

Ticketing the World's Largest Arts Festival

Background

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe is the largest arts festival in the world. The Fringe story dates back to 1947 when eight companies, unhappy that they were not included in the International Festival programme, endeavoured to play on the "Fringe of the Festival".

Since then Edinburgh Festival Fringe attendances have grown to 2.3 million tickets, across 50,459 performances. In 2015 the Fringe saw 3,314 shows in more than 660 spaces in 313 venues across Edinburgh over three weeks.

The Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society has three main objectives:

- Providing support, advice and encouragement to all who create the Fringe each year
- Assisting audiences by providing comprehensive, accurate and up-to-date information and ticket selling across web, mobile and in person
- Promoting the Edinburgh Fringe to the rest of the world.

The Challenge

Red61 was to provide a ticketing service across a wide variety of types and size of venues in a 42 site ticketing network, ranging from venues who sell 24,000 tickets to those that sell 400,000 tickets. This is one of the most dynamic ticketing environments in the world.

We also had to provide a service to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe Society which acts as an agency for all shows that take part in the festival and processes 1.3 million tickets.

The three key tenets of the brief were:

- Make ticket sales as open and easily available as possible
- Give venues a robust and reliable ticketing operation, where they retain control of their ticket inventory whilst enabling collaboration with sales, marketing partners
- Firmly establishing the Fringe Society as *the* place to find information and purchase a ticket for every show.

Our Solution

Distributed Ticketing and the Redgate

The Edinburgh Fringe used to have a central ticketing system. Venues were heavily reliant on their connection to the central server to be able to sell tickets in-house. Arts organisations can't afford to run expensive communications links across the city and the ability to sell a ticket across the entire network would occasionally be disrupted, causing chaos in an environment where a show goes in every few minutes.

Red61 removed all single points of failure in the old Fringe network by giving the larger venues their own instance of the VIA. Each instance can be hosted in-house or in the cloud to suit individual business requirements. All instances of VIA can cross sell with each other, so tickets remain openly accessible, but in the case of a communications failure, only the local venue is affected and, where they have VIA in-house, they can continue to sell tickets to maintain the significant walk up requirement.

The network is managed through our own communications devices called Redgates. The Redgate acts as a router to control traffic and enable Red61 to carry out 2,000 checks on the status of VIA, your hardware and your network connections. We generally know if there is a problem at the same time - if not before - the client does.

Cross Selling and Open Allocations

The Edinburgh Fringe is the largest ticketing network in the UK. All venues using VIA have the ability to easily sell for one another across the network, so venues retain full control over their own ticket inventory, whilst benefiting from the ability to collaborate with their partners to maximise sales channels and availability.

VIA users can still provide access to an allocation of tickets to other VIA users, but in the Edinburgh Fringe environment all VIA venues allow open access to all partners. When you've got 200 shows a day, that removes a huge amount of allocation management.

The VIA API

The powerful VIA Application Program Interface (API) allows us to integrate end to end ticketing with multiple sales channels. This including websites, mobile apps and EPOS systems as well as third party platforms.

The Pleasance Theatre, for example, are able to sell tickets through their own website, through the Edinburgh Comedy Festival website, through the Fringe Society website, mobile app and Facebook app, and through the local Festivals Edinburgh website. This maximises exposure by offering tickets for sale through channels owned by three other organisations as well as their own.

The Outcome

- The ticketing network is more reliable and robust
- Sales channels are maximised
- Sales through VIA have increased to 2 million for the three-week festival
- The Fringe Society has firmly established itself as the one stop shop, processing 1.3m of the 2m tickets.