay Michael DeForge three dollars every month—that’s nothing to me—but I get a brand new comic before it’s out in print. It makes so much sense,

you're paying money directly to this artist, you can see how much money they're making per month and you get exclusive content or updates. If you really care about this person you're putting your money where your mouth is and you're giving them money for the stuff you want to get in return, which is music or movies or books" (Akhtar). Akhtar is a software engineer, musician and avid member of the DIY community who also helps to run the DIY house show space Scully's Den. For Akhtar, the primary importance of email newsletters had become apparent. Where Akhtar previously aligned himself as a person who regularly signs up for email newsletters and prefers that form of communication from musicians and artists he follows, he admitted that a lot of those emails he actually ends up deleting. It is the email newsletters from musicians and artists whom only reach out to their audience once a month for an update, that are the ones he saves, reads and interacts with. Email newsletters create a sense of community because the subscribers feel noticed and appreciated.

"I think this is specific to each band. I think for the majority [of bands] they probably need to rely on it [social media] and that goes back to our conversation about Facebook Events and how there is really no other good means of how to promote a show. It's not the most perfect tool but it's probably the most popular tool" (Akhtar). Facebook's event recommendation takes a passive approach by using algorithms to determine a user's personal preference. This seems to be the case because they want to let the website curate its own recommendations based on previous actions made by the user or developing recommendations based on the bands and venues they "like" on the platform. When a user is actively viewing an event page on Facebook, there are recommended concerts to the right side of the event, listing some shows in your area that you might be interested in, in order of relevance to your tastes rather than ordered chronologically by

date. The second way they are able to introduce users to shows is through the actions that their friends make on the platform—one sees these notifications in their newsfeed. The third and arguably only relatively “active” approach is letting users invite their friends to events. Akhtar usually finds out about shows from friends with like-minded music interests and from there uses Facebook as a calendar to keep track of the events he is going to even if he does not end up going. “Facebook succeeds by being my default calendar. Whenever someone asks me what I’m doing, I turn to Facebook to see what I have coming up in the pipeline with regard to shows. I think it’s a good calendar and it’s good for push notifications.”

Problem B: Coordinating and Promotion

Ticketmaster and Ticketfly are where one goes to purchase tickets to their favorite events and Facebook is what the avid concert-goer uses to keep track of their events. Facebook’s user experience for keeping track of events comes down to three options “Interested,” “Going,” and “Can’t go” buttons which have been a staple of their approach. Though relatively simple in concept, how Facebook’s events feature ties in with the rest of its platform does not allow for the most effective or efficient approach to helping musicians, promoters and venues sell-through tickets. It is extremely difficult to keep track of all of the events you are going to when there is an insurmountable amount of information across the entire platform of Facebook. Due to this, one has to sift through a ton of clutter in order to find the shows and concerts they are interested in going to. This also makes it harder for bands and venues to promote shows because their outreach has become just a tiny facet of the large scope of content that Facebook has to offer. In other words, it makes the process difficult for companies to promote their events to their fans in a

transparent way. In addition “Interested” and “Going” buttons fail to give concert promoters and venues an accurate representation of who will be buying tickets and attending the event.

In an interview with an active member of the Brooklyn DIY music community, Georgia Krause, she stated some of her negative experiences working with Ticketfly’s fan accounts. She was very adamant about the large hassle of trying to change the name of a ticket holder when transferring one’s ticket to a friend and the excess amount of irrelevant concert information that is either advertised to her or sent to her email inbox. When asked *what do you think is lacking with regard to social media’s influence on concertgoers?* Krause responded with the following: “...Facebook Events kind of work but I think it is mostly a timing issue. I’ll either get invited to a Facebook Event the day of or I’ll see it on Instagram a few days later. I feel like I have to be lucky to stumble across a show on social media. There is not one place you can go to and see a list of all the shows coming up” (Krause).

It was not surprising to learn that Facebook is one of the services where Krause finds out about most of the shows she wants to attend. Facebook has aggressively been advocating cross collaboration between their site and other websites like Ticketfly with data they want to use. The problem on Facebook’s end is that they are handling a massive amount of information across their entire platform, so that it is often hard for Facebook to truly refine one feature and make it great. This also means that Facebook likely has other intentions with regard to the vast user base the site embodies—as of June 2017, two billion users per month (CNBC).

Dave Benton is a musician in the band Trace Mountains and an alumnus of SUNY Purchase’s Arts Management program. Benton was also a member of the band LVL UP (though recently disbanded) that formed at Purchase’s campus in 2011 and reached what some might call

“career success” after they signed with Sub Pop Records in 2016. “I think it’s become more difficult for small time artists to use Facebook Events effectively as a free tool for promotion. I think in an effort to monetize event promotion, Facebook has made it harder to promote events for free, in order to push concert promoters and artists to pay for sponsored posts. If the budget is there, I think it’s a decent tool, but if I’m promoting a show, I’d rather post a ticket link than a Facebook event link at this point” (Benton).

Problem C: Nurturing Niche Music Communities

Companies like Ticketmaster are working to make their fans’ experience more streamlined, just not in ways that benefit the small communities. Instead of a focus on pushing morale in the form of community, Ticketmaster is pushing morale in the form of shorter lines, and quicker access to entry. By developing a new digital ticket scanning software, this tells us that their research is being put into machines and equipment that make the actual live event experience more enjoyable without directly focusing on the live event itself (Garun). While Ticketmaster is pushing morale, Facebook is not. This is interesting to note in comparison to Facebook’s promotional tools that are often unaffordable for DIY artists, as previously mentioned in the section above. “...I don’t think they [ticketing services] think about the small time stuff. They know we need them and there’s really no incentive there for the platforms to contribute or give back to the long term health of smaller ‘scenes’” (Benton).

It seems that every company has the desire to become a larger entity and become even more powerful. Within the last few years Ticketfly has been acquired by Pandora and then acquired from Pandora by Eventbrite (Brooks). When Ticketfly was acquired by Pandora in

2015, it led to a key expansion of the service. Ticketfly was soon able to market its concerts within the radio platform, and in turn sell more tickets to live events. Eventbrite and Ticketfly now make for a stronger force in the music event world, making them fit to compete with the likes of Live Nation's juggernaut Ticketmaster. The fact that there is no service in which local music communities can instill their trust is only part of the problem.

Benton observed, "I wish I could post something on my website and have thousands of people see it, but the way the internet is structured today, it's very hard to drive traffic in that direction. You have to go to the 'public square' so to speak. And that's what these places are, as much as they don't want to fully admit it." Benton's categorical phrase "public square" used to define these online tools, brings an innovative way of thinking to this matter. It is not so much that these social networks are the "be-all, end-all" for success in the music industry, rather they are places we can visit, to drive traffic to our art if we would like. The only problem is that there is no way of avoiding the "public square" if one wants to create an audience around their artwork. In a sense, the digital public square has created a democratized landscape, allowing individuals with computer and internet access to act as managers of their own art. "If anything, I think these platforms have just become more powerful and necessary. You don't really have a choice today if you want people to hear your music. It needs to be available on Spotify or virtually no one is going to listen. The same goes for concert promotion and the other platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. It's very difficult to avoid using at least one of those" (Benton).

Recommendations (Conclusion)

Sustaining Niche Music Communities

After researching and conducting interviews the question has become: Could we be living in a time now where Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Spotify dictate the way we consume music? It was not that long ago when technology startups were multiplying all over the globe and people believed that any problem we had could be improved with a social media network. It is learned through this research that people are still striving, if not yearning for personal human connection among the things we create. So the question now becomes how do we use social media and digital resources to our advantage in order to bring people together in real life? Because healthy genuine community does not generate its foundation over social networking where anyone can remain relatively anonymous and internet trolls⁴ are free to ridicule without repercussion, we must find common ground that transcends online connectivity. This brings us to the idea of bookend follow-up engagement. Bookend follow up engagement exists by making sure the consumer or audience member of one's artwork feels acknowledged in their effort to relate to the artist. In order to achieve this, the artist must exhibit Channel Marketing and Customer Relationship Management. This means keeping the customers happy because when you achieve this, they will be willing to support your effort and will be more inclined to buy what you are selling (Gatti). "I'm always thinking about building other (more direct) connections with fans that could be utilized for communication or commerce (examples being my website/store, email list and more direct communication via Bandcamp's platform). Social media interactions are however, fleeting, and the platforms require constant attention to produce and

⁴ A person who intentionally antagonizes others online by posting inflammatory, irrelevant, or offensive comments or other disruptive content (Merriam-Webster).

maintain results. I think it's very important for the longevity of my project to not only connect with fans online but also in person. There's a big difference between when someone interacts with me on Instagram and when they very intentionally decide to come to a performance or purchase a record. So I guess social media and these platforms are the means to the end, which to me, is an elevated and more intentional connection at a show or sitting with a record" (Benton).

After conducting artist and community organizer interviews, the research seems to lead us towards a path that dictates peoples' favorability or inclination to value personal connections, ironically, using social media as a means to get them. In the past it seemed as though people would prefer to rebel, resist and refute online implementations into the DIY scene. Whether cognizant of it or not, we might be headed in a direction that accepts the "public square."

AdHoc Presents

Ric Leichtung is the Co-Founder and Events Director at *AdHoc Presents*, a Brooklyn-based concert promoter that has worked to curate some of the most influential shows in Brooklyn DIY during the 2010s and beyond. He is also a longstanding member of the music scene since his effort in helping construct the memorable, now defunct, DIY venue 285 Kent. AdHoc, a growing company that is expanding beyond the confines of DIY and heavily relies upon music event services to turn a profit, offers a different perspective on the challenges, conflicting morals, and opportunities that these services create.

In the aftermath of the 2016 Presidential Election, Facebook and their News Feed algorithm were under fire when it became apparent that users were being fed false or defamatory information in the form of "news" articles from third party organizations. A change in News

Feed was announced and placed into action beginning January 2018. The plan reassured the public that they would see more highlighted stories from your friends and family and fewer integration from publishers and brands (Bromwich and Haag). This was going to be a turning point for third party companies who had built the majority of their marketing existence on Facebook. Still, while approaching 2019, Leichtung does not seem to be that worried. “The qualms that I have about [Facebook and Facebook Events] are more tied to the moral and ethical practices of Facebook in general. As far as Facebook as a promotional tool and a product I think it’s really great, actually. Also, the events element is one of the main things that keeps people on Facebook to begin with” (Leichtung). One feature that would remain unaffected as a way to communicate with consumers is Facebook Groups—a community message board of sorts that allows Facebook users to directly interact with the brand they associate with. Leichtung was ahead of the curve on this and has been using Facebook Groups concurrently with the AdHoc Facebook Page for years. “We’re constantly having to refine our marketing practices overtime and the unfortunate fact of the matter is that these large platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. dictate how we promote shows. We always try to figure out ways to softly influence our audience to tell them about things without sort of ‘banging them over the head’ about it... The Facebook group [‘AdHoc Shows’] was something made because in those days it was a very different kind of company. I think it was pretty much me working off of a folding table in the middle of an abandoned venue, instead of where it is now whether its employees or things like that. Ultimately that kind of outreach made more sense at the time, now it’s used more as a personal way for me to share some things that I’m excited about” (Leichtung).

With regard to *Problem A: Connecting Fans to Shows*, AdHoc offers an interesting angle of “soft influence.” Of course, like any other concert promoter, they are posting updates about shows daily to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram Stories (Instagram’s highlights feature that disappear after 24 hours) but they have an understanding that not everyone is going to see that information all of the time, which means they need to be strategic. “The [Facebook News Feed] aggregate does make sense to me, it’s unfortunate that some things don’t push to the news feed but at the same time people can only take in a limited amount of content. This is a lot of the reason why we feel like the zine is really important and that we keep track of everything on our blog and on our own website because these social media outlets, they’re nothing more than self-publishing tools essentially” (Leichtung).

The AdHoc zine (short form “magazine”), is a quarterly print-editorial component to AdHoc events and the AdHoc blog. The original content spearheaded by Co-Founder and Editorial Director Emilie Friedlander, includes essays by musicians, interviews, illustrations from local artists, as well as fictional stories by members of the community. On the back cover is a list of upcoming shows, highlighting what is to come at nearby venues presented by AdHoc. While the zine is a more traditional approach and simply does not have the mass outreach capacity that these online services have, it is a tactile form of communication that offers more meaningful connection to marketing and facilitates a genuine response within the community. “I mean, even if we took all of our events off of social media and we exclusively made a huge push to keep everything on our website that we create, then we’d have major problems promoting events” (Leichtung). This further supports *Problem B: Coordinating and Promotion*. In response to a continuously increasing reliance on online tools for promotional means, AdHoc also strives

to work towards bookend follow up engagement by offering zines to purchase at shows and sometimes color-prints of the show's flyer. As social interactions are fleeting, stories and memories of taking the time to sit with a piece of writing help us remember the true essence of DIY and why it is important to stick together as a community. At least, if anything, projects created with intention like the AdHoc Zine allow for a common dialogue to continue off-screen, even if we still have an unparalleled reliance on social media for promotion.

AdHoc has been a longtime customer of Ticketfly since signing up in 2012 and they are now shifting their ticketing presence to Eventbrite as Ticketfly merges their software as part of the acquisition. In fact, Leichtung states that AdHoc was the 991st company to contractually sign up with Ticketfly, which means they have a more personal relationship with the Eventbrite team on the product decisions they implement in their effort to create a platform that caters to AdHoc's needs and in turn, likely the needs of similar companies, an affordance that not every company has. "AdHoc was specifically involved in helping to develop [and beta test] the new Eventbrite platform (Eventbrite Music). Any kind of feedback that's submitted [from AdHoc] is weighted in a way where changes or adjustments would benefit the mass majority of users rather than just AdHoc... I don't have concerns about Ticketfly becoming a part of Eventbrite. Honestly, I think it's actually kind of a good thing because in the middle market those were the two major companies really warring with each other to try and get a lot of independent venues' business. Ticketmaster is never going to suit the needs of a smaller venue, even on just a logistical level. It's designed for a different demographic and a different client in mind" (Leichtung).

The AdHoc co-founder went on to discuss the ways in which the Ticketfly and Eventbrite merger have been surprising—"...they create the opportunity for venues and promoters to take a

revenue share fee.” This means that a portion of the money a customer pays for in ticket fees go back, in many cases, to the venue, promoter or seller of the tickets. The entirety of the profits from ticket fees, sometimes given the vague name “service fees,” do not just go back to Eventbrite. Eventbrite also takes care of credit card fees of 3% as well as sales tax on ticketed events if you are a promoter in a city where that is applicable (New York City does not have sales tax on ticketed events). AdHoc has started branching out into booking shows in the thriving music scene of Raleigh, NC. Raleigh has a 7.75% sales tax that can be included in the ticket fee, in which Eventbrite will then pay it for you (Leichtung).

“Here’s the problem, I don’t really think you can talk about any of these ticket platforms as locally minded DIY folks because they’re very much the opposite of that... These DIY entities are sort of forced, out of lack of resources, to engage with large companies like Ticketfly, Eventbrite, Facebook, Instagram because at the end of the day [we’re] still very reliant on the services that these larger, often unethical, companies provide” (Leichtung). This further illustrates that the music industry is still an *industry* and there is not really any turning back when it comes to the operations of its ecosystem whether ethical or not. “Ultimately they [music event services] are all free. We indirectly pay and compensate our ticketing people via their ticket fees that they take on every sale” (Leichtung). DIY most of the time is not a choice and often exists due to lack of resources. The giant technology companies make it hard or nearly impossible to leave their services for an alternative path because they offer the ability to easily interact and communicate with the exact audience that one is aiming to target through promotional means. AdHoc has been a major force in helping to keep the Brooklyn DIY music scene alive by booking some of the most memorable shows of the past decade as well as giving younger and

newer bands an opportunity to perform without judgement. They have facilitated an environment that is open to different forms of music whether or not the musicians are professionally trained or signed to a label.

Opportunities for Further Research

This research paper introduces and explores a modern dialogue of a continual pursuit that is achieving genuine connections, audience, and peers in an ever evolving music industry. Regardless of the bureaucratic nature of the music industry, there have always been grassroots initiatives in the form of local music festivals, fundraising events, and free house shows that highlight the importance of building community through DIY means.

During my time as an undergraduate initially at Ithaca College from 2013-15, I worked with Computer Science Professor Doug Turnbull in his research lab, studying the importance of local music scenes with an analysis of Ithaca, NY. Alongside students from Ithaca College and Cornell University, the basis for our research consisted of developing a local music discovery service called MegsRadio.fm. Through countless hours of empirical research and user tests, we ultimately recreated the previously existing project in a more effective approach that would hopefully start to engage the larger community as a whole in its own local music scene and generate involvement and attendance to more shows in the area. Essentially, MegsRadio works by a user entering in a seed artist and then they are presented with a radio station based on that seed artist. This is similar to Pandora except that each radio station, which is algorithmically generated, will introduce the user to local artists along the way. Also, allowing for more station personalization as the user becomes more comfortable with the interface.

We collected wireframes, user tests, mockups—all of which carefully informed each of our decisions for features and feature placement within the web and mobile apps. While MegsRadio did not work directly with venues—it web scraped local music listing websites to generate a database of upcoming shows in the local Ithaca area—it ultimately was working toward a more localized approach fit for niche music communities⁵. In January of 2018, after eight years of work funded by the National Science Foundation, Professor Doug Turnbull decided to terminate the project citing the decrease in necessity for personalized radio as an interactive model as one of the main reasons for the app’s failure. “MegsRadio has failed to establish a consistent user base. We have spent seven summers developing software and three falls [actively] promoting our apps. Each time we have ‘launched’ MegsRadio we see about 30-50 daily users for a week or two. Sadly, a month or two later almost nobody is using our free-to-use and commercial-free service” (Turnbull). Although MegsRadio did not succeed, this innovative thinking is extremely important for continuing to find ways to contribute to the betterment of local music.

Often times, the current problems centered around music event services detail that they are not doing enough to satisfy the needs of local music scenes without alienating its musicians and fans. What should be addressed is the need for a user experience catered to the niche music community and clarity across the board that allows for a higher focus on the actual live event and increases the amount of local involvement within niche music communities. In my interview with New York based writer and music journalist, Liz Pelly, she touched on a lot of aspects that

⁵ Web Scraping is a technique employed to extract large amounts of data from websites whereby the data is extracted and saved to a database. Database is a term used in Computer Science to refer to collection of data organized especially for rapid search and retrieval (as by a computer).

continue to detract from the facilitating of organic community unencumbered by ad-driven services and general philosophies surrounding the consumption of music whether it be for listening purposes or attending a live event.

“I think with Facebook in particular, a lot of people have thrown their hands up about it as this thing that you can’t *not* embrace if you’re involved in a music community... but I think that’s something as communities we need to push back against and sort of remember that it didn’t always work this way. Especially being involved in Silent Barn, personally, as someone who was booking a lot of the shows there, I saw the challenges with promoting unpopular events on a platform that prioritizes what’s popular in terms of its news feed.” DIY as an expression of art by means of having fewer resources also creates a world in which many events are “underground” or unknown. “The [post] that has the most engagement isn’t necessarily the most important, it’s just [whatever] has elicited the strongest reaction.” Relative to Facebook, Pelly’s depiction of the social network further illustrates how Facebook dictates the content seen by generating ad-revenue and often cornering people into paying for ads on the service while making it so community members do not seek out other creative means of generating audience. “Being involved in a collectively run underground music venue (The Silent Barn) involved so much constant digital labor every day—Facebook posts, Twitter, Instagram, email, list serves. When I look back on it, because Silent Barn is closed, I think a lot about whether that was all helping us or if it was creating more work for us” (Pelly). Pelly believes that Facebook and the attention economy makes it exhausting to use these platforms and recognizes the weakness of Facebook as a tool for connecting with external community, offering the perspective on how the

platform is “good for nothing other than paying for sponsored posts and advertising.” She also acknowledged that she has recently seen another shift back towards email newsletters.

“Digital online metrics don’t often equate to real life participation... I think that there is great potential for digital tools to be used to bring people together and share information about music outside of the traditional mainstream gatekeepers but I do think that it has to happen on independent platforms that aren’t driven by advertising and the desire to scale as big as possible” (Pelly). For organizations like AdHoc, Pelly described those as businesses, in contrast to those that are “mission driven spaces” (i.e. community spaces, DIY venues, artist-run spaces, co-ops, etc.). Pelly, an advocate for organizations like AdHoc, understands their business model and does not condemn them. There is this interesting dichotomy to recognize between businesses and mission driven spaces in DIY communities. Businesses can help these mission driven spaces but they are able to thrive off of services like Facebook, whereas mission driven spaces do not directly benefit from the growth of these services. Growth in size, capacity or “nicer” facilities is not necessarily a need for these DIY communities. Pelly discusses the anti-scaling philosophy and how it is not always about “how do we increase growth in our community?” Yes, growth in ways of learning, expanding ways of thinking, and becoming more educated with the world around us and taking responsibility as a community that has had a role in gentrification but not so much the growth of aiming to be or exist as something that the community does not represent. “A business that is just focused on growing as big as possible isn’t going to be sustainable for communities—it’s only going to be serving the interests of their business” (Pelly).

Sustaining community and authenticity in community comes with the support of the whole in order to inform how the ecosystem operates within its own “rules/world” and within the

confines of the larger music industry. Pelly emphasized on the importance of ad-free community publications and content. “[Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Spotify are] not places for community building, they’re places for advertising... With Bandcamp there’s more of a sense of exchange in terms of ‘you made music and I am going to give you this five dollars and you’re going to give me your music’ and it’s so funny that to many people [in] the music industry, Bandcamp is this radical thing that could never scale, well, it doesn't *have* to but also it’s not really that radical, it’s just a store.”

Pelly brought my attention to Spotify’s serving of a “leanback environment.” This dilemma refers to limiting community members’ active role in music by bringing everything to them in the form of algorithms, making it a passive experience rather than consumers actively seeking out their interests (music, albums, events). Pelly brings up Spotify’s integration of recommended concert events—“does that make your concert going experience equally passive?” Algorithmic recommendations means people don't need to engage. This “leanback environment” strips music of its context as it no longer becomes about learning of the artist as it becomes music filtered through a system by which makes it the most accessible to people even if that person is an active member and supporter of a local music community.

Musicians and promoters today spend the majority of their time cultivating fanbases on Facebook, Instagram and Spotify—the three online juggernauts that have created a world in which artists are often beholden to using their tools or face the alternative of struggling to gain any sort of audience. There may be no other way around it unless the answer is limiting the amount of social networks one uses. A more drastic approach in forgoing social networks would require the gumption and support of an entire community to uphold. More research could be

completed to try and uncover how these online tools affect music, the way it is created and the growth of an artist who is subjected to knowing exactly just how much they are worth (in popularity) by follower counts and Facebook “likes.”

It may be possible to build a community through digital means but it is empathy that does not translate through this digital distribution. When it comes to building a community or an audience from the musician’s perspective, there is a need to encourage people who do not know you, your brand or your loyal members. It is in this effort that most musicians turn to social media or online means to help facilitate this, however, maybe the most effective way is to stick to basics and the traditional means of in-person interpersonal networking. “The whole point of DIY is if there’s something that you wish existed you can help make it happen whether you have the tools or not, so I feel like it’s up to everyone to look around and decide if the infrastructure that they are within feels good to them” (Pelly).

“Safety is always [priority] number one. The degree to which you cater to your community and keep them in mind with your programming and how you’re running things—that’s the most defining factor at the end of the day. Having it resonate with a group of people who are progressively minded and focused on emerging local talent, that to me is DIY” (Leichtung). Venues have come and gone but it is important to note that there will always be a drive to support DIY music in communities as long as there are feasible means of doing so—including reasonable rent prices, passionate musicians producing new and interesting sounds, as well as members of the community who care enough to devote their time and support for them.

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