

Net's trick flick tix

Spoiling the plot for deceptive online movie listings

By MICHAEL GILTZ

SAVVY New Yorkers know that if they want to see a blockbuster like "King Kong" on opening night, they've got to buy their tickets days — or even weeks — in advance. But the two main ticket sellers — Moviefone and Fandango — aren't interested in helping you find the most convenient movie theater at the best time.

Their job is to sell you tickets to their movie chains and steer you away from their competitors.

With big films like "Kong" and "Munich" on the horizon, here's how you can avoid the traps they lay for you. We'll use the recent debut of "Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire" as an example.

Check Moviefone & Fandango

Each company has exclusive deals with certain movie

chains. Often, until opening day, their sites feature incomplete listings omitting competitors' theaters.

Selling tickets to favored chains — with a nice surcharge — is where the companies make most of their money. So when buying tickets before a movie has opened, make sure you check both Web sites regularly to see what theaters your movie is playing before you commit.

Can't find a good showtime? Just be patient.

Just 48 hours before "Potter" opened on Nov. 18, Loews 34th Street listed only one "batch" of showtimes — with only one prime showing at 8 p.m.

Obviously, a movie like "Potter" will premiere on a gazillion screens, and a multiplex like Loews 34th will be showing it at multiple times. So if it looks like they're showing the times

for only one screen and it's already sold out, be patient.

Don't buy tickets to that 5 p.m. or 11 p.m. showing if you can hold off and keep checking online and by phone: More times will be added.

But you have to be vigilant and check regularly — there's no telling when more showings will pop up. And if you're trying to buy tickets to a movie like "Brokeback Mountain" or "Syriana," check Web sites like upcomingmovies.com. They might be opening only on a handful of screens before going into wider release.

Don't hang up if they start listing theaters in Jersey.

Many times, people use these phone services just to learn theaters and showtimes nearby. So when the automated voice begins with chains a few blocks away and then starts listing

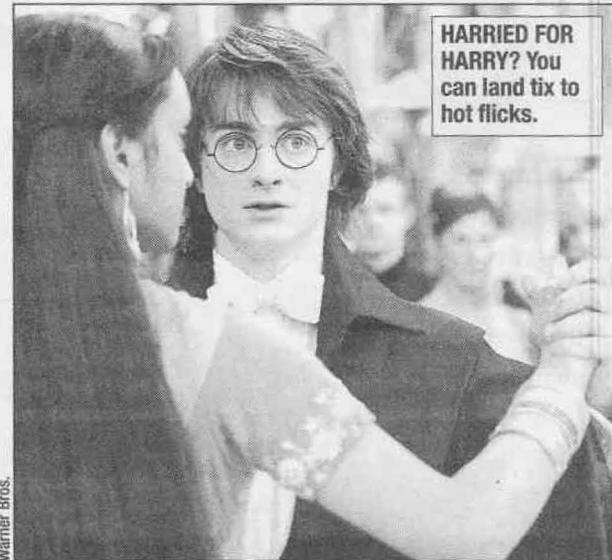
locations in Brooklyn and even New Jersey, people hang up thinking they've heard all the locations nearby.

Nope. These services often list all of the chains they have deals with first. You may have to skip through 10 or more listings before they mention a competitor's theater only a block or two away.

The day "Potter" opened, Moviefone listed City Cinema's East 86th Street location sixth on its list. Fandango listed it 17th — after locations in Queens, Brooklyn and New Jersey. Fandango listed the United Artists Union Square location fifth; Moviefone listed it 14th.

When online, read all listings.

They pull the same stunt online, where movie theater locations are usually shown in batches of five. You may have to scroll



Warner Bros.

HARRIED FOR HARRY? You can land tix to hot flicks.

through five or six "pages" before finding the theater you want buried at the end.

If you were in Harlem and wanted to see "Potter" on opening day, Moviefone listed the Coliseum Theater on 181st Street fourth when you entered the 10033 zip code. Fandango listed the Coliseum 13th.

Remember, neither service is "better" than the other. They both list the chains they have deals with first.

So if you want to get into a blockbuster on opening night, your best bet is to check online and by phone early and often. Go by your local theater a week or two in advance; they might be selling tickets in person and you can avoid the \$1.50 service charge.

And once a movie's opened, the surest way to find out *all* the places a film is playing is to buy the New York Post and check out the ads and movie listings.

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