

A Pure PASSION

The passion and drive that fuels the people behind Ticketmaster is what truly distinguishes this entertainment ticketing giant in its competitive industry.

Images by Estelle Judah Photography

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- Maria O'Connor

The people and the passion that energise and invigorate Ticketmaster’s operations and processes have ensured that it remains at the forefront of a rapidly changing industry. Maria O’Connor, Managing Director of Ticketmaster Australia and New Zealand, recently took a break from this 24/7 business to discuss its continual evolution.

The CEO Magazine: Having been with the company for more than 30 years, how have you seen Ticketmaster evolve as social and technological trends have shifted?

Maria: It’s changed a lot, mostly driven by consumers having technology at their fingertips. When I first started in the business, the technology was in the hands of the companies, not the consumer. Now that consumers have the technology, it’s made all retailers change.

With us being at the forefront of that, it’s definitely changed how we interact with consumers. Technology has made the entertainment industry change more than most because, if you think back to the days of *Phantom of the Opera*, there was technology on stage and the consumer noticed first how shows changed and how things were delivered on stage differently.

Then that was translated into how they bought their tickets and found out which shows they wanted to go to. Now it’s translated into the artist or entertainer engaging with their fans. The whole technology shift has revolutionised the entertainment industry.

You’ve previously said that Ticketmaster’s people and passion set it apart. How has this evolved over the years?

It’s a very hard thing to describe. We have a 24-hour day. We live it.

We’re dealing with customers who are motivated by passion, so we have to match that passion to be able to service them. That’s what sets our people apart; they are absolutely passionate about Ticketmaster and the events that they’re selling.

We work 24/7—even though they’re not here physically, they’re on their phones and on email, talking to clients and dealing with issues as they arise. That’s what sets them apart from other industries and even people within our own industry.

How do you reinvest in and engage with your employees and ensure you feed that strong passion?

We have an in-house training program. We support those employees who want to put time into further education. We’re supporting people who are doing university courses; we’re helping people do MBAs; we’re helping >



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some of our finance people do their CPAs; and we're supporting our technology people with developing their skills.

We also do a lot of management training, and we support people with leadership abilities. I myself have been through leadership training here. We also do a lot of social stuff: we have morning teas; we go to events; we play basketball and table tennis; and we try to make the workplace as fun as possible. We try to foster a culture of motivation, and we try not to take it too seriously. It is quite full on, and it's a 24-hour business, so we try to keep it balanced.

You also reinvest in people outside the organisation. What prompted the various community works?

That's a personal thing from my perspective. I've always been very aware of how lucky we are to live

in this community. Maybe it was my upbringing in Belfast in the war. I'm personally involved in a number of community organisations. I encourage that approach with all my staff. Some of the other managers are on boards and committees for charities, and we do quite a bit of community work. We support lots of community involvement. That's a worldwide initiative for the company, to try to be involved in each of our local communities and to give back.

I'm on the board of Big Brothers Big Sisters Australia. I've been involved in mentoring refugee women in particular. I mentor people at work, and I encourage my senior people to mentor as well. I think mentoring is one of those things that probably has the highest impact, and it's one of the easiest things you can do. I'm lucky because when I first came to Australia I was mentored by some very strong individuals, and that's helped me immensely in my career.

I'm actually still mentored by the same people, believe it or not, some 30 years later.

Due to the complexities of your business and the industry, what plans will you implement over the next 12 to 18 months to transform your processes and work with regulators?

One of the things we're looking at is how we present information to consumers. We have up to 30,000 events on sale in any 12-month period, and all our clients like their events presented in a particular way.

We're working as diligently as we can to ensure the customer is receiving information in a clear and concise manner, particularly the pricing schedule, which should be communicated at the earliest point in the transaction, especially when they're booking online.

We work with our clients to make the different variables they

impose in terms of ticket pricing as clear as possible.

How do you work with Disney Theatrical and Ernst & Young to ensure the best service for consumers?

Disney is a global company, so they bring a different, global perspective. They bring their experience from New York and London. When we have our strategic meetings with them, we work out what their plan is and what data they've collected from their global fields and we apply them in Australia. There are some things that work and some things that don't. Marketing strategies don't always work in each market, but we try as best as possible to apply them.

We go through a comprehensive strategic plan and we adapt the things that work. We might do that 18 months out from the first performance, and that's been very successful. We've been doing that

since the first Australian production of *The Lion King*, which was 10 years ago.

With Ernst & Young, who are our auditors, they make sure that all our processes and procedures back that up. All our reporting and systems have to be perfect. If you're building an event 18 months before it takes place, you have to make sure the audit trail, the reporting, and the event build are all done to the contract. We have to make sure that the systems are all being built correctly, the data is being stored properly, and everything is accessible 18 months later. Ernst & Young make sure all those processes are correct, efficient, and done to a global standard.

Where do you see Ticketmaster going in coming years?

I think more and more things are moving online, so the integration between the ticket being sold, the



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money being transferred into the bank, and then transferred to the client will require less and less human intervention. I think there'll be more integration between the sales and marketing systems, the ticketing system, and the general ledger.

On the technology side, there's going to be a lot more inter-phasing between all the different systems. We're in the throes of doing that now, though it will take a bit more time because of the complexities of all the different types of events that we have.

Consumers are much more savvy and informed than they ever were. They are much more interactive; they used to be passive. Consumers used to be sold to; now they're interactive in the transaction process. The e-commerce of live entertainment has completely changed—and it's going to continue to change. •



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