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Tickets come calling

No paper stubs: Only Verizon text gets you into Fergie show

Eric Morath / The Detroit News

There's seemingly nothing cell phones won't do: take pictures, text friends, play music. Add get you into exclusive concerts to that list.

Most fans who attend Fergie's June 13 show in Detroit won't be getting in with a printed ticket. Instead, the only way for them to gain entry is to display a barcode image sent to their Verizon phone. And tickets won't actually be sold to the concert; instead, text-messed "invitations" will have to be won.

Downloading Fergie songs to your phone or entering a Fergie look-a-like contest at a Verizon store, for example, are two ways to get invited to her Fergalicious show at the the State Theatre, soon to be Fillmore Detroit. The Detroit stop is part of the Black Eyed Peas singer's first solo tour.

The Verizon-exclusive tour, which kicked off in Seattle last month, is likely to unleash even more features on cell phones, said Roger Entner, senior vice president for the communication sector at New York-based IAG Research.

"It's another example of the Swiss Army knife phone," he said. "It will make concert-going more convenient, and ultimately every phone will offer the service."

The Fergie promotion is more than a sponsorship. It allows Verizon to show the cutting-edge abilities of its technology.

"Wireless phones are multimedia devices that are part of today's lifestyle," said Verizon spokeswoman Brenda Raney. "It's only natural that tickets will be sent to your phone."

Raney said the "Fergie Verizon VIP Tour" helps reinforce the strength of Verizon's music services and the capability of its phones, some of which can carry up to 2 gigabytes of music.

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Bryan Bedder / Getty Images
Fergie performs last month in Uniondale, N.Y.
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Analysts say the promotion is crafty because it encourages customers to learn about downloading songs and ring tones -- a key area of revenue growth.

After the invitation to the concert is sent via text message and the customer accepts, Verizon will then send the Fergie fan a picture message that includes a barcode.

Phones must be able to receive pictures to get the code, but all V-Cast phones, which allow users to download songs, have that capability.

A limited number of paper tickets will be distributed to noncustomers and those without capable phones who win radio contests or enter at Verizon stores.

New way to advertise

The show marks the first time locally that tickets have been transmitted through cell phones. The practice is popular in Europe and likely will become more widespread here, said Eric Smallwood, vice president of marketing for Front Row Marketing Services in Port Huron.

"This is the wave of the future," he said. "There's no doubt that this technology will be adopted by other carriers and could be used to enter a Tigers or Lions game in the future."

Sports fans and concertgoers at large venues such as The Palace of Auburn Hills or Ford Field need not fret that they'll be shut out of events if they don't own the right phone, Smallwood said.

The exclusive Fergie deal works in a 3,000-seat venue such as the State Theatre but wouldn't sell out a baseball stadium, he said.

As a sponsorship ploy, the Verizon-phone only concert is a win for the wireless company -- especially as Fergie's music appeals to the teen and 20s crowd cell phone providers covet.

"It's very unique it assures that fans will touch and feel the product," Smallwood said. "The days of sponsors just throwing up a sign is no longer."

Fans of Fergie who use other phones may not be as excited about the promotion, said Michael Bernacchi, marketing professor at University of Detroit-Mercy.

Verizon controls about 26 percent of the national wireless market, according to Chetan Sharma Consulting, meaning about three-quarters of wireless phone subscribers would likely be shut out.

"It's very monopolizing, very limiting and there is a risk there," he said. "The one thing customers don't like is being forced to do something."

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