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# VT PULSE

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## Quote of the Week

*"We took a risk on this one, especially in this environment."*

– Jeff Brown of Stream Realty Partners on his firm's decision to buy the Verizon Wireless Amphitheater in Selma, Texas and flip it, possibly into a church.

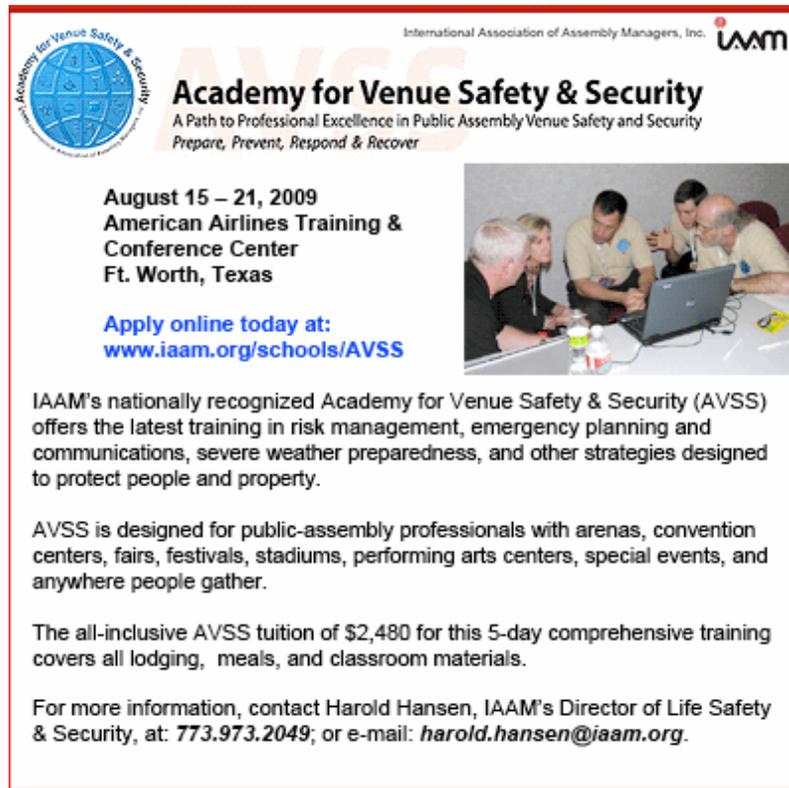
Greetings Riley,

Welcome to VT Pulse, your weekly guide to the "News Behind the Headlines." There will be no VT Pulse next week, as we finalize the April issue. Check your inboxes on April 8 for the next issue.



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VT NEWS



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## SHORT TAKES

>> **DOJ WANTS MORE TIME ON MERGER** – The U.S. Justice Department has issued a request for additional information on the proposed merger between Ticketmaster and Live Nation. Ticketmaster said the company anticipated the extension, in an SEC filing statement, and noted that it expected to close the deal in the second half of the year. *Contact: John Vlautin, (310) 867-7127*

## AMPHITHEATERS

### LIVE NATION SELLS SELMA SHED TO INVESTOR GROUP

*The Verizon Wireless Amphitheater in Selma, Texas will no longer host the Vans Warped Tour following its sale to outside investors. Pictured here is band Club Kingsnake performing in 2008.*



Live Nation has sold the Verizon Wireless Amphitheater in Selma, Texas, and has made the new owners promise not to produce live music at the center, effectively halting major concerts in the 788-person town. Buyer Stream Realty Partners of Dallas said the space is likely to be used as a church, although no final plans have been made.

Live Nation spokesperson John Vlautin confirmed the sale, which falls under the territory of Bob Roux, president of Houston/Dallas/New Orleans Region for Live Nation and covers Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas and Mississippi. Roux did not return a phone call for comment by presstime. In Feb. 2007, Live Nation sold the Starwood Amphitheatre in Antioch, Tenn.

Part of the current deal includes a deed restriction that the amphitheater not be used for concerts or live entertainment, explained Selma City Administrator Ken Roberts.

Newspaper reports about other potential Live Nation amphitheater sales noted that the firm's 2006 corporate earnings report outlined a strategy to sell venues where "the alternative purpose value of the real estate is greater than the value to us as a music venue." The Selma venue, near San Antonio, was among those listed for potential sale.

According the Venues Today Hot Tickets archives, Live Nation reported only 13 shows, grossing \$3,724,035 from 125,766 in attendance in 2008. The best year for the amphitheater was 2003, when 19 shows grossed \$6,815,059 from 189,606 attending.

Stream officials won't disclose what they paid for the property, but have

>> **TOENNIES JOINS ONCENTER** – TOENNIES JOINS ONCENTER - The Oncenter Complex board of directors has appointed Terri Toennies as president and chief executive officer of the Oncenter Complex, Syracuse, N.Y., including the Nicholas J. Pirro Convention Center, the War Memorial Arena and the John H. Mulroy Civic Center. She is expected to begin April 13. Toennies most recently served as general manager of Sunset Station in San Antonio, Texas.

Contact: Colleen O'Mara, (315) 478-6700

>> **TV STARS IN THE MAKING** – Ovations Food Services employees will make a cameo appearance in an upcoming episode of TBS' "My Boys," which taped a recent scene at Hohokam Stadium, Mesa, Ariz., spring training home of the Chicago Cubs. The fictional sitcom stars Jordana Spiro, Jim Gaffigan, Reid Scott, Jamie Kaler, Michael Bunin, Kyle Howard and Kellee Stewart. New episodes begin on TBS on Tuesday, March 31. This scene is expected to air in May.

Contact: Ike Richman, (215) 760-2888

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listed the real estate at \$8.5 million on their Web site. Stream's Jeff Brown said the plan is to flip the land and convert the site into either a corporate campus or university, but added that it would most likely be developed into a church.

The conversion would mean that the covered 6,000 seats would somehow have to be enclosed for a church service, while the 12,000-seat capacity berm around the property would be "used for something totally different" and that construction crews planned to "get rid of outside seating," Brown said.

He added that he beat several bidders to the punch for the space, although Roberts said he has seen many proposals to convert the amphitheater into retail space by third-party developers.

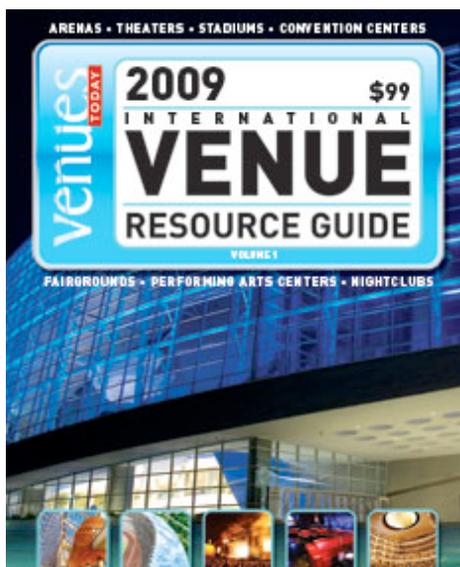
"I like to call them dirt kickers," Roberts said. "Four or five of them have come around with these grand ideas about what to do with the space, but when you say 'show me the money,' most of them fade, fold or firm up and leave. A couple of them just stare at their shoes and don't say a thing."

Vlautin said there were no concerts scheduled for the venue this summer. The amphitheater is the previous home to Kevin Lyman's Warped Tour, which is now scheduled for a July 2 run at the AT&T Center, located about 20 miles away. Lyman's RockStarEnergy Mayhem Fest was also slated for an August date at the amphitheater. No word yet where that event will go.

Brown said he and his team have no future plans to host concerts at the space since the amphitheater comes with a seven-year deed restriction. Regardless, Brown said his firm has mild trepidations about taking the real estate plunge.

"Trust me," he said. "We took a risk on this one, especially in this environment." – Dave Brooks

Interviewed for this article: John Vlautin, (310) 867-7127; Ken Roberts, (210) 651-6661; Jeff Brown, (210) 834-6655



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### ARENAS

#### LOUISVILLE ARENA HEALS NEEDS OF DOWNTOWN HEALTH CARE ACCESS

*The New Louisville (Ky.) Arena will be the first of its kind to have an urgent care facility on site.*



The Louisville Arena will be the first in the nation to include an urgent care facility. But it probably won't be the last.

E.J. Narcise, principal, Team Services LLC, a division of Learfield Sports Co., which bought the marketing rights to the new arena, said he has already received calls from other downtown arenas looking for a creative use of that square footage complete with an outdoor entrance that has traditionally become a restaurant or team store. The idea of cashing in on location with a public retail outlet of some sort is not new to arena real estate, but it has been hard to find a successful tenant.

In early March, Norton Healthcare signed a 10-year, \$10 million sponsorship deal for Louisville's downtown arena that includes building a 1,607-square-foot Norton Immediate Care Center inside the venue, which is slated to open in the fall of 2010. The University of Louisville's basketball teams are the main tenants for the 22,000-seat arena, which will also host the 2012 NCAA women's volleyball finals.

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“The arena is a huge economic boon to the city, and we wanted to support that any way we could that fit our mission as a not-for-profit,” said Michael Gough, Norton Healthcare CEO. “Putting our name on a building doesn’t do much for us in terms of brand awareness. While Papa John’s gets exclusive rights to sell pizza at their stadium (also in Louisville), we needed to get something out of [our naming rights deal].”

Narcise said the idea evolved over several sessions with Norton. It has helped tremendously that Team Services came on board two and half years before the arena opened, versus the usual one year to find a title sponsor for a new venue. Team Services guaranteed the city of Louisville a minimum share of sponsor and advertising revenues, exceeding \$15 million over seven years, in exchange for all marketing rights. It’s not a unusual for colleges to sell marketing rights to companies like Learfield, but this is a first for an arena and only possible because there is no major sports tenant, Narcise said.

Narcise has used the luxury of lead time to target various industries that are particularly competitive in the Louisville market. Norton is one of three primary competitors in the health care field. Narcise and team set out to explore each company’s marketing strategies and find a fit for Louisville Arena. Norton’s goal was to grow organically. Asked how they planned to do that, they said through Immediate Care Centers.

At about the same time, plans with the venue concessionaire to open a public restaurant with an outdoor entrance for the downtown lunch crowd had bogged down. “The concessionaire was not confident it would work,” Narcise said. Several of these types of restaurants have failed miserably over the years, he noted, pointing to Verizon Center, Washington, D.C., as an example of a venue that has been through a series of restaurateurs. The concessionaire was happy to give up that space and make use of space elsewhere. “The driver was that there is nothing like this space within the footprint of downtown,” Narcise said. The goal was to fill it with something that would be a necessity.

The Immediate Care Center is viewed as a convenience for downtown workers who need a flu shot or general health screening. It will be a major convenience for visitors to the convention center two blocks away as well, he added.

“By having a Norton Immediate Care Center in the new arena, we will provide convenient access to urgent care services for the approximately 60,000 workers within a two-block radius of the arena,” said Stephen A. Williams, president & CEO of Norton Healthcare.

Build-out costs for the urgent care facility were not yet available. “We are just about ready to meet with our architects,” Gough said.

To ensure clients and staff can get in and out of the facility during big events at the arena, Gough said there would be reserved parking. “Certainly, 30 minutes before a game will be harder than normal to get in and out,” he said. “We are working through how to create an access lane during that period, so people can do drop-offs there, and so police officers will be aware that people will be coming in for urgent care.”

Norton will staff two branded first aid stations in the venue during events, and their name will be on Norton Healthcare Plaza, a pedestrian plaza adjacent to the venue. They will also receive indoor and outdoor signage, and signage at nearby Papa John’s Cardinal Stadium, home of University of Louisville football.

Papa John’s is also undergoing renovation as part of the development in

the area of the new venue

Gough said there has been some push back from residents over the deal, since sports venue naming rights deals have been in the news lately. “We did a pretty good job of explaining to the community what and why,” he said. “This is an urgent care facility in a highly visible, high traffic area. And we did not negotiate for luxury suites, though we did get some regular seats.”

The Norton deal is the first of what arena officials said would be between four and eight cornerstone sponsors. The Louisville Arena Authority will use \$700,000 of Norton’s annual payment to pay down construction debt. The University of Louisville will get the other \$300,000 as part of their lease with the authority. — Liz Boardman and Linda Deckard

*Interviewed for this story: Steve Manaugh and Michael Gough, (502) 599-042; E.J. Narcise, (301) 770-5897; Vicki Glass, (502) 931-9044.*



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#### **FAIRS & FESTIVALS**

### **AFTER A DUBIOUS FUTURE, ROTHBURY 2009 COMES OUT WITH IMPRESSIVE LINEUP**

*Getting in a good stretch at Rothbury 2008.*



Producers of Rothbury, the July 2-5 environmentally-conscious music festival hosted in the Michigan city with the same name, announced an impressive lineup earlier this week after facing a dubious future just a few months ago. Held at the Double JJ Ranch, Rothbury is produced by Madison House Publicity and AEG Live. The inaugural 2008 event drew about 40,000 patrons and presented more than 70 acts.

Despite the success of the 2008 event, a bankruptcy filing against the owners of the Double JJ Ranch put the future of the festival in doubt. After some legal wrangling, trustee Thomas Bruinsma agreed to lease the space to AEG Live for \$285,000, according to court documents. A Federal bankruptcy judge later approved that agreement after two legal objections were dealt with successfully.

Headlining this year's event is The Dead, playing their only summer appearance, as well as Bob Dylan, The String Cheese Incident, Willie Nelson & Family, and The Black Crowes. Also on this year's bill are Damian "Jr. Gong" Marley & Nas, G. Love & Special Sauce, Gov't Mule, Broken Social Scene, Cold War Kids, Matisyahu, Guster, Les Claypool, Chromeo, Girl Talk, The Hold Steady, and Ani DiFranco. More artists will be announced in the coming months.

Tickets to the four-day event cost \$272.50. Rothbury 2009 has also unveiled its broadened Good Life VIP offerings, expanded to fit all budgets and tastes. Fans can choose from a variety of sleeping/living

options including beachfront (additional \$798.98 for three nights) and forested environments (additional \$540 for three nights), or a selection of habitats such as safari tents, teepees and pre-fab camping packages.

Jeremy Stein, Madison House Publicity, said work on landscaping has already started. "The actual set up of the entire site starts about five weeks prior to the event, and the Good Life/VIP areas are part of the ongoing building process during that time," Stein said. "There are existing beach fronts that have been used for many years. There are some existing sewer lines for RVs in particular areas of the site. "

Power, Stein said, is provided by generators that run on biodiesel. Daily pumping services for RVs are provided at an additional cost.

Stein expects there to be approximately 80 food vendors on site. Food services run 24 hours per day, "as we are ready to provide tens of thousands of people breakfast, lunch, and dinner, for four full days."

"Last year national brands were not present," he said "We are focused on providing natural and organic foods, and we will have a full farmers market on site this year. It is important to showcase local foods from organic farmers in order to support our general mission."

Building on its mission to create a state-of-the-art large-scale sustainable event and to organize and nurture community involvement that makes a difference, Rothbury 2009 also has promised more cutting-edge festival implementation of ever-changing green technologies.

The 2009 Rothbury Think Tank, an event within the event, will explore the topic of the emerging "New Green Economy." The Think Tank will host various buzz sessions and roundtables between leading scientists, scholars, writers, progressive political and corporate leaders, youth leaders, Rothbury artists, and Rothbury attendees.

Rothbury itself is committed to producing a near zero-waste concert. To tackle a green program of this magnitude at an around-the-clock (camping) concert in the USA, Rothbury has an on-staff Greening Chief, and has implemented multiple initiatives toward this effort, including replacing disposable with 100 percent compostable, recycling and composting, choosing clean energy, carbon-offsetting, and Green Ticket options. - Pam Sherborne

*Interviewed for this article: Jeremy Stein, (303) 413-8308*

#### **CORRECTION**

In the March 18 edition of VT Pulse, we erroneously attributed several quotes to Steve Beazley in the story "OC Fairgrounds Hosts Obama Town Hall." Beazley was not interviewed for this story. We apologize for the error.

## **HOTTickets**

HOT TICKETS is a weekly summary of the top acts and ticket sales as reported to VT PULSE. Following are the top 20 concerts and events, the top 5 in each seating capacity category, which took place since March 24, 2009.

### **BARRY BENEFIT CLEARS HALF MIL FOR CF FOUNDATION**



15,001 or More Seats	10,001-15,000 Seats	5,001-10,000 Seats	5,000 or Less Seats
<p><b>1) The Eagles</b> Gross Sales: \$1,819,025; Venue: <b>Rexall Place, Edmonton, Alberta</b>; Attendance: 13,932; Ticket Range: \$187.17-\$48.92; Promoter: AEG Live; Dates: March 7; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p><b>2) The Eagles</b> Gross Sales: \$1,703,538; Venue: <b>The Palace Of Auburn Hills (Mich.)</b>; Attendance: 14,801; Ticket Range: \$195-\$60; Promoter: Live Nation, Palace Sports &amp; Entertainment; Dates: March 21; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p><b>3) Fleetwood Mac</b> Gross Sales: \$1,605,006; Venue: <b>Verizon Center, Washington</b>; Attendance: 14,468; Ticket Range: \$149.50-\$49.50; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: March 10; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p><b>4) Fleetwood Mac</b> Gross Sales: \$1,292,161; Venue: <b>TD Banknorth Garden, Boston</b>; Attendance: 13,005; Ticket Range: \$149.50-\$49.50; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: March 11; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p><b>5) Fleetwood Mac</b> Gross Sales: \$1,241,491; Venue: <b>Xcel Energy Center, St. Paul, Minn.</b>; Attendance: 12,046; Ticket Range: \$149.50-\$49.50; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: March 3; No. of Shows: 1</p>	<p><b>1) Coldplay</b> Gross Sales: \$1,568,463; Venue: <b>Vector Arena, Auckland, New Zealand</b>; Attendance: 11,970; Ticket Range: \$100.46-\$55.78; Promoter: Chugg Touring Pty Ltd.; Dates: March 18-19; No. of Shows: 2</p> <p><b>2) The Eagles</b> Gross Sales: \$1,092,718; Venue: <b>i wireless Center, Moline, Ill.</b>; Attendance: 9,968; Ticket Range: \$185-\$58; Promoter: Rose Presents; Dates: March 18; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p><b>3) The Who</b> Gross Sales: \$660,124; Venue: <b>Brisbane (Australia) Entertainment Centre</b>; Attendance: 7,170; Ticket Range: \$137.08-\$88; Promoter: Andrew McManus Presents; Dates: March 24; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p><b>4) NJSIAA High School Wrestling Championships</b> Gross Sales: \$300,496; Venue: <b>Atlantic City (N.J.) Boardwalk Hall</b>; Attendance: 41,856; Ticket Range: \$10-\$8; Promoter: NJSIAA; Dates: March 6-8; No. of Shows: 4</p> <p><b>5) Slipknot</b> Gross Sales: \$239,007; Venue: <b>Citizens Business Bank Arena, Ontario, Calif.</b>; Attendance: 7,277; Ticket Range: \$45.50-\$13; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: March 10; No. of Shows: 1</p>	<p><b>1) Barry Manilow Benefit for Cystic Fibrosis Foundation</b> Gross Sales: \$536,947; Venue: <b>Comcast Arena at Everett (Wash.) Events Center</b>; Attendance: 5,418; Ticket Range: \$250-\$50; Promoter: Harvey J. Platt; Dates: March 15; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p><b>2) Los Temerarios</b> Gross Sales: \$487,230; Venue: <b>Nokia Theatre L.A. Live</b>; Attendance: 4,935; Ticket Range: \$125-\$55; Promoter: AEG Live, Goldenvoice; Dates: March 13; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p><b>3) Kings of Leon</b> Gross Sales: \$431,721; Venue: <b>Newcastle (Australia) Entertainment Centre</b>; Attendance: 7,415; Ticket Range: \$64.04; Promoter: Frontier Touring Company; Dates: March 22; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p><b>4) Roy Jones Jr. &amp; MMA</b> Gross Sales: \$386,590; Venue: <b>Pensacola (Fla.) Civic Center</b>; Attendance: 5,632; Ticket Range: \$353-\$28; Promoter: Square Ring Inc.; Dates: March 21; No. of Shows: 1</p> <p><b>5) Motley Crue</b> Gross Sales: \$315,647; Venue: <b>Erie (Pa.) Civic Center Complex</b>; Attendance: 6,069; Ticket Range: \$95-\$29.50; Promoter: Live Nation; Dates: March 7; No. of Shows: 1</p>	<p><b>1) Cher</b> Gross Sales: \$1,911,450; Venue: <b>The Colosseum at Caesars Palace, Las Vegas</b>; Attendance: 13,095; Ticket Range: \$250-\$95; Promoter: AEG Live, Concerts West; Dates: March 17-18, 20-21; No. of Shows: 4</p> <p><b>2) A Chorus Line</b> Gross Sales: \$710,316; Venue: <b>Fox Theatre, Atlanta</b>; Attendance: 16,424; Ticket Range: \$62-\$18; Promoter: Broadway Across America; Dates: March 3-8; No. of Shows: 8</p> <p><b>3) Monty Python's Spamalot</b> Gross Sales: \$622,177; Venue: <b>Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre, Atlanta</b>; Attendance: 11,977; Ticket Range: \$70-\$25; Promoter: Atlanta Broadway Series; Dates: March 17-22; No. of Shows: 8</p> <p><b>4) Il Trovatore</b> Gross Sales: \$486,403; Venue: <b>Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre, Atlanta</b>; Attendance: 8,131; Ticket Range: \$133.50-\$27.50; Promoter: The Atlanta Opera; Dates: Feb. 28-March 3, 6, 8; No. of Shows: 4</p> <p><b>5) Monty Python's Spamalot</b> Gross Sales: \$444,590; Venue: <b>Tampa Bay (Fla.) Perf. Arts Center</b>; Attendance: 8,831; Ticket Range: \$79.50-\$50; Promoter: In-house; Dates: March 3-8; No. of Shows: 8</p>

## THE BEAT

### QUARTERLIES

#### TICKETMASTER (NASDAQ: TKTM)



Graphic By Vanessa Bentley

**Stock (Tuesday close):** \$4

**History:** Traded as high as \$13.29 on Oct. 3 and as low as \$3.68 on Dec. 8

**Market Cap:** \$233.43M

**Report:** The big news out of the Ticketmaster report was the company's choice to write down \$1.07 billion in losses for the fourth quarter. Similar to Live Nation's write down, Ticketmaster's loss is a pre-tax impairment charge that reflects both a significant drop in stock value, and the company's negative outlook on the economy.

Revenues for the year were posted at \$1.4 billion, while fourth quarter revenues were \$384 million. The company saw its quarterly revenues rise by 9.4 percent over the same period last year, citing additional income from strategic acquisitions that included Front Line Management, Paciolan and TicketsNow. Despite the rise in earnings, profits were down 81 percent to \$9.9 million.

Citi analyst Mark Mahany called Ticketmaster's stock performance "generally weak" in his March 20 report.

"The current global slowdown continues to impact live entertainment," he wrote. "In Q4 however, Ticketmaster was also impacted by weaker concert ticket sales (down 14 percent year-to-year) due to softer demand, on-sales events being pushed into Q1 and Live Nation exercising its right to withhold 10 percent of the tickets in its venues."

The earnings report was broadcast over a colorful investor-relations conference call that included IAC's Barry Diller, who serves as Ticketmaster Entertainment's Board Chairman. Diller categorized media coverage of the company's merger attempts with Live Nation as negative and told investors, "I feel that we've been made a poster child for all the ills in the industry" and condemned the "always to be expected shameless grandstanding of Senator (Charles) Schumer."

He went on, "While we are subject to the vicissitude of technology – sorry again Mr. Springsteen – we did not divert tickets nor intentionally redirect fans from the primary to the aftermarket. Nor will we ever," adding that his company was pushing for greater transparency and more options to dynamically price tickets. "While we certainly have learned from our mistakes, they have been an omission and not a commission."

Ticketmaster CEO Irving Azoff said the company's stock drop was due to "foreign exchange volatility, stock market and economy-driven non-cash impairment charges and one-time public company expenditures" which "significantly dampened the bottom line in 2008. But we believe Ticketmaster is well positioned for the future."

Also on the call was Ticketmaster President Eric Korman and Chief Financial Officer Brian Regan. Absent from the call was Ticketmaster Entertainment President Sean Moriarty.

A recording of the call can be heard by clicking [here](#)

Contact: Mark Maheny, (415) 951-1744; Barry Diller and Irving Azoff, (213) 639-6100

## LIVE NATION (NYSE: LYV)

Stock (Tuesday close): \$2.88

History: Traded as high as \$16.48 on Oct. 2 and as low as \$3.08 Nov. 21

Market Cap: \$240M

**Report:** Live Nation reported a loss of \$337.5 million for the year, equal to about \$4.33 a share. Last year the company reported losing \$18.4 million, about 25 cents a share.

The company blamed the large drop on a goodwill impairment charge of \$269.9 million. The company's stock has plummeted by 70 percent in the past year. Without the charges, losses in the latest quarter would have totaled \$67.6 million, or 89 cents per share.

Revenue for the fourth quarter was also in decline, dropping to \$916 million from \$922 in the previous year. North American shows made up almost half of that revenue, bringing in \$452 million, while international concert revenues dropped to \$195.8 million.

The report found that the company spent \$3.3 billion on talent and artists, a 12 percent increase from 2007. Talent costs made up 81 percent of the company's expenditures for the 22,167 concerts Live Nation organized in 2008. Total event days were up over 30 percent from the previous year.

Concert attendance was up 14 percent to 13.4 million, while the company averaged \$66.49 per fan per event held, the report said. Live Nation also lost 87 sponsors in 2008 to end with 840, but managed to increase sponsorship revenue by 13 percent to total \$33 million. The company's biggest growth sector was its Artist Nation division, which pulled in \$245 million. — Dave Brooks

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## FAIRS & FESTIVALS

### SLENDER SIMPSON AND SIZZLING SWIFT DRAW NATIONAL ATTENTION TO STRAWBERRY FEST



*Jessica Simpson shows off at the Florida Strawberry Festival in Plant City.*

A photograph of a fit, Daisy Dukes-wearing Jessica Simpson during a performance gave the Florida Strawberry Festival and Fair some of its best publicity ever, but it was teen country star Taylor Swift that had the only sell-out at the Plant City, Fla. event.

“We were in a lot of national publications because (Simpson) was here,” said Paul Davis, the new GM who took over last December for Patsy Brooks, who retired last spring. “There were a lot of people who never had heard of the Strawberry Festival that saw that.”

Simpson's show, held on the last night of the Feb. 26-March 8 event, drew attention because the singer had been criticized for her appearance in high-waisted jeans at a late January performance at a Florida chili cook-off.

However, Simpson did not draw as big an



audience as Swift, perhaps at least in part because Britney Spears was playing at the St. Pete Times Forum a half hour away in Tampa.

“There was a little competition there,” Davis said. “It was still a pretty well-attended concert, and I think she put on a pretty good show.”

Swift did “phenomenally,” Davis said, and was the only and the “quickest” sell-out at the 11,500-12,500-seat GTE Federal Credit Union Soundstage.

Davis did not have final attendance figures, but expected to be at least on par with last year’s 535,000.

“I can say it’s over 500,000,” he said. “In a down economy, we’re thrilled.”

Also new at the fair was the carnival, Deltona, Fla.-based Belle City Amusements, which took over for the Mighty Blue Grass Show.

“Mighty Blue Grass Show is getting out of the business and they sold out to Belle City,” Davis said. “We agreed to take Belle City and honored the contract, and we are very pleased with their first year.”

Charles Panacek, owner of Belle City Amusements, declined to discuss any deal between his carnival and Mighty Blue Grass Show owner Jim Murphy, noting that a press release would be issued later to describe the situation.

Belle City Amusements placed 84 rides at the Strawberry Festival and Fair, and the popular ones included the Rock ‘n Roll Himalaya, the Drop Tower, a new giant wheel, and a whitewater flume ride, which “did well because the weather was so warm.”

Wristbands cost \$18 except on the two Friday Moonlight Magic sessions held from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m., which cost \$20. On weekends, fairgoers could buy \$1 tickets for the rides.

“We had some discussions and decided to keep the prices the same,” Davis said. “It worked well for us. There is a trend in some places to up your prices for various reasons. One is because the minimum wage went up about 50 cents an hour. Federally, it touched everyone.”

The federal minimum wage is \$6.55, but is \$7.21 in the state of Florida.

“But we decided not to raise the prices and we kept entry prices the same,” Davis said. “It worked well for us this year.”

In addition to Swift and Simpson, the festival featured a full line-up of entertainment, generally with two shows a day featuring different acts. That has been the formula for the past couple of years, a departure from when the same acts played two shows a day.

Fair officials compensated by charging ticket prices for most seats, with 8,600 in reserved seats and 3,000 in free seats. Most tickets cost between \$10 and \$15, but some go higher, as did the ticket for Swift, which cost \$45.

“There is free seating for every concert,” Davis said.

The second best-selling concert was George Jones, Davis said.

“Where else can you go on a Thursday and see a country legend like George Jones and two nights later see the newest artist out there?” Davis said. “It really brought the crowds in for us and we were thrilled to death.”

Other acts included Kool & the Gang, Mel Tillis, Larry Gatlin & The Gatlin Brothers, The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, Kellie Pickler, Jake Owen, Third Day, Rodney Atkins, Jim Ed Brown and Helen Cornelius, Randy Travis, Marty Stuart and Connie Smith, Travis Tritt, Brenda Lee, Lorrie Morgan, Ray Stevens, Ronnie McDowell, Jeff Foxworthy and Mark Lowry.

The festival paid about \$1.5 million for the acts, which was on par with recent years, Davis said.

In marketing, the festival had a presence on the Internet through sites such as Facebook, Davis noted.

“It’s probably the first year we did that full speed,” he said. “We don’t know how much revenue came from that or how many people came in because of that. We’re trying to focus better and see what brought people in. We want to focus on marketing a little bit.”

Next year’s dates will be March 4-14. - By Mary Wade Burnside

*Interviewed for this article: Paul Davis, (813) 752-9194; Charles Panacek, (407) 399-1831*

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