

A photograph of a large audience seated in a dark theater, looking towards a stage. A camera operator is visible in the foreground, silhouetted against the stage lights. The stage features a large screen displaying the SXSW 2018 logo and a colorful graphic. The scene is dimly lit, with blue and white stage lighting.

SXSW 2018 – Creativity from Diversity

Chick Foxgrover

EVP, creative technologies & innovation

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SXSW 2018 - Creativity from Diversity

In the last few years there have been many complaints in the marketing community that SXSW has “jumped the shark”, was no longer relevant for those who are looking for the next big thing.

Since the days of the emergence of Twitter and FourSquare heralding the importance of social media for connection, commerce and marketing, **there has been an expectation that SXSW is the platform where heroes are born. Perhaps that was no longer true.**

Hugh Forrest kicked off the festival with a reminder that **SXSW’s mission is to foster unexpected discoveries from diverse topics and people. And the focus of that mission is creativity.**

And Creativity is more relevant than ever before and still alive at SXSW 2018.

A glance at the 25 topic tracks, each with at least 50 sessions, talks or meetups demonstrates a breadth of inquiry and ensures **a variety of experience and connections for any brand marketer interested in digital culture.**

“The event has changed in many surprising and meaningful ways since 1987, but **at its core, SXSW remains a tool for creative people to develop their careers by bringing together people from around the globe to meet, learn and share ideas.** (And maybe have a few once-in-a-lifetime experiences.)”

– Roland Swenson, SXSW Managing Director



SXSW 2018 – Creativity and the Human Colossus



“Made on Earth by Humans”

(Label put on Elon Musk SpaceX components)

And at SXSW creativity and technology are connected. This year SXSW delivered a passionate call from some of our best minds to **embrace the immense possibilities of today’s technologies, to**

learn about them and get involved in their development.

Elon Musk, Tim O’Reilly, Fei-Fei Li and whurley all reminded us that **SpaceX, AI and quantum computing are human inventions, the product of our best selves as collaborators seeking to build a better world.**

And as for the essential role of creative communications, Tim O’Reilly ended his talk with a thought from Yuval Noah

Harari’s in [“Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind.”](#) that should inspire everyone in marketing that their work is noble and empowering:

“Much of history revolves around this question: How does one persuade millions of people to believe particular stories about gods, or nations, or limited liability companies? Yet when it succeeds, it gives sapiens immense power, because it enables millions of strangers to cooperate and work toward common goals.”



SXSW 2018 – A World’s Fair of Convergence

I was not the only one who was struck by **the many languages spoken around SXSW this year.**

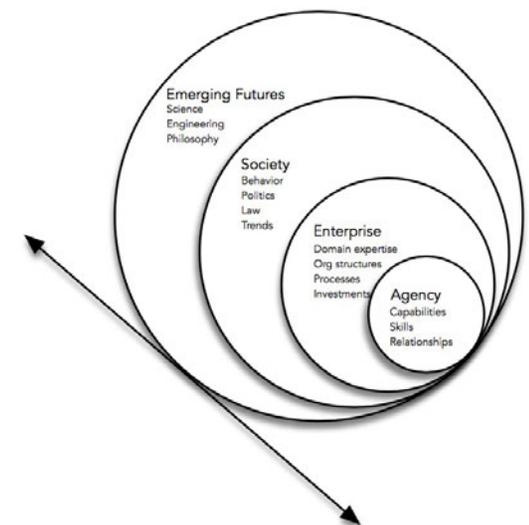
If SXSW no longer mattered as much to advertisers it certainly did to a young international crowd who came with a passionate interest in learning and engaging with important ideas and challenges of our rapidly evolving technocratic age.

Hugh Forrest, called **SXSW a World’s Fair** when introducing emerging tech companies at China Gathering at Austin City Hall. An idea borne out by the number of attendees from outside the U.S. **A World’s Fair where you can explore how the storytelling arts and technology are converging to change cities, government, sports and more.**



SXSW 2018 – Creativity from Diversity

- Creativity is the core theme for SXSW's sweeping program — an invitation to engage your creative mind in everything from storytelling to the frontiers of advanced tech to most pressing issues of our time.
- Marketing and the persuasion arts – finding and making audiences, building great experiences – will continue to play an a vital role in inspiring action and change.
- New technologies such as blockchain, AI, quantum computing, 5G, immersive media are on the brink of revolutionary breakthroughs with a urgent need of human creative direction.
- The most inspiring thought leaders in technology sent a clear message that everyone has a right, even an obligation to learn about, and contribute to, the design and use of of the many new technologies that are re-making our society.
- Creative practitioners will continue to find deep learning, conversation and new connections at SXSW.
- **Inclusiveness is necessary to optimally harnessing the creative energy of human inventions and discoveries. Diversity = humanity at the scale our future requires.**



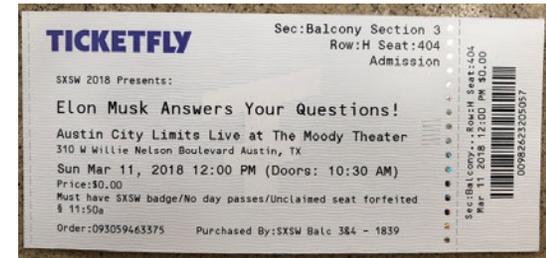
4A's Creative
Technologies Evaluation
Framework

Elon Musk – Big Ideas

A SXSW superstar and a surprise addition to the program this year. Tickets were only available first come-first serve at 8:30 one morning, already a long line at 8 AM. Then another long line to get into the theater. A full half day.

This was not a prepared talk but an impromptu Q&A with the writer of the movie Interstellar. So the talk was about SpaceX and the latest launch and the future of space travel.

Why does he do such big projects? To engage and inspire as many people as possible in creating the so-called impossible.



One hot ticket this year!



Diego Donamaria/Getty

Tim O'Reilly – AI, Automation, Economy

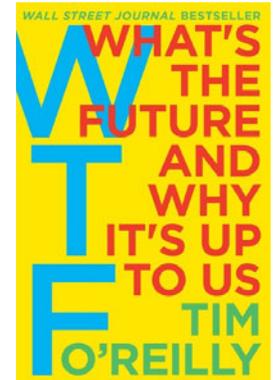
Tim O'Reilly has been at the center of our current digital technology awakening, coined and defined the term web 2.0 and is certainly one of the best thinkers we have on the nature and impact of technology on business and society.

His talk at SXSW followed up only a few of the themes of his recent book and he has a lot to say about how **technology, entrepreneurial culture and government need to get EVEN MORE in sync.**

His deck is now available on SlideShare: <https://www.slideshare.net/timoreilly/do-more-do-things-that-were-previously-impossible>

AT SXSW he tackled 5 themes, at length:

- 1. Why technology will create MORE jobs** through the introduction of many new needed skills.
- 2. Maximizing profits is not the answer** to sustainable economy.
- 3. Technology is not a one shot problem solver** even with the right idea. Solutions grow with participation over time.
- 4. AI is NOT a mortal threat** if we don't let it become one.
- 5. We should experiment with new economic models of incentives and distribution** instead trying to optimize old economic models that for many is not working.



Gradually, then suddenly

- 1. We are creating new kinds of partnerships between machines and humans**
- 2. Artificial Intelligence and algorithmic systems are everywhere**
- 3. The *world* is becoming infused with the digital**

O'REILLY

It's very worth the time to hear him talk and there are a number of one-hour videos on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s3ha6vHapcl>

Nonny de la Peña – VR and Immersive Media

The “Godmother of VR” gave a passionate defense of the medium of VR for a new kind of story telling. After a career of some of earliest uses of VR for documentary stories, and then retreating because she felt the tech was overwhelming the story.

She has come back to VR because of the unique way people experience VR content. **RAIR, “response as if real” is so profound that she has re-engaged in VR work.** She has recently completed [“Greenland Melting”](#) and you can dive into her current work at <http://emblematicgroup.com/>

Other important takeaways from her talk:

1. 5G will allow wireless transmission of VR scale data streams and help push VR into the mainstream
2. Photogrammetry – creating 3D models from still photographs has advanced to become a revolutionary tool for the future of the immersive arts.
3. We are still in the very beginnings of learning how to harness, to design for, the potential of RAIR and create the immersive arts of the future
4. Embodied media will be an expensive addition to the future of story telling.



whurley – Quantum Computing

Extraordinarily complex and in its earliest beginnings, quantum computing vastly expands our ability to represent the innumerable variable states of reality digitally. **It is therefore particularly important for multi-variant optimization and simulation problems such as weather, climate change, machine learning among many other things, many un-imagined.** In other words the frontiers of much of the actual magic we expect from AI, robotics and more

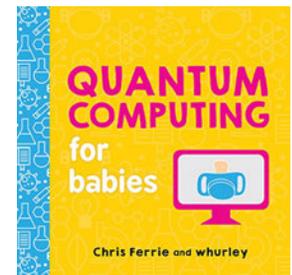
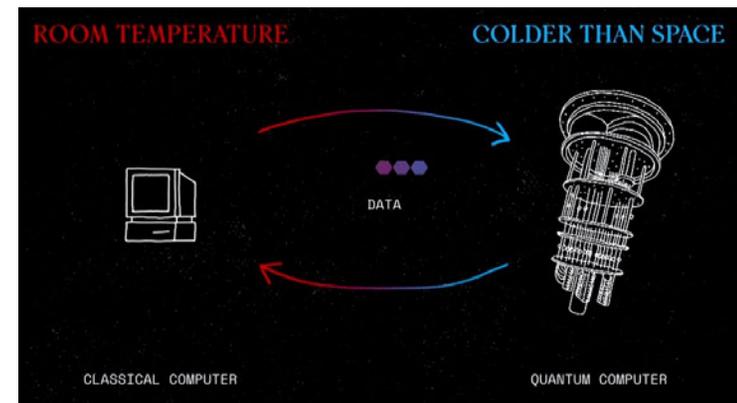
William Hurley, "whurley", an entrepreneur and former IBM "master inventor" among many other things, gave **The [IEEE Tech for Humanity](#) keynote to try and humanize quantum computing.** He's even written a book on quantum computing for babies!

Watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tNlAtQz17Q>

An optimistic believer in open source, whurley too asks us all to get closer and investigate advanced tech. Only massive exploration of the possibilities by many people can bring the technologies' promise to fruition.

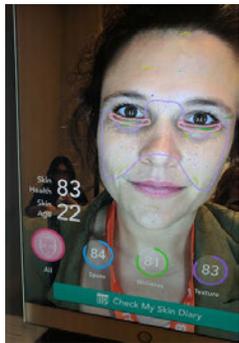
Highlights from his talk.

1. Quantum computing is truly revolutionary, bringing as many new concepts as power into computing.
2. Quantum computers need "classical" computers to manage most of their operation.
3. Quantum computing today requires a village of experts in physics, math and computer science to run.
4. Investment is international and progress is steady. This is the true "space race" of our age.



SXSW 2018 – AI Everywhere

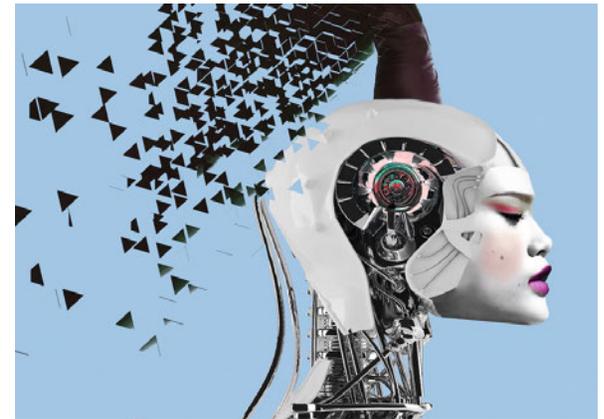
It's fair to say that the one technology on everyone's mind today is Artificial Intelligence and found its way into every track and conversation from the design of smart cities to the AI: Transforming Luxury, Fashion and Beauty.



L'Oreal @ SXSW - app and custom skin care

Here's just a sampling of the 115 talks and sessions on the program at SXSW this year:

- Accounting for Human Tastes: Marketing and A.I.
- Active AI: Immersive Experiences in Health
- AI and Applied Math Meet Up
- AI Creativity in Art, Neuroscience, and the Law
- AI Philosophy: Why It's Hard & State Of The Art
- Can AI Soothe the Savage Comment Section?
- The Future of Machine Learning: Worth the Hype?
- How Will Brands Grow In the AI Era?
- What AI Reveals About Our Place in the Universe
- Will AI Change the Future of Creativity?



Every POV on AI was represented but what stuck was

- 1. It's already here.**
- 2. We're just getting started.**
- 3. It's going to be important in every aspect of your life.**

AI @ SXSW 2018

Democratizing AI for Individuals and Organizations

One of the best and most inspiring talks on AI was a panel with two of the most accomplished people in the business: Fei-Fei Li of Google and Stanford and Megan Smith, former Chief Technology Officer of the U.S., centered on the need and practical activation of citizen AI scientists.

These experts were passionate in their belief that **all of us can and should learn about and how to use AI technologies**. They are actively involved in teaching and programs with people of all ages.

Our potential to contribute to the evolving abilities of new technologies and manage the challenges of the future was reaffirmed often this year at SXSW.



AI @ SXSW 2018

How Brands Grow in the AI Era

Steven Wolfe Pereira from Quantcast gave a terrific talk about how AI applies to brand building that I've heard.

After walking us through a bit of "how we got to now", he says that if marketers needed an internet strategy in 1998, **in 2018 you need an AI strategy.**

For Wolfe Pereira, **machine learning** is the most important AI technology for marketers right now.

He uses a helpful **pilot metaphor** to think about where AI fits in in the marketing process:

Take off – AI for insight and strategy. Pattern recognition, predictive analytics, human oversight.

In-flight – machine learning models the campaign, makes adjustments

Landing – measurement, learnings.

Many brands are suffering **low growth** and **audiences are divorced from media.** AI can contribute to a 3 point program:

1. **Go direct to consumer.** Integrate your operations into strong direct relationships.
2. **Determine what part of the AI stack you should own.** Many companies are bringing data-driven strategy in-house.
3. **Use AI to focus on your current and future customer.** Look for patterns in your data for deeper context. Track trends for predictive prospecting.

Clearly in the **AI is useful versus dangerous** camp, Wolfe Pereira gave marketers a blueprint on how to investigate AI today.



Westworld - The hit of SXSW 2018



I couldn't get in to the most talked-about experience at SXSW 2018, but coverage was extensive.

The West World theme park re-created an analog mirror (in advance of a virtual one) of possible future digital experience, in parallel to many of the questions arising today about digital culture. And the moral intersection of virtual and physical worlds.

These are all important issues that we must address along the way towards creating a new society based on the powerful technologies of virtual reality, AI and robotics.

Great video of WestWorld experience by Endgadget - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qupcgRD6bM4>

Brand Pavilions at the New World's Fair

A number of brands programmed their own content with all-day schedules of all-star speakers. Many of these sessions were very worthwhile but made choosing even more difficult!



Always worth checking out, Capital One has for some years created a deep presence at SXSW and has presented innovation programming and performances.



Mercedes created an entire compound for an extensive schedule of activities and talks

Land O' Lakes worked with National Geographic and Microsoft programming 24 speakers on food and agriculture topics - <https://event.thefoodeffect.com/>



Sony's Wow Studio presented beautiful playful interactives like this amazing augmented reality projector

Brand Activations – Outdoors

Mercedes Theater within their large compound



Dell Technologies – right next to the convention center

Dynamic creativity: Dropbox had artists continually painting new murals on the same wall throughout SXSW



And Vice had baby goats!

SXSW Brand Activations Rainey Street



Hulu – Handmaid's Tale activation included burning of the costume in this case



Pinterest containers



iHeart was still pumping at SXSW

Blockchain (Ethereum) superstar company Consensus

Brand Activations – Indoors

The indoor spaces at the SXSW convention center and hotels also provided numerous opportunities for brand activations.

The Vimeo Theater in the Austin Convention Center



Mercedes created a very engaging low-tech game about relationships with day-glo strings



One of many Google Assistant activations seen at SXSW

Brand Activation Standout – Bumble

Bumble the women-lead dating app, teamed up with **local agency Preacher** to create a large activation with performances, games and drinks to introduce **service extensions to Bumble Date: Bumble Bizz, and Bumble BFF.**

It was lively and smart and made a convincing statement about extending dating dynamics into business and friendships.

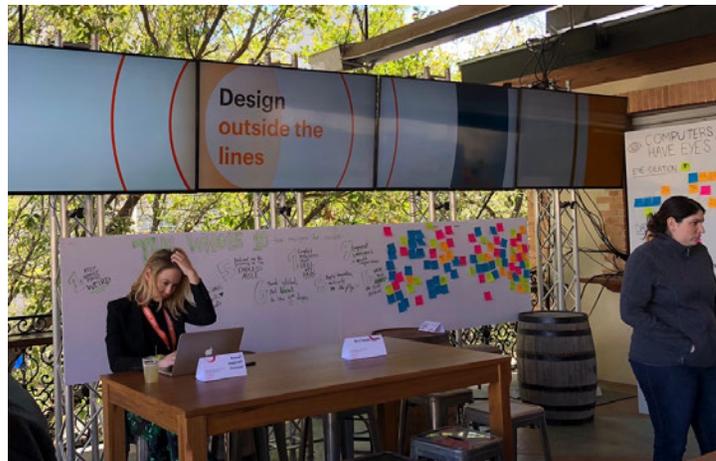
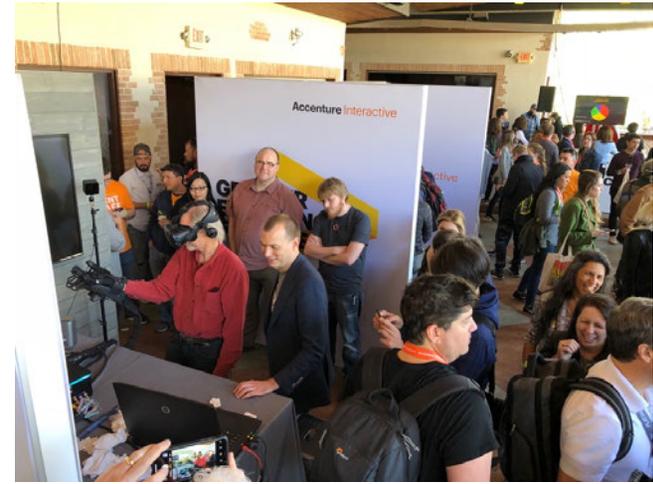


Performance stage



Brand Activation Standout – Accenture Interactive

Accenture Interactive had a very well attended booth of interactive advanced tech experiences for visitors highlighting work in VR and AR with brand partners like Microsoft and Whole Foods.



Idea mapping - not a new idea at SXSW but participation was good.

Brand Activation Standout – Bose

Voice and audio have become an important creative consideration in experience design since the introduction of the Amazon Echo. Along with their conventional wares, **Bose brought their concept augmented reality glasses** to SXSW.

The glasses have an audio agent like Siri or Alexa coupled with location recognition using sensors on the device and a tethered phone, that can **layer on an audio description from a service like Trip Advisor or Yelp over restaurants or stores in your field of vision.**



Karissa Bell/Mashable



Entrepreneurs at work - SXSW 2018



Beautiful electronic guitar



Free T-shirt for sign up at startup
Trustwork.com

Mobile music video production studio



Oh, and Bernie Sanders too.

Who speaks at SXSW? Some of the most well known personalities in technology and culture – though probably with a progressive point of view. Certainly **the line to see Bernie was long! And the crowd enthusiastic.**

He's out on tour for Democrats but gave nothing away about his future plans beyond the immediate challenges posed by the other party.

Like Elon Musk, Melinda Gates, Nonny del la Peña, Sadiq Khan, and many prominent speakers this year, Bernie fit right in with the spirit and worldview of SXSW.

See you next year!

