

Service charge put Ticketmaster in spotlight

Rob Elder

For the Oregon Daily Emerald

Ticketmaster, a large ticket broker, is facing lawsuits and severe consumer criticism for tacking what some say are excessive service charges on the tickets it sells.

In a recent 80-event, 10-state survey, Ticketmaster was shown to charge average service fees of 27 percent of a ticket's face value. The study was released by the United States Public Interest Research Group in coordination with OSPIRG.

"Ticketmaster clearly rips off consumers," said Maureen Kirk, executive director of OSPIRG. "Ticketmaster charges outrageous, monopolistic [prices]."

In addition, two-thirds of those Ticketmaster agents surveyed said the service charges are not disclosed separately on tickets. In other words, consumers are not always told what kind and how much of a charge they are paying.

"This is an example of students becoming aware of their position as consumers," said Matt Rabin, campus organizer of OSPIRG. "It's a sobering

experience when the public realizes that they are being ripped off in doing something so simple as buying a ticket."

Ellen Keithly, a University sophomore, said Ticketmaster is charging unrealistic prices for its tickets. "I can't afford the concert seats that I want. I think they are alienating the customers that they are trying to attract."

University sophomore Rachel Hewitt said, "I think Ticketmaster has lost touch with the fact that they are doing a service for their consumers."

At the University, the EMU Main Desk Store sells tickets for events on campus as well as at the WOW Hall and Hult Center. But its service charge averages only 5 percent per ticket.

"We are a service for the students," said store manager Marcia Hudspeth. "We try to keep the prices down for students and still make a profit."

The ticket agent, however, does not always determine the ticket price and service charge.

"We do what the promoter wants,"

Hudspeth said. "We either add a commission to the ticket if the promoter wants its face value or deduct from the gross sale."

"Either way, we have to make 5 percent," she said. "It used to be that we would generally deduct from the gross. Then Ticketmaster came along and started charging exorbitant ticket prices, so others did too. But that's how a company like that stays in business," Hudspeth said.

Ticketmaster, a \$1 billion-a-year business, has been battling the word "monopolistic" since 1991, when it bought out its main competitor, Tickettron.

This summer, Jeff Ament and Stone Gossard of Pearl Jam went so far as to testify against Ticketmaster before a House Government Operations Subcommittee. Their appearance was the result of a memorandum Pearl Jam filed with the Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice. The memo accused Ticketmaster of outrageous service fees and of having "a virtually absolute monopoly on the distribution of tickets to concerts."

Ticketmaster executives have not commented, but spokesman Larry Solters was quoted as saying, "What happened is, the computerized ticketing provided a tremendous convenience. People embraced that convenience, and it evolved into a necessity. Now the lawyers and the acts don't feel that the consumers should pay for that service."

Ticketmaster seemingly won a minor battle on June 27 when a New York state judge dismissed a consumer's antitrust lawsuit against the company. The suit accused Ticketmaster of unfair business practices, including kickbacks to concert promoters and concealed service fees. Ticketmaster said it was confident that it would win not only the suits already filed but also any similar suits should they arise.

frustrating and nerve-wracking fight for subsistence."

With all the negative, high-profile publicity, Ticketmaster is having trouble obtaining the distribution contract for the 9 million tickets to be sold for the 1996 Olympic events in Atlanta.

Extension gives students more time to file sexual harassment grievances

Lori Bettineski

Oregon Daily Emerald

The time line for filing sexual and discriminatory harassment grievances at the University has been extended to one year.

Students previously had 180 days to file either a formal or informal grievance with the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity.

"The primary reason that the change was made is that sexual harassment is such an emotional event," said Ken Lehrman, director of the affirmative-action office. "Sometimes victims blame themselves or they wonder if it was how they dressed, and this kind of unraveling of emotions can take a fair amount of time."

Although the University has extended its filing times, Lehrman said students must realize that the time line for filing with federal agencies hasn't changed. Students still have only 180 days to file a grievance at the federal level.

"The problem here is that people may decide to wait nine months to file with the University, but in doing so, they will lose their time to file with the federal agency if they should decide they want to take it to that level," Lehrman said.

Students who file an informal grievance with the University have until day 364 to change it to a formal one, but the change must be made before the end of the year. The one-year time line begins the day the grievance is submitted to the affirmative-action office.

The deadline for grievances concerning "prohibited discrimination" has not been extended. Grievances addressing discrimination on the basis of race, age, gender or sexual discrimination must be filed within 180 days.

Students who are uncertain about filing with the affirmative-action office can speak first with a trained group of consultants on campus. The Sexual Harassment Resource Network consists of faculty, staff and students who listen to students' concerns with confidentiality.

"We really want to convey the message that the University does take harassment very seriously and will not sweep anything under the carpet."

— Ken Lehrman
affirmative action office director

According to Lehrman, the number of sexual harassment reports at the University is starting to decline, although this doesn't necessarily mean sexual harassment occurs less often.

"I do think there is less sexual harassment, but that's not to say that it's not going on," Lehrman said. "The numbers will show that reporting is down slightly because there has been a number of highly publicized cases and harassers are recognizing that this university is taking this seriously."

"It took some time to get this message across, and the message is that it's not the '70s and you can't harass people anymore," Lehrman said. "People have become aware that sexual harassment can ruin careers, and people are now more cautious."

Lehrman also emphasized that students should never hesitate filing a grievance with the University, even if the student was harassed by a staff or faculty member.

"We really want to convey the message that the University does take harassment very seriously and will not sweep anything under the carpet," Lehrman said.

"It makes no sense to even contemplate sweeping something under the carpet because if it was found out, the liability could go through the roof."

"It is not in the University's interest to do this," he said. "The University wants to find out what's going on and take appropriate action immediately."

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