



# What Does

# Mean for Festivals?

By Will Payne

If you stay informed about technology and business these days, certain key words and phrases stick out again and again. From “crossplatform” to “app” to “game mechanics,” many of these terms are just buzzwords and trends that may or may not be important, or even make sense, a few years down the road. Do you remember the big fuss over “multimedia” CD-ROMs? Today, there is one major trend affecting just about every industry, known as “Big Data.” As a festival promoter, this is a development that you can’t afford to ignore.

First off, what does “Big Data” even mean? Put simply, Big Data refers to a proliferation of information made available by computer systems and networks. The amount of accessible information is so staggering that old-school analytic techniques, like Excel workbooks and databases, struggle to keep up. In order to make sense of all this data, to find the signal hidden in all the inevitable noise, savvy technology companies and organizations are adapting to be able to visualize, analyze, and sort through this data with powerful new methods. These techniques have been used by governments to predict currency fluctuations, insurance companies to get closer to understanding the evolving risks of natural disasters in an era marked

by global climate change and extreme weather events, advertisers seeking to target their online media more precisely to the ideal target consumer, and online stores to get a better understanding of their customers’ tastes and shopping habits.

While Big Data may sound like something that is easily measured or defined in a textbook, the truth is that the concept applies differently to different scales of organizations. The availability of data can be overwhelming relative to their historic practices and needs. If you work at the National Weather Service or a major investment bank, you may need to process many terabytes of data or more on a daily basis. A terabyte is equivalent to over one thousand gigabytes or hundreds of iPhones worth of data. For many small businesses and consumers, Big Data is any complex data set that can be analyzed over time, since few laypeople have the training or the inclination to pore through the statistics that doing business online opens up to them.

What does this all mean for you when putting on a festival or event? What data is going to be most meaningful to you to ensure success? At Ticketfly, we are continuously working to get a better understanding of these questions and to help event promoters use data in an actionable way. If your festi-

val is only held once or a few times per year, it may seem like there would be less work to do to understand your business. However, any advantage in this regard is balanced out by the fact that with so few chances to experiment with different approaches, it becomes vital to make sure that your interpretation of the data is correct and that you are following up with the right responses.

There are three main areas where Big Data can bring the most insight and success to festival promoters. First is the fundamental problem of knowing who your customers are, or *demographics*. The second key is being able to gauge the *effectiveness of your marketing efforts* (both on- and offline) in real time. And third, it’s becoming increasingly important to maintain an online conversation with your audience to keep people interested and engaged. Understanding how people are interacting with your brand through digital platforms, or online engagement, is paramount.

Customer demographics are the most fundamental pieces of data you can access. Demographics affect everything from when and where your event takes place, to the talent and attractions you produce, to the places and media in which you reach your target audience. Luckily, they’re also some of the easiest to track these days. If you

don't have *Google Analytics* installed on your website, stop everything (including reading this article; continue once you're finished) and get your site registered now. Google has a treasure trove of data that you can start to sort through immediately, from age and gender information to a breakdown of how many visitors to your website are on mobile devices. This information will almost certainly make it clear how important it is for your website to be optimized for phones and tablets.

There is one area where Google doesn't have all the answers though. If you're in a high-density urban area, you might find it frustrating that Google Analytics is only accurate to the "city" level. In New York City, for example, you can see that people in "New York" and even "Brooklyn" are interested in your event, but good luck trying to compare sales between the Upper West Side and Brooklyn Heights. Free services like *Batchgeo.com* allow you to import an Excel file of geographic data (like a list of ticket buyers) and easily plot it on a map. Obviously, the first step is helping to decide where to focus your marketing efforts, from billboards and posters to radio spots. Beyond this foundation, retailers have been using zip code data to do sophisticated market segmentation research for decades. They've been able to draw powerful conclusions about household incomes, family makeup, and consumer preferences, and there's no reason you can't, too.

Hopefully, the conclusions you're reaching are reaffirming your programming and marketing decisions, but if they haven't, don't be afraid to make a change in midstream. If you find out that half of your attendees come from Nashville, for example, and one of the top stars of your upcoming event performs there every other week, you may want to look into whether or not you need something more novel to keep these people happy.

Okay, now you know exactly who your existing audience is, and how well it lines up with your target audience. The next thing you need to do is evaluate how well your existing marketing strategy is reaching these people. You can achieve this by tracking how many people you reach and convert into ticket buyers with each element of your marketing plan. The easiest way to do this is with help from Google Analytics (seriously, if you haven't registered your site yet, do yourself a favor and do it now). Google makes it easy to see how many people arrive on your site from different links. To be able to easily understand what link is what, you can use something called a *UTM code*, which lets you add certain "tags" to your links that Google Analytics picks up and displays when you look at who's arriving on your site. For example, if you purchase online ads, you can provide the ad host

with a tagged link that allows you to easily see how many people click through to your website. If you're using an integrated event ticketing and marketing platform like Ticketfly, you can even see how many people ended up buying tickets based on that link, or your total sales conversions.

This may seem irrelevant if most of your marketing is done offline and digital media doesn't drive much of your advertising budget (it probably should, but that's another story). Nevertheless, you can reap the tracking benefits of UTM codes in print ads or other media where people have to type the URL into their computer manually; just take the whole long URL and shorten it using a tool like *Bit.ly*, ending up with something like *bit.ly/YOUREVENT*. Alternatively, you could create a promo code that ticket buyers can use in order to get a small discount that you only announce in one print ad, then easily track how many people redeem that code to get a good sense of how many conversions came from that ad.

Once you know who your target audience is, and how effectively your paid advertising is reaching them, it's time for you to see how well you have been engaging your audience online. Organic conversation on Facebook and Twitter builds your brand, makes your customers more loyal, and attracts new people to the fold. A few rules of thumb: don't make everything you do on social media about you. If your community sees you continuously broadcasting your marketing messages with no two-way conversation or other useful and interesting content, they will tune you out, and Facebook's News Feed algorithm will start to penalize your posts as spam and show them to fewer people. Another great way to get a handle on how you're doing is to use the built-in *Facebook Insights* you have access to from the dashboard of your fan page. For power users, Facebook, like Google Analytics, allows you to export a spreadsheet with all kinds of detailed data about your posts and your page, so you can slice and dice the numbers to your heart's content.

Also, if you're having trouble keeping up with posts on Facebook, Twitter, and other social networks, you may want to look into using a dedicated social media management application like *Hootsuite* or *Sprout Social*. These services allow multiple team members to collaborate and post from the same accounts, allow you to keep track of which messages you've responded to, and have some built-in analytics features of their own that you can use to track the growth of your community and the effectiveness of the different kinds of content you share online.

This may sound like a lot to keep straight, but every one of the tools mentioned here has the potential to make

your business significantly stronger. If you're only putting on a few events a year, it's even more important to make sure that you do everything you can to make them successful. Hopefully, by mastering the techniques laid out in this article, you can make Big Data have a big impact on your event and your bottom line.

## THIS MONTH TICKETFLY...

announced the availability of *Ticketfly Fanbase*, a complete customer analytics product within Ticketfly's integrated ticketing and marketing platform. Building on the best practices for using data outlined in this article, Fanbase allows event promoters to see at a glance who their top fans are, identify which fans are motivating additional ticket sales through their social media connections, and reward and grow their audience with targeted promotions. Fanbase is available to all Ticketfly clients, including festivals and attractions throughout the U.S. and Canada. For more information, visit: <http://ticketfly.com/fanbase>

**Ticketfly** is an integrated ticketing and marketing platform for event promoters of any size, from standing-room-only clubs to festival grounds and arenas with reserved seating. The Ticketfly platform provides a full suite of integrated ticketing, mobile and social marketing, email and analytics tools that streamline operations and increase ticket sales. Prominent Ticketfly clients in the U.S. and Canada include Merriweather Post Pavilion (Baltimore), 9:30 Club (Washington, D.C.), Brooklyn Bowl, Austin City Limits Live, The Troubadour (Los Angeles), the Legendary Horseshoe Tavern (Toronto), the Preakness Stakes and Virgin Mobile FreeFest. The San Francisco Business Times recently named Ticketfly the fastest-growing technology company in the Bay Area, based on revenue growth.

To find events near you, visit [ticketfly.com](http://ticketfly.com). For more information about Ticketfly, visit [start.ticketfly.com](http://start.ticketfly.com), connect on Facebook at [facebook.com/ticketfly](http://facebook.com/ticketfly), or follow us on Twitter at [twitter.com/ticketfly](http://twitter.com/ticketfly).