

Five key learnings from SXSW 2019

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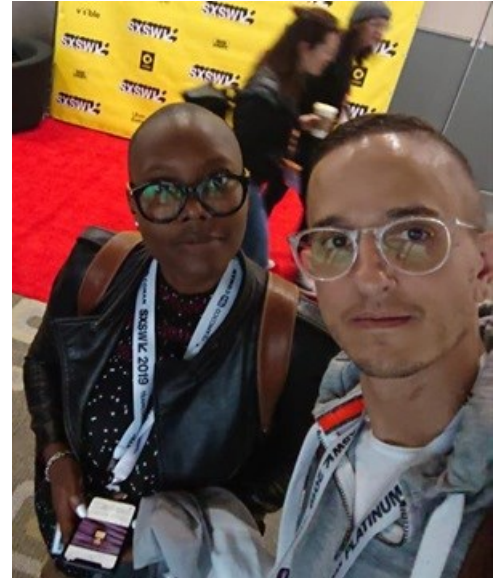
South by Southwest (SXSW) is an annual 10-day event of interactive media, brands, film and music festivals that bring 100,000 creatives from across the world to Austin, Texas to network, learn and share ideas. It features key speakers from various industries who share the secret sauce of what's next in tech, music, film, brands and marketing.

For us, this was an opportunity to not only bring back a wealth of knowledge from the biggest names in entertainment, business, politics, marketing and technology, but also to crack the magic behind some of the most ground-breaking innovations that are influencing the future of digital.

Here are five key learnings from the SXSW talks we attended, from A\$AP Rocky and Trevor Noah to Brené Brown and Gwyneth Paltrow.

Forget boomers, X, Y and millennials - Welcome to Generation Truth

Human truth was the golden thread at SXSW. Drawing from research, professor and author, Brené Brown's address, it was explained that as the world evolves, brands need to find the courage to speak the language of the heart. Vulnerability, diversity, empathy and courage are distinctly human traits and it forms the foundation of human connection. It is the sweet spot to cementing well-crafted brand essence and converting sceptics to loyalists.



Wayne Flemming and Zubeida Goolam at the South by Southwest (SXSW) event

These age categories - boomers, X, Y, millennials and alphas - were created to distinguish various eras and generations when it came to music, pop culture, fashion and ideals. But they are not simply labels, they describe people. And although there may be many things that differentiate people, one thing has never changed - truth.

As generations like alphas and 'ama-2000s' emerge, the digital machine falls back into the old model of marketing and adopts (or attempts to) the new language and face of the emerging consumer; never realising that the most important thing remains the same. Although consumers have become desensitised to connecting and being present, everyone still responds to an emotional connection that surprises and delights them.

The rise of the invisible brand

"Hey Google, talk like a Legend" - this is how you activate John Legend's voice as your Google Assistant on Google Home. This not only speaks to the revelation of how brands can drive their popularity through merging itself with popular culture but also speaks to "the rise of the invisible brand". As audio innovation gains traction, brands need to make themselves stand out. Whether there's a specific sound that signifies that a transaction is complete, logging into an App or something mnemonic like the famous phrase "Winter is Here" associated with popular HBO series, *Game of Thrones*; brands need to explore how they can trigger brand association using audio". This is the invisible brand - you can't see it, it's not tangible but it's an invisible experience that triggers an association with a brand.

During a trends talk at SXSW, it was said that 86% of people are more likely to interact with your brand if they like the sound. It's almost like having sound in a sound-off environment because there's not social (media) interaction. Whether it's Google Assistant, Alexa or Siri; we are connected now more than ever using voice interface technology which opens up an opportunity for brands to plug themselves in.

If you don't know, ask - The art of vulnerability in business

Actress and entrepreneur, Gwyneth Paltrow, also touched on the importance of understanding that it's okay not to know everything when venturing into entrepreneurship. Speaking about her early days, she often found herself in boardrooms with people speaking "business." She had to gather courage and ask questions. This is true leadership, the only way to learn and grow is to ask. As a result, she gained double-digit growth in the last five years.

Tech is becoming more human

Technology will continue to evolve and enhance our quality of life. Sony's newest innovation, '[aibo](#)', is a perfect example. With life-like expressions and a dynamic array of movements, aibo is a robotic dog with lovable behaviour that brings warmth and delight to its owners. The approach to raising aibo shapes its personality, behaviour, and knowledge, creating a unique environment for growth. Over time, aibo will learn and develop as the owner's approach to nurturing gradually shapes its personality.

Artificial intelligence - like all technology - can act only as capable and ethically as we train it to. If we hold ourselves accountable to standards of fairness and excellence, we will see these principles in our AI solutions. The panel discussed how AI, including the policy principles for the industry, will empower workers and industries, and what we can do to prepare for this next generation in our workforce.

In conclusion

Brands have to move with relevant culture, it is not a trend; it is a part of social culture that will endure the test of time. It's about moving your brand into a space of relevance and truth to make sure it will survive the test of time. What is relevant to your audience and how do you support that cause?

Lastly, brands need to be brave. As a brand, if you are driving a narrative which has not been written before, you will drive the story, you will be the case study, and you need to be courageous and vulnerable enough to pilot it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

With a rich history and culture, Zubeida had an impressive repertoire, spanning over many years at industry giants, before starting and then dominating with her own company BrandTruth. With solid experience in the industry, Wayne Flemming is a business visionary and IMC content creator who describes himself as a "marketing fanatic". His bold thinking is supported by his strong strategy and leadership skills, and he is also a storyteller at heart.

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