

Do not pass go, do not collect \$200: The live entertainment monopoly leaving fans bankrupt



*a policy brief to encourage lawmakers to
enact change and fans to advocate for
themselves.*

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At the conclusion of this year's Q3, Ticketmaster and Live Nation had sold upwards of \$314 million tickets, gaining them about \$8.5 billion in revenue (Live Nation, 2025a, 2025b, 2025c). They're on track to continue breaking yearly records as we enter into 2026. Despite owning only 4% of live event venues in the U.S. (Live Nation, 2025b), their failed attempt at free-market-capitalism continues to monopolize the live music industry.



Since their 2010 merger into Live Nation Entertainment (Budnick & Baron, 2011), Live Nation and Ticketmaster have extorted fans and artists alike - squeezing out profit from every aspect of the concert experience. Their dominance over concert venues and artist management around the U.S. has led to a free for all ticketing infrastructure. Locking in artists and venues with heady contracts, they've been able to increase ticket prices with unexplained fees, garnering more profit for themselves.

From the utilization of surge and dynamic pricing, to the hidden fees added only at check-out, and their pro-scalper infrastructure, Live Nation Entertainment has taken fair-priced tickets out of the hands of fans and turned them into a monthly mortgage payment.

As singer-songwriter Jon Bellion describes, the "peanuts, parking and alcohol" concept occurs when Live Nation Entertainment locks artists in with contracts requiring them to utilize only Live Nation Entertainment vendors (The George Janko Show Clips, 2024). Live Nation Entertainment controls and receives 100% of the profit made off of food, parking, and alcohol purchases at each venue.

Ticketmaster's threat to consumers' access to competition has been standing for over 30 years – gaining notoriety even before the Live Nation Entertainment merger. Beginning a war with Pearl Jam in 1992, Ticketmaster stood their ground and began retaliation efforts as threats to their monopolization of the ticketing industry started to stir (Tkacik & Brown, 2023). Pearl Jam's attempts to provide free admission to a show enraged Ticketmaster, who would demand a percentage of ticket sales, despite the fact that they were free. Pearl Jam then faced unfortunate event after unfortunate event, canceling shows for a number of issues. In 1994, Pearl Jam testified in front of Congress to highlight the monopoly that Ticketmaster had over the live event ticketing industry – resulting in litigation being thrown out and Ticketmaster being sent off to continue their monopolization.

Removing, threatening, and retaliating against their competition allowed Live Nation Entertainment the ability to control all aspects of a concert, and how much they cost fans.

As Ticketmaster and Live Nation merged into Live Nation Entertainment, Giblin and Doctorow (2022) boiled down the companies' promise to not thwart competition to a "pinkie swear" (p. 98). The merger provided a total free-for-all, with no competition to threaten their practices. By 2010, Live Nation Entertainment had no one to answer to – threats of litigation instilled no fear in Ticketmaster or Live Nation. The company and its' executives knew that money talks – and so they solidified their reign of terror over the fan demand for an in-person, live-music experience.

Live Nation Entertainment has utilized three specific tactics that have extorted their fans financially:

Enabling scalpers to purchase tickets en masse at face-value, only to turn them for profit by drastically inflating the price

Creating a dynamic-pricing system, artificially inflating the price of tickets as demand increases

Tacking on often unexplained and unknown service fees, drastically increasing ticket price, only visible at check-out

Second hand but luxuriously priced

the secondary and resale ticket market

Scalping tickets has been part of the live-event experience since what feels like the dawn of time – it is the act of purchasing tickets at face value, only to resell them for a profit. Embracing a free-market approach, scalping encourages inflating the value of tickets to make a profit, oftentimes taking advantage of the demand and desperation of fans.

Yikes!

In a recent lawsuit from the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), internal emails between Ticketmaster employees were uncovered, outlining their collaboration with and consideration for secondary-market ticket brokers (Federal Trade Commission V. Live Nation Entertainment, LLC., 2025). The suit also highlights the concept of triple-dipping, Ticketmaster's ability to collect service fees on their first ticket sale and from the seller and buyer of a secondary

Bots or BOTS?

How do ticket scalpers do it? King (2025) explains it with three terms:

1. Bots
2. VPNs
3. Proxies

Scalping is not just a way to offload tickets to a show you're unable to go to. For some, it is a full-time job. Scalpers utilize bots (computer code that you can make do anything, and fast, much faster than humans ever could), VPNs (virtual private networks, which give you the ability to protect and secure most of your online data while still accessing the internet) and proxy IPs (dupe IP addresses that can mask your current IP address to one that appears to be in a home).

Despite their Terms of Use (Ticketmaster, 2025) detailing that using bots to purchase tickets is against their policies, this is not enforced. Scalpers have continued to purchase tickets en masse, for profit. In a measly attempt to curb the inflated prices of resale tickets, Ticketmaster has implemented an artist opt-in policy called the Face Value Exchange (How Does Ticketmaster's Face Value Exchange Work?, n.d.), in which tickets that are being resold can only be sold for the original value, if an artist chooses to opt-in. Regardless, Ticketmaster still collects 2x-3x the service fees, even if scalpers cannot profit.

In an attempt to curb the usage of bots to purchase tickets en masse, the BOTS Act of 2016 was passed to prohibit the sale of tickets purchased using a bot (Better Online Ticket Sales Act, 2024). Almost 9 years later, this law has had abysmal enforcement. Only this year, has it been recognized and reported that Ticketmaster has been violating the BOTS Act, as stated by the FTC suit (Federal Trade Commission V. Live Nation Entertainment, LLC., 2025).

Only recently has Ticketmaster chosen to terminate TradeDesk, their one-stop-shop for resellers, including tech support (Lind, 2025).

It's the Algorithm, Stupid

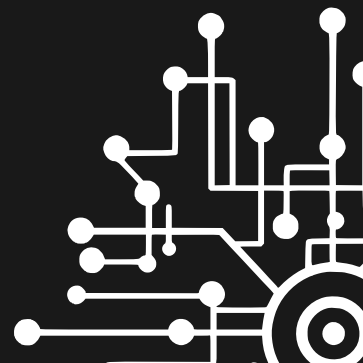


Ticketmaster's market manipulation

Imagine this: you're about to get tickets to see your favorite artist. You've spent 2 hours waiting in a digital queue, to see tickets labeled as "Platinum." Surely, this must mean they have a level of VIP status, right? Access to a special restroom, bar, or seat...right? The unfortunate answer to this – no.

Ticketmaster utilizes a demand-based pricing model (Pires, 2025) to inflate ticket prices, ultimately, because they know that fans will buy them. With a combination of algorithms evaluating the demand for tickets and fear of missing out (FOMO), we see fans having no choice but to purchase tickets more than double the original price (Izundu, 2025), with no extra benefits.

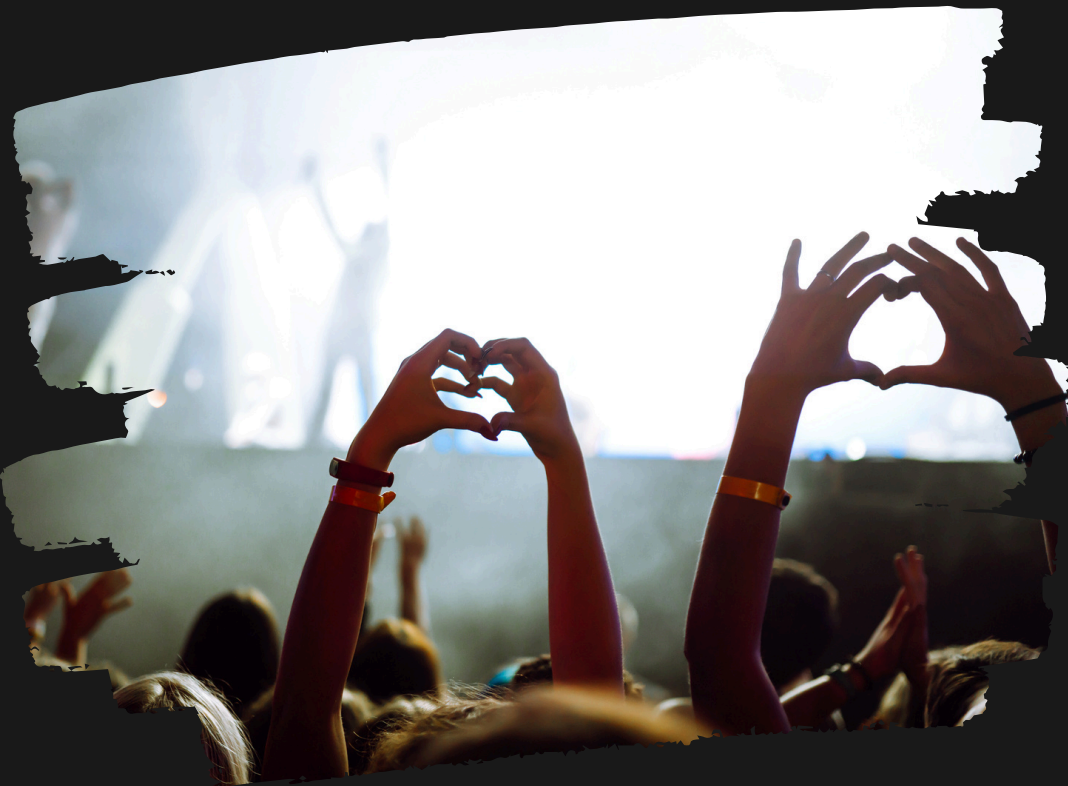
Despite claims that they'll inform fans beforehand about dynamically priced tickets (Izundu, 2025), Ticketmaster is still utilizing this practice – forcing fans to make a game-time decision between seeing their favorite artist live or missing out, unable to predict if tickets will sell out or decrease in price.



The B.S. Service Fee

As singer-songwriter Clyde Lawrence described in his 2023 testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee, artists work with their teams to set their ticket prices (Senate Committee on Judiciary Holds Hearing Entitled “That’s the Ticket,” 2023). What artists do not have a say in, though, is the notorious service fee. An unexplained, unknown fee tacked-on to the final total upon checking-out on the Ticketmaster platform. Though Ticketmaster acknowledges these fees (Ticketmaster, 2025b), they offer no explanation about the what or why of said fees.

The only action thus far to combat against service fees has been the introduction of legislation titled the Fans First Act, which would require Ticketmaster to disclose all fees as soon as the purchase begins, creating transparency of the total cost (Sisario, 2023). As of the end of 2025, this legislation has yet to become law.



What Can We Do About This?

There are 3 courses of actions that can be taken to mitigate Live Nation Entertainment’s monopoly on the live-event industry:

Continue the status-quo

Despite the on-going litigation, Live Nation Entertainment continues to see and project exponential growth (Live Nation, 2025d). The company also claims to have sufficient evidence and support to adequately defend itself. It is to no surprise that a billion-dollar company has sufficient access to top-tier legal defense. As of now, there has been abysmal punitive measures taken against Live Nation Entertainment – and they operate business-as-usual, pinkie swearing that they will enact change. Leaving the status quo would continue to have fans extorted by bots and greed.

Enforce existing and pass pending legislation, with non-financial penalties

With already existing legislation including the BOTS Act of 2016, the Sherman Act, The FTC Act, and the Clayton Act (The Antitrust Laws, 2022), a multitude of government authorities can execute their power to bring light to Live Nation Entertainment’s violation of the law, and enforce penalties. Research implies that financial penalties do not deter big corporations (Coffee, 2021), therefore, technological penalties should be enforced.

Break up the Ticketmaster and Live Nation monopoly – declaring both as separate entities.

The ultimate response to the monopoly of Live Nation Entertainment is to break the monopoly up. This would require the participation and deliberation of the U.S. Department of Justice to litigate their anti-trust suit, and issue an agreement or verdict on their violation of the U.S. anti-trust laws.



Evaluating the Alternatives

To evaluate the three policy options above, we'll take a closer look at the: social acceptability, political acceptability, and cost effectiveness.

Social Acceptability

This will be defined as the general acceptability by current social and cultural standards, including the opinions of fans and artists

Political Acceptability

This will be defined as the likelihood for the current political system to take the proposed action

Cost Effectiveness

This will be defined as the cost to various stakeholders; with low cost being most effective and high cost being least

	Social Acceptability	Political Acceptability	Cost Effectiveness
Status Quo	Low social acceptability; fans and artists are already unhappy with the current practices of Live Nation Entertainment	Mixed political acceptability; anti-trust legislation has been filed, but no penalties have been enforced	Fans have the lowest cost effectiveness, as they have no access to a competitive market; Live Nation Entertainment has the highest cost effectiveness, as they monopolize the industry and can continue increase prices and profits
Legislative Enforcement	High social acceptability; fans and artists would positively benefit from enforced legislation	Mixed political acceptability; some lawmakers will agree to enforce the laws, while others may prioritize lobbying efforts by Live Nation Entertainment and other industry executives	The enforcement of regulatory legislation will provide high cost effectiveness for fans, lowering prices; Live Nation will face loss from the removal of triple-dipping, inflated prices, and potential service outages created by penalties
Break up the Monopoly	High social acceptability; fans and artists will have access to a true free-market for the live-event industry	Mixed to low political acceptability; lawmakers will be met with lobbying efforts or threatened financially	Objectively, this provides the highest cost effectiveness for fans and completely destabilizes Live Nation Entertainment

Future Predictions & Tradeoffs

Allowing Live Nation Entertainment to remain in the same parameters will all but guarantee fans will become more frequently priced out of live event experiences. As scalpers push the boundaries and inflate prices, it will be more likely that attending live events is seen as a show of wealth. It will also likely guarantee that Live Nation Entertainment will completely dismantle any outlying competition, completely owning the live-event industry.

Keeping the status quo will continue lining the pockets of industry executives, but create a wider disparity between fans and their artists. There is potential for artists to attempt to break contracts, or wait them out.

If current legislation is enforced, and pending legislation is passed and later enforced, we may see Live Nation Entertainment make tangible changes and room for competition. If faced with technological penalties, like servers being shut down or blocked, Ticketmaster will have no choice but to correct violations in order to stay in business. Enforcing monetary penalties will offer no real incentive, as a company being worth billions of dollars will not fear fines worth millions.

Enforcement will require the federal government to bipartisanly agree to monitor and report any violation of the law, and enforce the correct penalty based on the scope of the violation. This alternative will also face scrutiny from the company itself, and may generate lawsuits and legislation against the government.

The potential break-up of the Live Nation Entertainment monopoly will create an actual free-market, allowing concert venues and artists to re-negotiate or break contracts with Live Nation and provide growth opportunities for smaller ticket companies to enter the market.

The break-up of the monopoly will be met with pushback from the companies, and potentially law makers. Lobbying is not an uncommon action taken by large corporations when under scrutiny, and it is also not uncommon for lawmakers to prove their votes can be bought.

The break-up may also allow for other companies to retaliate or even grow into monopolies.

Recommendations

The solution is clear: legal action needs to be taken in order to protect consumers.

To start, the enforcement of current and passing of pending legislation will establish an understanding that the government is prepared to regulate Live Nation Entertainment. Enforcing technological penalties instead of financial penalties will incentivize the company to self-regulate and work through any potential violations. Fans should begin to see live event ticket prices decrease to face value and notice the absence of scalpers, unexplained service fees, and algorithmically priced tickets.

To generate a totally free market, with competition, federal lawmakers should consider the inclusion of both enforcing laws and initiating a break up of the Live Nation Entertainment monopoly. Both solutions will ensure that upon a break up, other corporations will also be regulated adequately.

Ultimately, federal lawmakers should consider their constituencies and the social acceptability of enforcing laws and potentially breaking up the monopoly. Both actions will require public support, and enacting them will provide consumers with a true free market of choice.



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