



## The Edinburgh Experience: A Bird's-Eye View of Clicket.co.uk

by Jo Michel, Director, Michel Consultancy

The Edinburgh Portal Project was originated to unify the customer experience when searching for events and activities across the city. In this paper, I aim to give you a bird's-eye view of the experience of those involved in the project which was finally launched in 2011 as [www.Clicket.co.uk](http://www.Clicket.co.uk)



I came to Edinburgh in June 2008 to be the Ticketing Manager at Hub Tickets, the agency which is operated by the Edinburgh International Festival and sells tickets for that festival and many others during the summer months each year.

### Edinburgh - why a portal?

Edinburgh is a festival city. As everyone knows, it is the home of the largest of them all: the Edinburgh Festival Fringe; the prestigious Edinburgh International Festival; The Edinburgh Book Festival; Edinburgh Jazz & Blues Festival; Festival of Politics; and Festival of Spirituality and Peace all of which run concurrently throughout August, each year. Edinburgh is also home to the renowned Traverse Theatre Company, has great touring venues in the Festival Theatre and Edinburgh Playhouse, the beautiful Queens Hall and a spectacular concert venue, The Usher Hall.

The festivals unite these venues, which usually run their own ticketing systems, sell their own seasons and market their own product in individual ways. The visitor to Edinburgh, outside of festival time, is often confused as there is no central booking agency, unlike during the festival when the programs of each festival make it easy to find what's on, where.

Edinburgh City Council, the Scottish Arts Council and The Audience Business had an idea to create a single point of entry for visitors which would offer product from all the Edinburgh venues and eventually expand to all cultural aspects of Edinburgh life, including the superb galleries and museums on offer.

*"...a single point of entry for visitors, which would offer product from all the Edinburgh venues..."*

### Structure and strategy

The Audience Business (TAB) was appointed as the project management and a Strategy Working Group put in place to guide the decision making process and to be representative of the core stakeholders in the project. The Edinburgh Portal Project had begun. I joined the Strategy Working Group in September 2008 as the Ticketing representative; there were representatives from Museums & Galleries, Edinburgh City Council, Tourism, Marketing and Venue Management as well as TAB. A Project Leader/Digital Manager, Kate Park was also put in place by early 2009.

Prior to me coming on board, Roger Tomlinson and Beth Aplin had been brought in to look at the possible technologies that could be employed to form the basis of the portal and link systems together. Ticketswitch was chosen as the appropriate technology partner. It is a middleware product which acts as a conduit, receiving data from individual systems, displaying it in a website and, when customers choose performances, the events are sold back into the originating system.

We also looked at Partnerships that could potentially assist us in getting product onto the site even if they weren't linked through Ticketswitch. One of the partnerships was The List, the Edinburgh what's on guide which has an event listing website, and we looked at integrating their listings for venues that were not linked directly. In addition, the Group explored options with Visit Scotland for accommodation packaging.

## Working Groups

With the technology decided, the next step was to start getting the TAB subscriber venues interested in participating in the project. We realised nothing would be achieved without assistance from the venues and organisations, so it was important to have their consensus.

It was decided to set up a separate working group which would be made up of all the Ticketing Managers of the year round Venues and Festivals. As the technology employed would need to talk directly to each of the Ticketing Systems for the project to work, we needed the Ticketing Managers onside to progress the requirements for each organisation and to speak directly to their Management and IT.

Independently, TAB and the Project Manager also communicated each step of the project to the Managing Directors and Marketing Managers of the organisations involved.

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## Process

The project was now underway and, interestingly, had started to develop in a way that we, as a Strategy Working Group, had not envisaged. Initially we thought the early focus would be on the style and vision of the project but we realised that before we could talk about how the website would look and function, the underlying technology had to be in place and working.

Therefore the focus and energy of the project was put into working with Ticketswitch and the Ticketing Managers. Decisions were made about data, event coding, management of cancellations and refunds, how limited tickets and sold out events should be presented as well as fees and charges.

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Then we needed to get the API links between the systems in place. Of course this was not easy to achieve as each system had its own way of labelling and sending data. It wasn't possible to get all systems talking to Ticketswitch but it was achieved between enta (Festival Theatre, Kings Theatre, Queens Hall & Royal Lyceum Theatre), Blackbaud's Patron Edge (The Edinburgh International Festival, Filmhouse and Usher Hall) and Red 61 (Edinburgh Festival Fringe & Edinburgh Book Festival). Working directly with each of the ticketing system suppliers to achieve the integration was hugely beneficial for the project; it enabled us to achieve greater understanding of our purpose and the requirements for the individual participants.

## Bit by Bit

It was an arduous process and an expensive one, as each systems development of the API had to be accounted for, but gradually we started to get all the elements in place for us to start the next phase.

Once we knew the technology would work, at least theoretically the Strategy Working Group turned back to the physical website and its presentation and functionality. For the design aspects we worked with Numiko. We wanted customers using the website to be able to create a profile and build a wish list, comment and give feedback on events they'd seen and share their experiences through social media. We also wanted to be able segregate the events in different ways not just by Art Form, Venue or Festival. Ideally wanted to feed the Festivals Edinburgh website with the festivals' inventory; create a child-friendly event site; a Scottish and Traditional event site and eventually a more Tourist-friendly site which also linked with Visit Scotland.

And we needed a name! After much deliberation and testing we named the site Clicket.co.uk.

## Testing

The timeline was in place, we wanted to be live with both Clicket, and the feed to the Festivals Edinburgh website for the 2010 Festival so 9 August was the agreed 'go-live' date. It was time to test. Each venue or festival participating had their feeds connected to Ticketswitch: now we needed to make sure that the information coming through was correct and matched events, dates and time even down to correctly representing seat numbers, discounts and seat attributes such as restricted view. We also needed to discover how sold out shows behaved in the website.

We also looked at the copy and images on the website and the event coding to ensure that Music performances appeared if 'music' was a search field. It was an extremely time consuming thing to do at the same time as maintaining 'business as usual' sales, especially for the Summer festivals.

The other main focus was testing the confirmation emails received by customers to make sure that it was clear what shows were booked by each organisation, where they went if they needed help and what booking fees they had been charged.

We also tested the results of purchases in our originating systems, how did the sales appear, what information was captured when the customer was created, what showed in reports and could the sales be refunded effectively.

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One of the aspects which had not been totally considered was the fact that we needed to test in a live environment. Therefore Kate and each of the Ticketing Managers were effectively buying live inventory to test the accuracy of the site. This was dangerous as we needed to be able to track each booking and refund it to the card holder and also maintain the accuracy of reporting on these live events.

The nature of Edinburgh's festivals and the time frame meant that to fully test the capacity and veracity of Clicket we needed to do the testing and have the live cutover when the full inventory was in the system, therefore it needed to be in August.

At the final hour, the day before we were to cut over, the Ticketing Managers met with TAB and agreed it wasn't ready. There were too many issues, mostly small but enough make us decide to put the project on hold until after the Summer Festivals were over for another year.

After the summer, destiny stepped in; Ticketswitch's parent company went through a fairly dramatic management change, which meant we had to put the project on hold and take time to review. After a few months, we were able to continue the project as Ticketswitch was bought by Ingresso and investment continued.



## We Did It

During our hiatus, we worked on the design flaws we had found during the testing process, made the search simpler and more fluid. We worked with the Ticketing System suppliers on fixing some of the issues with the API which enabled us to provide customers with better information. And we ironed out other bugs found in the delivery process. So, when Ticketswitch was available again, we were able to put all these improvements in place. We also worked with the participating organisations to review any other concerns.

Clicket and the feed to the Festivals Edinburgh website went live for the 2011 Festival season on August 10, selling thousands of tickets.

## Progress - Where are we now?

Clicket is continuing to sell for events year-round in Edinburgh, and you can see it here: [www.clicket.co.uk](http://www.clicket.co.uk). The challenge for Edinburgh now is how to make the website pay for itself; as a pilot project, it was funded by the Edinburgh City Council and grants from The Scottish Arts Council. Now the pilot is over, the management costs need to be covered by generating revenue from agency sales and other online services.

If we knew then what we know now, would we do it again? Probably, but it would be a different project as technology has changed in the past five years. I suspect it would be easier now and we'd have more options for our technology partner.

Three things which were vital to our success? A motivated and diverse group of people in the Strategy Working Group; a great leader in Kate Park who kept communication a priority; and allowing ourselves time to ensure we had ticked all the boxes. There were still hiccups along the way but we were able to deal with them and move on! ■

*Jo Michel is a member of the Advisory Panel for the inaugural Ticketing Technology Forum 2013 in London, 19-20 March 2013.*

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