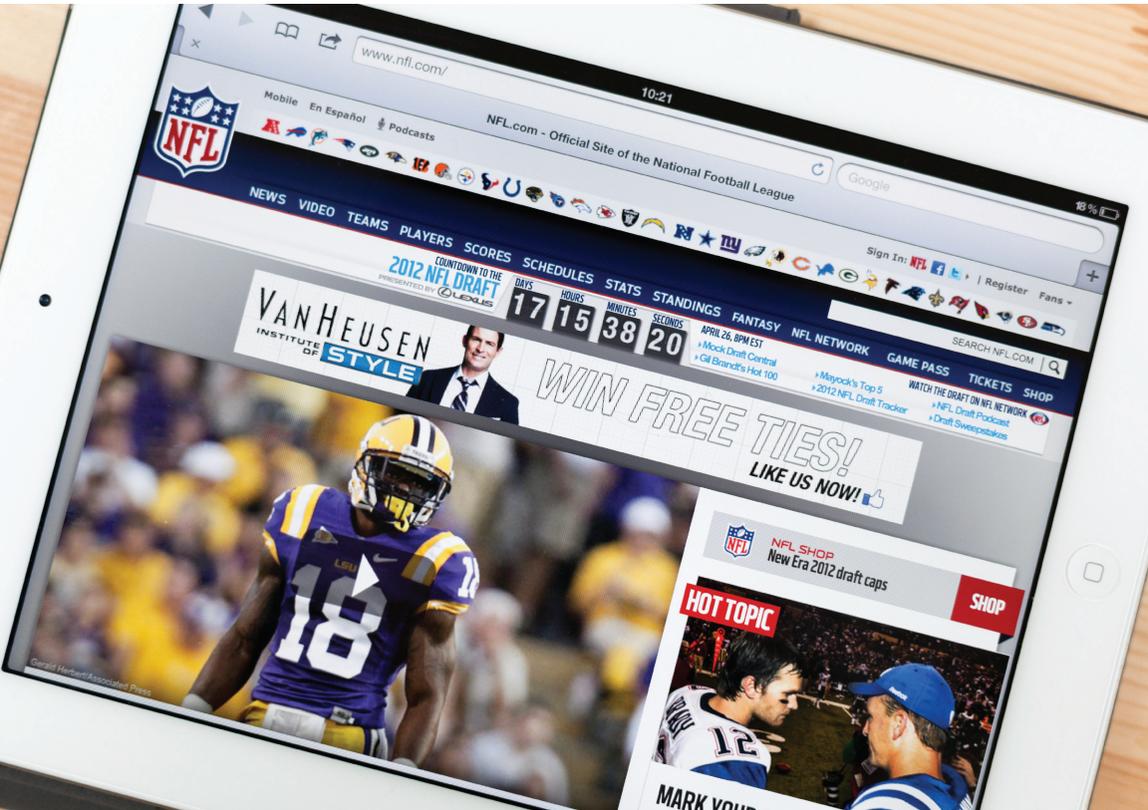


ARE YOU READY FOR FAKE BOWL 47?



On Sunday February 3rd millions of Americans will be fixated on their televisions watching the explosive end of another football season¹. Some lucky fans will be heading to Louisiana to see the east-coast versus west-coast matchup, which is also a sibling rivalry between the Harbaugh brothers. Of course, there are an unknown number of unlucky football fans who will also be scammed out of thousands of dollars by an underground industry which targets the Super Bowl each year in the form of counterfeit tickets, fake travel packages, and knockoff NFL merchandise. You can be a fan without being a victim, here's how.

The NFL has stated that around 250 people commonly show up at the gate with counterfeit tickets², that is a minimum of half a million dollars going to criminals at the current prices. In 2006 one woman was charged with passing 146 fake tickets³. Counterfeiting is real and pervasive. Knowing the numbers of actual available tickets may help you calculate the risk. The venue seats 72,000 but there are likely only a few thousand tickets available to the general public. The reason is a formula for how super bowl tickets are distributed which accounts for the high price, scarce availability and the desire to counterfeit. Three quarters of the tickets are distributed to the NFL teams, mostly to the two competing teams and the host venue. The tickets made available to NFL teams trickle down to season ticket holders, selected by lottery, to be given the option of buying tickets. This means many of the tickets are scooped up by companies and not the public which is blamed by some for the steep resale costs⁴. There is a Super Bowl random drawing, but if you did not enter the drawing last year you are not eligible now.

There are, however legitimate tickets available. Official tickets are being sold online through ticketexchangebyticketmaster.com and are \$2200 or

more. The most expensive “official” tickets are going for over \$13,000 each (yikes!) with some resale prices reaching into the hundreds of thousands of dollars. Someone offering to sell tickets for less than \$2200 should be viewed skeptically. There are apparently no standing room tickets for the Super Bowl so you should also be suspicious of these offers.

For years Super Bowl tickets have been created with enhanced anti-counterfeiting measures which are touted publicly ahead of the game. But how effective are these measures? They may or may not help the consumer because anti-counterfeiting measures are generally created to protect the merchant and not the victim. First, anti-counterfeiting features cannot really be verified until you have the tickets in your hand, which is hard if not impossible to do online. If you do have the opportunity to inspect a ticket before buying it, look for the following: the hologram that changes color when you move it, ink which vanishes when exposed to heat (called thermochromics), raised (embossed) printing, and perforated edges as they are printed in sequence on large sheets⁵. If the ticket has no hologram or heat-sensitive ink and is flat with smooth edges it is probably counterfeit. None of this is fool proof since sophisticated counterfeiters have been making their own holograms for years⁶. Holograms were high-tech thirty years ago but somewhat ordinary now. Thermochromatic ink also sounds high-tech and expensive until you realize it is the same material found in Mood Rings⁷ and beer bottle labels which tell when your brew is cold enough to drink(as if you didn’t know already).

¹ <http://www.nfl.com/superbowl/47>

² <http://www.dallasnews.com/sports/super-bowl/local/20110122-be-on-alert-for-fake-super-bowl-tickets.ece>

³ <http://sports.espn.go.com/espn/page2/story?page=rovell/060131>

⁴ <http://video.foxbusiness.com/v/2119579479001/corporations-paying-big-bucks-to-attend-super-bowl/?intcmp=obnetwork>

⁵ <http://www.nfl.com/superbowl/story/09000d5d81d40d6a/article/how-to-tell-if-your-super-bowl-ticket-is-legit>

Of course, the question here is how much is a counterfeiter willing to spend to convincingly forge a ticket? Well, quite a bit if the payoff for the counterfeiter is thousands of dollars. The lesson is that anti-counterfeiting measures only raise the fraud bar and do not prevent it all together. Unless you can compare a suspect ticket to a real one, you still might be fooled.

In addition to StubHub and AceTickets, another site offering many Super Bowl tickets at lower than expected prices is vippartytickets.com. The problem with this website is the lack of transparency. No real company information is provided, only a phone number. A little digging shows this site is likely part of a conglomerate called Alcatraz Media (AKA VIP Tickets) which sells tickets to various events like concerts, NASCAR, the theater and vacation tours as well as sports. They have many websites which do not clearly state their ownership. Regardless, Alcatraz Media is a real company located in Georgia and registered in Delaware. They are rated by the Better Business Bureau with 34 complaints in the last three years⁸, which is a low count for a company that probably sells thousands of tickets. However, it is unclear if this site is run by some affiliate of the main reseller. This is all about information and calculating risk. The fact that these purchases can be linked to a real company is good, but it should not require this much work from the consumer to find out just who is the real company.

Not necessarily counterfeit, but there are related ticket purchases which

⁶ <http://www.wired.com/science/discoveries/news/2007/02/72664?currentPage=all>

⁷ <http://www.badfads.com/collectibles/mood-rings/>

⁸ <http://www.bbb.org/atlanta/business-reviews/travel-agencies-and-bureaus/alcatraz-media-in-atlanta-ga-7003850/complaints#breakdown>

could be passed off as something else and so require reading the details carefully. Many online searches for “Super Bowl Tickets” lead to a vast list of other venues around the Super Bowl. Some of these ticketed events are private parties and the media day, which can be just as interesting and entertaining but are not the Super Bowl. Be sure what you are buying. Make sure the tickets are for Super Bowl XLVII: Baltimore Ravens vs. San Francisco 49ers - Sunday, February 3, 2013 at 5:30 PM. Most of the peripheral events also contain the term “Super Bowl” like the Super Bowl Emeril Lagasse Pre-Game Party and the Super Bowl Maxim Party.

Are you going to meet a stranger to buy a ticket? This is not recommended, but if you do follow the same safety rules you would in any similar situation: meet in a public place with security cameras like a chain coffee shop, never go alone, tell someone where you are going and who you are meeting, don't bring large amounts of cash, and ask the seller to provide identification. Never let a stranger come to your house and never go to a private house or get into a stranger's car. If the seller refuses to bring identification, don't buy tickets from them, record details with your camera phone. Even safe, and apparently verified, transactions with strangers have turned out yield counterfeits as some have discovered⁹. And not all offers are solely regarding tickets. One Baltimore Craigslist ad (since removed) offered free air, hotel, and ticket to an “attractive young female¹⁰.”

⁹ <http://boston.cbslocal.com/2012/02/02/two-patriots-fans-lose-2800-in-fake-ticket-scam/>

¹⁰ <http://baltimore.craigslist.org/tix/3567256031.html>

If you are thinking about going to New Orleans and buying tickets on the street from a scalper, there are a few things to be aware of. It is legal to scalp tickets in Louisiana but tickets for athletic events cannot be sold for more than the face price of the ticket¹¹ unlike tickets sold online which can be without limit. This law, makes any street-transaction suspicious because why would someone scalp a real ticket for \$900 when they could sell it for \$2000 online? There are some benefits to buying tickets from a legitimate online ticket reseller. Not only is there a paper trail, but Louisiana law requires refunds if the event is canceled. These rules are only in place for real online ticket resellers, not personal transactions which occur online. This situation would apply to tickets purchased on Craigslist. Craigslist does not guarantee any purchases.

Guess what; even buying a real ticket from an illicit seller may not get you into the game. If the ticket in question was reported as lost or stolen, you will be barred from entry. These are not counterfeits but stolen tickets are just as worthless to the buyer. Souvenir Tickets are issued as gifts which look just like the real thing but list the seats in non-existent sections of the stadium¹², check the seating chart at the Mercedes Super Dome: superdome.com/footballchart to be sure that the seats are real.

Traveling to the Super Bowl presents its own problems for fraud. Many fans have rented rooms from nonexistent “bed and breakfasts” only to show

¹¹<http://law.justia.com/codes/louisiana/2006/47/96730.html>

¹² <http://www.superbowlticketcollector.com/Replica%20Tickets.htm>

up at a private residence¹³. Double-check all hotel details with travel rating sites, the Better Business Bureau, AAA, and local services like the Greater New Orleans Hotel Association (GNOHLA)¹⁴.

If you are not in for the adventure of actually trying to go to the Super Bowl you may just want some commemorative gear, which is a whole other opportunity for fraud. Last year at this time U.S. federal agents seized three and half million dollars in fake Super Bowl memorabilia. Fake merchandise is often sold on the street and fake websites. These sales don't support your teams, fund organized crime and often use child labor.

As with any event attracting crowds fueled with alcohol there are additional risks from pickpockets and criminals renting parking spots they do not own. There will of course be a massive presence of local police, state troopers, private security, and federal homeland security¹⁵. The Super Bowl has also brought with it a swath of prostitution. According to the FBI, human trafficking has more than doubled since 2007. Several cities hosting the Super Bowl in previous years have conducted vast crackdown on prostitution ahead of the big day, countering human traffic which descends from out of town.

Have fun and don't let all this keep you from enjoying the game.

¹³ <http://www.wvlv.com/news/Concerns-over-online-weekend-rental-scams-grow-ahead-of-Super-Bowl-187371411.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.gnohla.com/>

¹⁵ <http://www.wvlv.com/sports/superbowl/Super-Bowl-Security-A-Team-Effort-In-New-Orleans-188122511.html>

digitalcitizens
alliance 

www.digitalcitizensalliance.org