

The London 2012 ticketing process

The Good, the Bad
and the Ugly

Authors: Meriel Lenfestey
John Waterworth
Tom Wood

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1 Summary

The good: The ballot system

The bad: The separation into two sites (one for ticketing, one for general information on the Games) is unhelpful from the ticket applicant's point of view

The ugly: Forcing people down the Visa route is one thing. Rubbing people's noses into it by saying how 'proud' LOCOG is to have done so seems unnecessarily provocative given the potential for consumer backlash

Foolproof's main findings from our user experience evaluation on the launch day of 2012 ticketing are:

The ballot system is a really good idea

It gives you six weeks to think, plan, and research what you want to apply for. But the site doesn't make this clear and you might feel anxious about what level of commitment you're getting yourself into. There should be more messages on the site to make it clear that your application isn't final until 26th April and you can return to change details or remove it entirely. Plus what happens if you get tickets for an event which you then can't attend.

There are two sites, which is a bad idea

Overnight a new 'splash' landing page has been put up to announce the launch of ticketing. It's easy to follow the link into the ticket site and miss the fact there's a whole other site with information which could help you decide and apply.

Venue and seating information is inadequate

It's reasonable to want to know the difference between a £500 ticket and a £30 ticket, but there are no seating plans, sightline simulations or even commentary on different ticket types. Because of the 'two sites' problem there's almost no useful venue information available to people piling in for tickets today. Even if you find the second (main) site, venue information is patchy and particularly unhelpful for people with concerns about attending with children, older people or disabled spectators.

The ballot allows time for a more considered application, but there's not much more information on the site to help you plan things

There's a missed opportunity to link into a whole world of content that could help you decide what tickets to apply for. National Olympics Committee sites have good content on which events

each country is expected to perform well in. There are all sorts of blogs and forums about the Beijing Olympics that give tips about which less glamorous sports make for great spectator events. The main message from LOCOG is that you should increase your chances of getting tickets by applying for qualifiers, or less popular sports...but they provide no content which helps or encourages you explore this in more detail.

The Visa payment monopoly is not something to be proud of

The ticket site carries the phrase “We are proud to accept only Visa” next to the 2012 logo. But should they be proud? This arrangement will inconvenience or disadvantage tens of thousands of people over the coming months. Visa card owners need to be aware of the open-ended commitment they are making for a payment which could hit their account any time from 10th May to 10th June (and only be told how much they actually paid on the 25th June). Even for those not affected it calls into question the nature and effect of commercial deals on the Olympics.

Our 5 top tips for booking your London 2012 tickets

1. Use the main london2012.com site to plan your sports, venues and dates before going to the ticketing site - particularly if you need to know about access issues for older people or children.
2. Pick some less popular sports that are great to watch live - like Handball, Judo and Weightlifting. You are more likely to get tickets in the ballot. There are blogs and fan sites out there that can give you an idea of what's fun to watch.
3. Think about how much you are prepared to risk to get the tickets you want. Set an upper limit to the total cost of all the tickets you will apply for - and stick to it.
4. Have your Visa card ready. The ticket site is 'proud to accept only Visa'.
5. If you change your mind after you have gone through checkout, up until 26th April you can 'withdraw' your application. This puts your application back in your basket so you can add or remove sessions - or start all over again if you want.

2 Evaluation

For many people, the 2012 Olympics will be a once in a lifetime event and is therefore a big investment. The ideal ticket application process for both the sports fan and LOCOG is one that conveys excitement, builds a relationship, and encourages considered applications.

In practice, the ticketing ballot for 2012 tickets feels like a missed opportunity. Some of the excitement generated in the lead up will be transformed into anxiety, because the designers haven't anticipated the end users' needs or concerns. The functionality that needs to be there is in place; if you know exactly what you want, the application form will allow you to do it once you master some of the basics of how it works. But there is little to help users negotiate the unfamiliar ballot process or to encourage them to apply for less popular sessions. Nor is there much to develop a sense of control and confidence over what they are getting themselves into.

LOCOG would have been very aware of the PR problems caused by online ticketing at recent world sports events. Having their site fall over under the weight of early-bird demand is an embarrassment they appear to have avoided partly by going for a ballot with a six-week window rather than first-come-first-served ticketing, and partly by basing ticketing around the robust Ticketmaster infrastructure.



But that PR advantage on Day One of ticketing comes at the expense of the user experience. Poor usability and weak information resources makes applying for tickets unnecessarily stressful for users who have to make an unclear commitment to buy tickets. The excitement and emotion surrounding the games is not amplified by the ticketing site. A chance to showcase the UK's leadership in designing brilliant digital experiences has been passed up.

2.1 Excitement to anxiety

Many people will approach the ticketing site feeling excited by the media build up, by their desire to attend and even by the ballot nature of the sales process. Although the ticketing system is functional and seems to have suffered no major outages on day one of ticketing, using it quickly converts the excitement into a sense of anxiety.

1. Users are now encouraged to bypass the main London 2012 site and go straight to the secure ticketing site. But the ticketing site has no supporting information about events or

venues, and nothing to help or encourage users to apply for tickets for less obvious sessions.

2. There is no supporting information about the price categories or ticket types available. Users are left wondering whether to choose a cheaper ticket that may have a poorer view, or a more expensive ticket that they might not really be able to afford. Basic seating plans or commentary about the different ticket types would be useful. Sightline simulations would be even better.
3. The site does not encourage users to consider and evolve their application over time. Once a user has 'checked out' they are prevented from applying to more sessions. Their only option is to 'withdraw' their application - with unknown consequences. Allowing users to update an existing application would create reassurance.
4. After booking tickets there is a continuing sense of uncertainty. Users do not yet know what seats they have or what tickets they will get, or what they will ultimately have to pay.

2.2 Just what am I getting into?

Everyone using the site will need to work out a strategy for choosing the sessions to apply for.

1. Enthusiasts will want to maximise their chances of getting to sessions – but the site provides no visibility of popularity. A simple view of the number of applications received for each event would provide an indication of likelihood of application success.
2. As users apply for sessions, the maximum cost can rise quickly. Each user must judge how much risk they are prepared to take if they are lucky in the ballot.
3. The site could take payment anytime between 10 May and 10 June. If a user has a Visa Debit card they will have to keep a large amount in their account for that period just in case. This is a significant barrier for less affluent visitors.
4. Users who choose to pay by cheque must pay the full amount immediately and will not be refunded for several months.

2.3 Limited and uninspiring information

Until the launch of ticketing, information was all there was. People were encouraged to prepare by scouring the schedules and selecting sessions they would like to attend to 'speed up' their application process. But the information provided does not convey the spirit of the Olympics or meet the needs and expectations of the users.

1. The ticketing site is separate from the one containing general information on the games. Overnight a new 'splash' landing page has been put up to announce the launch of ticketing. It's easy to follow the link into the ticket site and miss the fact there's a whole other site with information which could help you decide and apply.
2. The FAQ contains many dry 'corporate' answers, and the content is not distributed throughout the site in the places where the user is most likely to need it. We found

ourselves having to browse through the FAQ to learn about the process rather than be able to follow any structured content, or access information when we needed it most – in the application form.

3. Many questions remain unanswered like, for example, what the difference is between B and C class tickets, will there will be space for buggies, what facilities there will be in between sessions, what are the chances of securing tickets for any specific session, which sports GB are strong contenders in. This makes it difficult to build a strong sense of conviction that you are applying for the right tickets.
4. And users are looking for more than just the facts. An opportunity has been missed to enrich the site through snippets, thoughts and testimonials from previous Olympics, or through visibility into applications received.

2.4 The User Interface

Most people arrive at the Olympics ticketing site with experience of other ticketing websites, or at least other shopping sites. The challenge for the designers of the Olympic ticketing site was to leverage that knowledge, while highlighting the important differences created by this ballot system, managing the need to apply for a variety of events. In general the search, selection and application pages are clear, but the process is repetitive and the user needs to pay careful attention for a long time to get their application right. We found a pen and paper was often necessary to help us keep track of our application. This starts to build a feeling of stress and anxiousness for the user.

1. Session searching doesn't include the Olympic park venues in the London venues list. Most UK residents and overseas applicants will naturally assume that London includes all the major events.
2. Clicking sport and venue links in the search results runs a new search rather than linking to relevant supporting information. So if you click the venue link for 'Hampton Court palace' the site will list all the events being held here, rather than take you to a page describing the venue which we think would be the expected outcome for this action.



Clicking on either Beach Volleyball or Horse Guards Parade does not take you to information about the sport or venue. It simply refreshes the search to bring up more results against either search term

For the same sports, some sessions requires the user to choose a range of price categories, while others require the user to choose a single price category and then choose ticket types.

3. Applying for several sessions for the same sport require the user to apply for the first session, then repeat their search, then apply for the next session, etc. It would be more useful to be able to apply for all events related to a particular sport off a single page.
4. If a user makes a mistake in the number or type of tickets they choose for a session, they cannot remove tickets or apply for additional tickets. The user must cancel the application, search for the session again and then reapply.
5. There is a time limit set for completion of the process to maintain site performance. However, if a session times-out all progress is lost and we occasionally experienced trouble signing back in.
6. It is not clear that all session selections must be added to the list on 'Your Application' before proceeding as only a single application can be made. If the user charges through to booking on their first event, they will find that they can't make an additional application (in fact they have to 'withdraw' their application and then add in new events).

2.5 The Visa payment monopoly

The ticket site carries the phrase "We are proud to accept only Visa" next to the 2012 logo. But should they be proud?

1. This arrangement will inconvenience or disadvantage tens of thousands of people over the coming months. Some people will feel forced to take out a Visa card to be included in the draw.
2. Alternative payment methods (cash, cheque) are available, but these are not presented as an option within the ticketing journey. The need to pay up front, in full and in person at a Lloyds bank branch seems unfairly onerous – and it's clearly not a viable option for overseas residents.
3. Visa card owners need to be aware of the open ended commitment they are making for a payment which could hit their account any time from 10th May to 10th June (and only be informed how much they actually paid on the 25th June).
4. Visa cards used must be valid until at least August 2011. A good chunk of Visa's current customers will be in this 'no man's land' of card validity.
5. Even Visa customers who aren't inconvenienced by these restrictions may have cause to wonder whether this restrictive choice around payment is in line with Olympic ideals.

3 What could be changed?

Many of the elements for improving the experience are there, and changes could be made to make them more valuable to users. Here are a few:

3.1 Take down the splash page

This would give people a much greater chance of spotting that there are two sites (one for ticketing, one for general information).

3.2 Make it clear you can save and edit up to 26th April

The concept that users can slowly build a complete schedule of events they want to attend (including free ones), with no commitment, and change that at any point up to 26th April is compelling and in the spirit of the event. It will lead to more considered applications and will help to create more buzz as people discuss their applications. However, the ability to save a partially completed application, or to withdraw and then change a submitted application isn't communicated even though the functionality is there.

3.3 Integrate the supporting information into the ticketing site

Provide more contextual links to support the decision making process including links to genuine FAQ content, richer venue descriptions, detail on sports from a spectator's perspective.

3.4 Provide richer information

Link into richer information to help people decide what tickets to apply for. National Olympics Committee sites have good content on which events each country is expected to perform well in. There are all sorts of blogs and forums about the Beijing Olympics that give tips about which less glamorous sports make for great spectator events.

3.5 Support people in managing their risk

Create visibility of the number of applications received for each session and ticket type against the number of tickets available.

3.6 Provide more payment options

Allow more varied mechanisms including postal applications, other credit cards and electronic payments.

4 Background

In 2012, Great Britain is proud to be hosting the Olympics. The word 'showcase' is often used about such a significant event. The venues showcase wonderful British locations, architecture and engineering. The logo showcases cutting edge British design. The ticketing system *should* showcase the skills and talent Britain has in graphic and interaction design in which it is a world leader.

The Olympics is a highly complex mass ticketing event. In the first 42 days of ticket sales, 6.6 million tickets will be available for 640 sessions across 26 different sports. Some will be hugely oversubscribed; others may still be available on the eve of the event itself. To provide everyone with a fair chance of getting the tickets they want, and to reduce the stress on the ticketing systems as they go live, London 2012 is using a ballot system to manage ticket allocation.

A single ticketing website will handle initial applications for many different sports, which have differing ticketing characteristics, as well as for a wide variety of different needs and expectations from the public. This is an enormous design challenge.

This report contains the results from an expert review of the ticketing system on launch day.

5 Method

The team employed a User Centred Design (UCD) methodology called "Heuristic Evaluation" in order to provide a thorough, but fast, analysis of the 2012 Olympic ticketing system as it went live. We also monitored public reaction across social media.

In advance of the go-live date, we drew up 6 "personas", or character profiles, to focus on during our evaluation. These encompassed characteristics representing the range of expectations and needs that real users are likely to approach the site with. Personas allow us to 'see' the site through other people's eyes. We also developed our standard set of heuristics, or rules of thumb, that are appropriate for the ticketing scenario, and the speed of the evaluation. We identified 5 main evaluation areas: Experience, Information, Interaction, Consistency and Accessibility.

The personas and heuristics formed a matrix which was used by the team to record findings both before and after go-live, each team member adopting 2 personas. The results from all users were merged to create a complete picture of the experience provided by the system, and developed into this document.

The appendix includes our personas and heuristics.

6 About Foolproof

Foolproof Ltd is Europe's largest specialist User Experience consultancy.

We help businesses design and deploy more engaging and accessible digital experiences for their customers, and to gain more business value from their marketing channels. We follow a simple philosophy: identify the win/win between what customers want and what businesses want out of digital experiences.

We specialise in:

- Design strategy
- User experience research
- Customer-driven innovation
- User-centred design
- Sales process optimisation

Since the business was formed in 2002 we've worked in more than 20 markets including Brazil, US, Canada, Mexico, China, Australia and many EU countries. We've worked with some of the world's biggest brands from sectors including travel, financial services, utilities, gaming, media and telecoms.



A Appendix

A.1 Heuristics

Experience:

- Do users feel in control of the process they are entering?
- Are users needs and expectations fulfilled?
- Does the site strike the right balance between the spirit of the Olympics and functionality?
- Does the site build a mutually beneficial relationship with the user (functional and anticipation)

Information

- Is the process clear? Incl longer term.
- Is supporting / preparatory content concise and clear?
- Is content appropriate to users and their goals?
- Is it clear how to get further information?

Interaction

- Is terminology familiar to users and relevant to their goals?
- Are there clear journey paths through the site / process and appropriate navigational feedback?
- Does the site allow for a smooth transition from research to requesting tickets?
- Are form errors handled effectively?

Consistency

- Is content, design, navigation & terminology consistent with the look and feel of Olympics?
- Is content, design and navigation & terminology consistent across the website?

Accessibility

- Have the standard accessibility principles been followed?

A.2 Personas

Jack (aged 34) is a plumber from Hackney. Keen sports watcher (not so much of a doer). Will watch a lot of the Olympics on TV at home, at friends or in the pub. Wants to catch as much as he can in real life.

Buying tickets for himself and perhaps a few friends. He can only attend outside of work hours (weekends and daytime after 4pm).

Particularly wants to see team games in London and will buy impulsively.

It's a once in a lifetime chance so he's willing to pay quite a bit and wants a good view.

He doesn't have a visa card.

Issues:

Team sports aren't yet in specified sessions.
How many tickets should he apply for, and how many should he leave till later?

Desires:

He wants to see all events in the hours he can do. He wants to go to events he'll have a pretty good chance of getting tickets for. He wants to see his own teams.
He wants to be able to swap tickets with friends.

Philippe (aged 52) is a Aged 52, telecoms engineer from Grenoble. Has sports mad kids and is always looking for exciting things to take them to. Youngest likes canoeing, eldest likes something else. He wants to include 2 days at the Olympics into his holiday with them next year.

He's a single dad with 2 kids aged 14 and 16 (will be 15 and 18).

Wants to spend 2 days at Olympics and pack lots in.

Wants to see Athletics and Modern pentathlon – ideally with some French participation.

All to be in London.

Budget is limited because he wants to see lots of sessions.

Will pay by visa.

Likes to plan.

Issues:

Too early to book travel and see kids holidays - so not sure exactly when he'll be there.
How does he buy tickets for pentathlon as it is a one day event?

Desires:

Would like to apply for day passes to make sure he gets a full schedule - but can't commit to requesting conflicting tickets in case he gets conflicting sessions.

Stella (aged 21) is a keen swimmer. She competes at regional level. She's the social secretary at her swim club and has decided that a day trip to the swimming at the Olympics would be a great bonding day for the swim team.

Wants to arrange tickets for her swimming club social.

Lives in Birmingham so will make a day trip. Wants to squeeze in as many swimming events as possible into a single day.

Would love to see finals if Brits were in them.

In search of atmosphere as much as seeing event itself.

Budget very limited and can't afford to shell out money herself. Wants to pay with multiple cheques.

Issues:

Very early to know who will go. Can't give names, even giving a number is hard.
Wants to see GB team - but which sessions?

Desires:

Wants to buy a 'group' ticket with her as leader.
Wants to pay with multiple cheques - she can't afford to cover the payment.
Wants to pay some later when she knows exact people.

Dan and Emma (both 40) and living in Jersey. He is a fanatical cyclist who has spread his enthusiasm to his son. Wants to soak up the atmosphere in the velodrome and show the family. Can't take kids out of school and has to take into account travelling times.

They have 2 children aged 10 and 3.

Can't attend on school days

Interested in track and road cycling events esp. sprints at the velodrome.

Budget is a priority but also wants good view.

Wants to pay by mastercard or paypal

Will buy impulsively but is very sure what he wants.

Issues:

Daughter needs pushchair space.
Can he even use the site - UK only?

Desires:

See just cycling events and request tickets straight from schedule. Request first and second priority: He believes that velodrome tickets will be popular so he won't get all he wants.

Bella (aged 34) lives in Italy. Not in the least interested in sports - but knows that her dad is and It's his 60th next year. He lives in London but follows all sports with Italian participation.

She wants to buy a ticket as a present for her dad who lives in London. She won't attend with him.

He'll be interested in anything where Italy is involved.

He lives specific people.
 Wants it to be a day to remember and will pay a little extra.
 Pay by Visa
 Wants to plan ahead – but has no knowledge.
 Her parents aren't online
 Her dad has a bad hip so finds steps difficult.

Issues:
 Tickets have to be physical - parents can't do e-tickets. What if his condition worsens and he can no longer get about - what will happen to his tickets.

Desires:
 Wants to be able to request tickets in someone else's name - with all communication going to her.

Tom (aged 13) lives in Southampton, loves water sports and wants to attend some sailing, rowing and canoeing.
 He wants to attend some events in Southampton (home) and some in London.
 He can't buy or attend alone because of his age.
 Can't go on school days
 Interested in Sailing, rowing and canoeing – particularly the men's fours.
 Budget is important to help him convince his parent to buy for him, but view is important for him.
 He'll do all the planning but get his parents to buy the tickets.

Issues:
 Too young to complete purchase process - but can't let his parents do it - they'd get the wrong stuff.

Desires:
 Wants to plan and present parents with detailed schedule for them to request tickets. Ideally so that he fills in the form or creates a shopping list for them.