

LYTE

AT THE END OF THE

TUNNEL

TICKETER'S CEO SEES COMPANY COMING OUT OF THE SHUTDOWN STRONG

BY JAMES ZOLTAK

LAST APRIL, LYTE founder and CEO Ant Taylor and Lawrence Peryer, then the company's chief revenue officer and now its chief strategy officer, told VenuesNow sister publication Pollstar that the ticketing platform had been on a steady growth trajectory. At the time, Lyte had just secured \$15 million in Series A funding from the likes of Bernie Cahill and Activist Artist Management.

Earlier this year, the company announced it had secured another \$33 million in Series B financing, with some high-profile investors like Quincy Jones on board. Around the same time, Lyte announced its first partnership with a talent agency, Mint Talent Group, whose client roster includes 30 artists —

including Taj Mahal, Angel Haze, The Soul Rebels, Helmet, Carla Morrison, Shemekia Copeland, Mersiv, Neal Francis, Trevor Hall, Jaimoe and others — that would implement Lyte's technology across hundreds of potential shows. The solutions offered through Lyte's platform, which is used at major festivals like Coachella, "offers to address touring uncertainty caused by the pandemic, creating the ability for fans to reserve tickets risk-free for events not yet on sale." Late last year, Lyte announced its first international partnerships outside North America, with the platform being used by two of the largest festivals in New Zealand, Bay Dreams and Soundsplash.

Taylor, who played guard on the Princeton University basketball team in the late 1990s and launched Lyte after seeing empty seats at the 2012 Olympics in



Lyte CEO Ant Taylor

London, spoke with VenuesNow's James Zoltak about where the company and ticketing trends are headed in 2021 and beyond. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

How did 2020 turn out? I'm guessing the year-over-year comparison has to be awful, but not surprising given the circumstances. Has your optimism waned at all?

I think that for us it was much more about we had, and frankly discovered, leading indicators in our business that signaled, way earlier than potentially other platforms out there, that demand for the wonderful thing we get to sell was not waning, (but) in fact (was) going to come back in spades. To answer your direct question, yes, we all hit the COVID wall, but our products in the reservation system (are) really about aggregating demand first and long before you start to think about issuing tickets or supply. So, what we were seeing through 2019 was a massive increase in consumer demand expressing itself on our platform in some of the partnerships ... and the fact that there was uncertainty around when the events were going to come back or (at) what capacity those events would come back, or even what configuration of that capacity would be, or what pricing around that would be — all those things that historically would have been non-starters, at least in the minds of the industry, for fans were in fact not slowing down credit card swipes at all.

Our outlook changed in terms of thinking now about 2021 and 2022. We had an early kind of peek into

where consumer demand was, which obviously was incredibly powerful. My optimism aside, I think that the reason we were able to do a Series B financing just around 12 months after our Series A financing, at a significant increase in our company's valuation and with high-quality investors getting involved, was because those leading indicators are so strong, they're so positive. I say all that, you know, with respect to all of the venues out there who really had to struggle to kind of get through this. That can't change the reality of a pandemic, but you can start to look and stage for what's going to come back at the end of all this.

What can you tell me about the Mint deal? Why is it a win-win in your view and will there be more partnerships like this with Lyte?

I think there will be more partnerships like this and soon. I think the exciting thing about any economic catastrophe like what we endured is necessity breeds innovation. The group of people that came together around this, I remember my first sit-down with the Mint team, on a Zoom call, when things were staging still for them, was superexciting because it wasn't just about what we're bringing to bear with our platform, it was also about all the sort of novel ways that they were now, this group of agents that came from all these great agencies, going to be more experimental and more innovative (with) more hustle than they were able to do before or because we all kind of (are) conditioned to do things a certain way. Now, sort of bringing things back to kind of ground zero, we're able to kind of rebuild a lot of processes and tasks and ways that we do things, and so the starting point of the partnership was just two companies coming together at exactly the right time in their evolution.

A touring agent's job historically was very difficult to do with the data that was at their fingertips. Whether it was streaming data or it was listens or it was past tour proceeds, when bands were touring on three-year tour cycles. As data goes, those weren't terribly great signals. They might have been in some cases, but for the most part there was a ton of intuition and frankly just good luck in the results

WE WILL TELL THE STORIES

**MAUREEN ANDERSEN
PRESIDENT & CEO, INTIX**

Time passes. And just like that, we have cleared the one-year shutdown milestone. When you reflect on the past year with the associated loss, pain, horror, shock, strife, uncertainty and illness, it is a miracle that not only are we still standing but we are here to tell the tales. Like all seminal events and times this moment in time and history, for the live entertainment professional, will mark us forever. Eventually these times will become part of our storytelling canon. We will share our tales of where we were when it happened, what happened to us, what we had to do to keep the 'live' alive during the dark times, where we were during the long intermission, how many social distancing seating configurations we had, what our seating pods were, if we were employed or if we had to rebuild a career. This time that has been painful, dark, and arduous will bind us together and our collective lore, across all borders, will grow from this shared experience. At the end of the day, and gratefully as the pain recedes in the rearview mirror, the tales will grow as we gather in person and toast our survival. We will be the generation of survivors of this modern-day plague. The generation that willingly shut off the lights and closed the doors to protect and safeguard their fans, audiences and customers. But the other side of this is that we will also be the authors, the architects, the creators and the inventors of the renaissance that will come. We no longer talk about being changed when it's over because we now know as we creep to the finish line, with great certainty, that we and everything in our world has changed while we paused.

For the past year, literally the past 52 weeks, the INTIX community of live entertainment and ticketing professionals has gathered each Wednesday at a midday Zoom for an hour of sharing, aiding, teaching and commiserating with each other. Our community of pros has included reps from every corner of the industry — from sports to arts; from the large to small; from the venues to teams; from festivals to the secondary market. It has been quite the journey we have taken and continue to take together. Through the weeks we have gone from processing refunds, postponements, customer service hand holding, reverse logistics, donations and moving entire seasons to creating social distancing seating plans out of thin air as we waited for technology and reporting to catch up to them and their needs; plotted ingress/egress plans along with new one-way paths of travel through venues; painted giant performance circles and squares on lawns; created and sold performances in garages, parking lots, backyards, street corners and fields. We have new reports and a new language around orphan pods, pod integrity and horizontal vs. vertical concerts. We have debated the value of temperature checks, the new ways of cashless, contactless, mobile delivery, and ways to use our venues with ever evolving health and safety protocols. We have shared resources and swap creative ideas — like what the ideal pod size is to sell, what a VIP section looks like at a drive-in opera, how to package the premium vaccination seating locations, what prices work for live-streaming content or communication techniques that work best for the customers! We share the differences of our global regions and what we were learning based on where you are at and we debate whether to do COVID-19 test at the gate or not to test or the legalities of COVID-19 disclaimers on the backs of tickets, or even if to ticket or not to ticket. The best day is the day that someone announces that they are putting something on sale and making do with reduced ever celebrate selling out, even if at only 500 tickets and 25% capacity. We have become pros with zip ties and making do with reduced staffs. From each other we have put down the foundational layers of understanding and knowledge that we each can use, and we share it so we can help each other. Those who go first in the reopening process test the waters and then turn to give a hand up to those that will come behind to open.

Within these weekly Zoom calls, the greatness of the mission is truly clear. A shutdown didn't mean that we closed, it only meant that we had to find another way to do what we do so well. We have done that; we are doing it. Truth be told, we've been doing it all the way through. We didn't really stop, we just stumbled then walked on. The stories we tell are the wisdom of this age and time. We stand proud because our organizations, teams, venues have stepped up in unexpected ways — we've been food banks, shelters for the weary on the front lines of protests, polling and voting centers, testing sites, and now vaccination sites. We have lobbied and donated and stepped up to give our time and expertise to support and teach. We have been creative and courageous in exploring new ways to not only create but to engage and deliver.

Together we celebrate the ticketing professional who was left to answer the phone when everyone else was gone, had endless repetitive conversations with customers and was the voice of the organizations. We honor the ticketing professional who created social distance seating pods, pods of 2, 3, 4, 6, 8 at 10%, 15%, 25% and now moving to 50% and 3 feet of distance. We stand together in solidarity with the ticketing pro who has had to let go of the remainder of their staff after the first round of PPP relief funding had been exhausted or the fiscal year ended. We literally applaud and cheer for each of us that announces that they are getting a vaccination! We stand together as we continue the long and step-by-step process of slowly reopening. We show up for each other because we know we are stronger together and that we have a lot of work to do to be fully in our rebirth, our renaissance. But together we also shout out WOW, look what we can do!

To all the venues, organizations, teams, festivals, vendors and partners, if you want the best we are here. As you are rehiring and filling your bench back up, you need not look any further than to us; to INTIX and to this community of battle-tested professionals who are ready to come back to work and bring their skill and knowledge with them! These pros haven't missed a beat and they have been part of an extraordinary group who have stayed current, shared, taught and supported one another. They know tech works best for what needs to be done and they have the best network of knowledge for the renaissance that you will ever need. They prove this every week! Come join us on Wednesday and see for yourself!

of well-thought-out, well-strategized tours. At the end of the day, there was still that gap of, 'Well, let's put it on sale and see what happens.' The problem with that is all of the cost investment that goes into just getting to the on-sale. The risk profile of every tour was just massive. So that's sort of one piece.

Thinking about the peculiarities of COVID and coming out of COVID you have two prevailing problems. Problem one was, how do we actually ever get back on sale with so much uncertainty regionally with a tour. We might have (some) degree of certainty in certain markets and feel really great about that, but when you try to route a 30- or 50- or 60- or 90-city tour, you've got to have all the stars aligned for all of the variables and frankly we now (also) have the X factor of the stuff that's completely outside of our control. What's the state of public health? What's the state of vaccination rollouts, etc. When you kind of

put all those things together the risk profile of these tours compounds to the point that you just can't put things up on sale, at all.

But the other prevailing problem is, once things do come back, now you face the opposite situation. You go from can't put anything on sale to a promoter is dealing with 10 or 15 holds on a given night. So, now you can't find where to route your tour not because of COVID or the pandemic, but because there's no rooms. What Mint is now able to do is to start to aggregate demand in advance of some of those unknowns. We just want to find, too, data of consumer demand in pockets of the tour that historically they weren't able to find. That could be a tertiary market on a certain route. That could be another night in the same venue on the route, filling those holes throughout the tour. There's all sorts of things. It could be that a band is good for 3,000 tickets in one market, but

only 500 tickets in another market, but in aggregate that makes sense for the tour, so they can make more informed decisions around it.

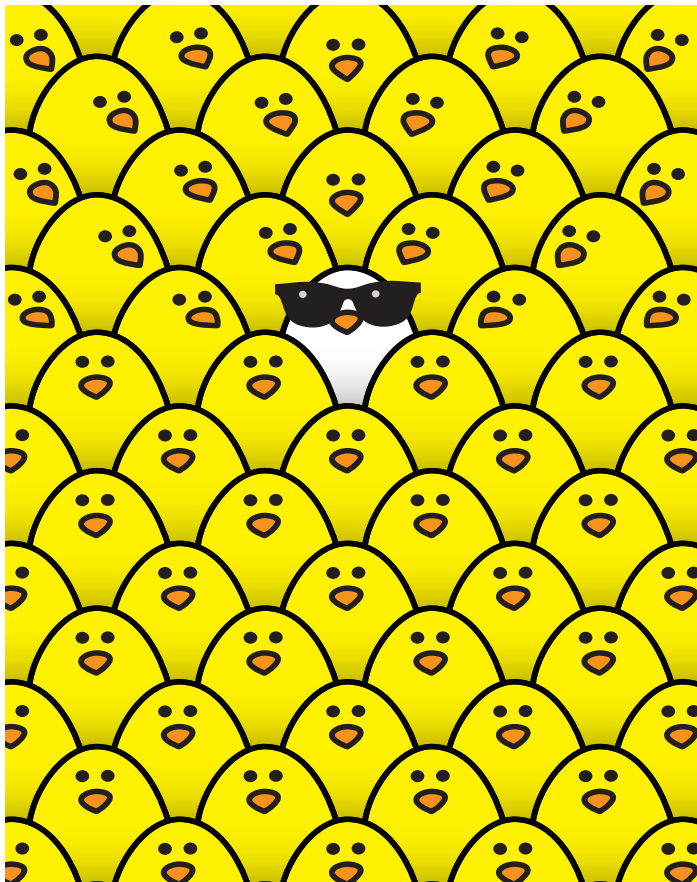
And then the last piece for a Mint: now you've got in that in that scenario where you've got 10 or 12 or 15 holds, well wouldn't it be great to be able to say, "Hey, you might have 10 or 12 or 15 holds, but my artist has already taken enough demand to fill half your room, or all of your room." If I'm a promoter and I'm on the other side of that coming out of this scenario, well, shit, that's a heck of a value proposition, right? It's not about Mint's artists to the exclusion of other artists. I think we need to fill rooms across the board to get this thing really going on the flip side.

Are there any new festival partners on Lyte's horizon?

The festival market is really starting to fill in ... really starting to hit the same stride that touring started to hit in December. I think

some of the more interesting ones for me, just because for so long we were focused on the U.S. market, is the work happening in New Zealand. We have another, I think our third, festival launching in New Zealand (after Bay Dreams and Soundsplash, in partnership with Ticketspace) in the next couple of weeks.

And then we have our eyes on, we have an incredible roster of festivals here in the U.S., both the corporate-owned in AEG and Live Nation's portfolio and the independent festivals here in the U.S. I'm actually really excited (about) some of the U.S.-based stuff that we're doing with the reservation model, but there's opportunities where festivals, especially regional ones, are looking at expanding to other markets and they can actually use our reservation system to figure out which of those markets are the best or most primed for demand coming out of this. ■



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