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HUNT

Kentucky
63.196
facebook fans

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TICKETS

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RUPP
ARENA



THE GREAT TICKET HUNT

by DAVE BROOKS

Matt Johnson and Paul Hooper from Lexington Center Corp. have learned an important lesson about hosting scavenger hunts — make sure you're in a safe hiding place before posting photos of any freebies on Facebook. Stick around the scene of the crime and eventually the frenzied mob will figure out who is posting the tickets and give chase like a pack of drooling, rabid pit bulls.

After all — if anyone loves free stuff, it's college students and after a day of posting pictures of Nickelback tickets around campus in an effort to generate buzz for the band's Oct. 8 concert at Lexington's Rupp Arena, the duo learned some students will go to extreme lengths for free swag. The pair were planning to hide tickets between the legs of a famous statue when they noticed a student surreptitiously watching their every move.

"I told Matt that this guy was obviously on to us, so we started to walk into the Student Center, and the kid followed us through the doors, down the stairs and then made a left the same time we did," Hooper recalled.

Hooper and Johnson eventually lost the stalker in a game of elevator switch-a-roo and dropped off the tickets in their intended location.

"As soon as we did that, we noticed there were plenty of people who were much better at hiding than this kid and ran to the statue to grab the tickets," Hooper said. The tickets were quickly snatched up, leaving many people, some sobbing, without Nickelback seats. Hooper said he and Johnson tried to make a getaway in a Rav4, but the mob "started the direction they thought we were going to drive" and chased the car down the street until their vehicle eventually got away from the sprinters.

The pair said they got the scavenger hunt idea from famed skater Tony Hawk, who hid skateboards all over the country as a promotional campaign and posted clues on Twitter.

"We're constantly having brainstorming sessions around here, trying to come up with innovative ways to promote our venues," said Sheila Kenny, the Lexington Center's Marketing director,



which manages Rupp, a convention center and the Lexington Opera House. In February, Rupp Arena was set to host a Black Eyed Peas concert when Kenny received a call from AEG Live Promoter Nicole Neal.

"She said ticket sales had been slow and she was looking for some out-of-the-box ideas to get ticket sales going," Kenny recalled. "We created a list of 10 ideas and, because we're in such a unique position with

our university campuses being so close, we decided to launch this fun and innovative way to stoke the collegiate market. What's great about Matt and Paul is that although they're a little older than the students, they're definitely tapped in to that audience."

In total, the two were given six pairs of Black Eyed Peas tickets and charged with generating buzz at the area's three universities. First on the list was Eastern Kentucky University, and the pair decided to hide a set of tickets on the back of a marble bench, in a maze of similar looking benches. After a few minutes, the tickets were snatched up. The duo posted another pair of tickets in a tree, angled toward a campus stage — the iconic location was easy to determine, but the challenge was matching the tree using the view of the stage provided in the picture. Those tickets went quickly, too.

Johnson and Hooper also hid tickets at the Leeds Theater in Winchester, and under the Kissing Tree at Transylvania University. Finally, back at the University of Kentucky, they hid tickets in a large classroom, simply posting "1st pair Black Eyed Peas tix, room 106 row G of classroom building at UK" on Facebook.

"When we sent it out, we were at the row and by the time we hid the tickets, we were at the classroom exiting at the bottom steps," Johnson said. "Within 30 seconds, people started coming in through the top doors, racing through the rows looking for tickets."

Between the Black Eyed Peas and Nickelback, the pair have used scavenger hunts to give out tickets for ESPN Game Day, and the Avenue Q theatrical show. More importantly, the giveaways have helped the two reach increasingly larger audiences online. In February, the pair had 5,000 or 6,000 fans on Facebook. By the end of the year, the arena is on track to have 75,000 fans on Facebook and their Twitter account has 3,189 followers.

Above: Matt Johnson (right) and Paul Hooper are pictured here with their boss, Lexington Center Marketing Director Sheila Kenny.