

BUSINESS

Taylor Swift's Ticketmaster meltdown: What happened? Who's to blame?

Ticketmaster may be a favorite 'punching bag,' but the pop star might also share some blame, experts say

By [Julian Mark](#)

November 18, 2022 at 7:34 p.m. EST

Ticketmaster halted Friday's public ticket sales of Taylor Swift's "Eras" tour after a chaotic rollout of presale tickets that left fans waiting for hours on the ticketing site, with many walking away frustrated and empty-handed.

The fiasco sparked bipartisan outrage from some [Democrats](#) and [Republicans](#) who have questioned whether Ticketmaster handled the Swift ticket rollout appropriately. It also resurrected criticism that Ticketmaster holds outsize power in the ticketing and live events industry.

But questions remain about who actually got tickets, who is to blame and whether the renewed attention on Ticketmaster will lead to changes.

Here's what we know.

WHAT TO KNOW

- ◆ [Why did Ticketmaster cancel the general sale?](#)
- ◆ [Is Ticketmaster to blame?](#)
- ◆ [Is Ticketmaster a monopoly?](#)
- ◆ [How has Swift responded?](#)
- ◆ [Where can I get tickets now?](#)

Why did Ticketmaster cancel the general sale?

On Tuesday, presale ticket sales opened for Taylor Swift's "Eras" tour — her first tour since 2018. A mad rush ensued, leading to "historically unprecedented demand" that snapped up 2 million tickets, the most tickets ever sold for one artist in a day.

But that rush also overwhelmed its site, leading to glitches, long wait times and many disappointed fans. Ticketmaster first played down the problems, saying in a blog post on Thursday that only 15 percent of customer interactions experienced issues on its site.

In response to questions from The Post, the company referred back to the blog post, which appeared to have been temporarily taken down Thursday.

In the post, Ticketmaster acknowledged it wasn't only Swifties who converged on its site Tuesday. There were also a "staggering number of bot attacks," it said, prompting questions of who was actually getting the tickets — Swift fans or scalpers hoping to make a profit on the resale market. Bots are software tools that scalpers use to buy as many tickets as they can.

In a subsequent statement on Thursday, the online ticketing giant said it was canceling its general public sale because of "high demands on ticketing systems and insufficient remaining ticket inventory to meet that demand."

Is Ticketmaster to blame?

The fiasco has focused criticism on Ticketmaster, a company that critics say unfairly dominates the ticketing industry. It has long drawn the ire of customers and consumer advocates for charging high fees on sales and profiting off its secondary market website, which critics say enables the hoarding of tickets by resellers and price gougers.

Ticketmaster's market dominance makes that possible, this group argues. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.) tweeted on Tuesday that the company, which merged with concert promoter Live Nation Entertainment in 2010, needs to be broken up. On Wednesday, after receiving complaints from customers, Tennessee Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti (R) said he would look into whether the website violated consumers' rights and antitrust regulations.

But Eric Budish, an economics professor at the University of Chicago and expert on the ticketing industry, said Swift may also be responsible. Ticketmaster is just "a punching bag," as he sees it.

It's typically the artist who makes the lion's share of ticket-sale profits, he noted — and the artist plays a role in deciding how tickets are priced. In this case, he said, it's possible that Ticketmaster used a dynamic pricing system which calculates the prices of tickets based on the level of demand. When

dynamic pricing system, which calculates the price of tickets based on the level of demand. When asked, a Ticketmaster spokesperson would not confirm whether the pricing system was used.

Both Swift and Ticketmaster, he also pointed out, have the power to restrict ticket resales and thereby diminish the power of scalpers.

The system that would be “most appropriate for an artist like Taylor Swift ... is [to] set the price you think is a fair price and turn off the resale market,” he said. The way to restrict resale is to “put names on tickets,” very much like airline tickets — a system called “paperless ticketing,” he added.

Swift “could have chosen that, and she didn’t,” Budish said. “It would not be as profitable.”

Ticketmaster’s leadership, meanwhile, blames the chaos on the surge in demand. Greg Maffei, the chief executive of Liberty Media, a large shareholder in Ticketmaster’s parent company, told CNBC on Thursday that the troubled rollout was a “function of the massive demand that Taylor Swift has.”

But as Budish sees it, Ticketmaster should have been prepared for the web traffic, and he doesn’t buy that claim.

“It’s like you’re in the Super Bowl and you fumble the first snap,” he said.

Is Ticketmaster a monopoly?

When Ticketmaster and Live Nation Entertainment merged, some critics said the companies would wield too much power. Those concerns led to a Justice Department review that found in 2019 that Live Nation had violated the terms of the merger. As a result, the Justice Department and Live Nation agreed to extend court oversight and clarify language that prohibited Live Nation from retaliating against concert venues that chose ticketing companies other than Ticketmaster.

Nevertheless, advocacy groups continue to accuse Live Nation of engaging in such behavior.

The Justice Department has launched an investigation into Ticketmaster, which was confirmed by a person familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the situation. The person said that the probe predates the Swift chaos this week and that its parameters were not immediately clear.

Live Nation has countered that the market remains extremely competitive. On CNBC on Thursday, Maffei rejected claims that Live Nation and Ticketmaster are anticompetitive, saying a Swift show promoter — AEG Presents — chose Ticketmaster because “we are, in reality, the largest and most effective ticket seller in the world.”

On Friday, an AEG spokesman disputed that claim in a statement shared with The Post, saying the promoter “didn’t have a choice.”

“Ticketmaster’s exclusive deals with the vast majority of venues on the Eras tour required us to ticket through their system,” the spokesman said.

Peter Cohan, an associate professor of management at Babson College, called Ticketmaster a monopoly — a company that has the power to block rivals from entering the industry and can overcharge for products while providing bad service, as he defines it.

“I don’t really have much evidence that Ticketmaster is blocking competitors as much as I have evidence that there is bad customer value here, bad customer service and high prices,” he added.

How has Swift responded?

On Friday, Swift issued a statement on Instagram, citing “a multitude of reasons people had such a hard time trying to get tickets and I’m trying to figure out how this situation can be improved going forward.”

Without naming Ticketmaster specifically, Swift said she and her team “asked them, multiple times, if they could handle this kind of demand and we were assured they could.”

“It’s really difficult for me to trust an outside entity with these relationships and loyalties, and excruciating for me just to watch mistakes happen with no recourse,” she wrote, adding, “It’s truly amazing that 2.4 million people got tickets, but it really pisses me off that a lot of them feel like they went through several bear attacks to get them.”

Representatives for Swift did not respond to questions from The Post on Friday.

Where can I get tickets now?

Tickets are available on resale websites like StubHub. Some were priced at about \$28,000, according to Reuters. But others stayed in a range between \$400 to \$3,000.

Sonia Rao contributed to this report.