

SXSW 2018 Insights

Highlights from some of the sessions at the amazing SXSW Festival!

SXSW takes place in Austin, Texas, and brings together a series of events, conferences and screenings across the film, digital, music and interactive industries. Below you'll find summaries of a few sessions on the topics of OTT, VR, Social Media, Content Marketing, Blockchain and Music Talent Management.

OTT AND DIGITAL

Talk: A View From Over The Top

Topline: Streaming has disrupted the TV industry and redefined the way we consume entertainment. In fact, recent studies show that 4 in 10 TV consumers with broadband use 2 or more streaming apps. Is original on-demand content or live streaming TV the way of the future? Or is it a medley of the 2?

Panel:

1. Richard Irving, VP of Product, Hulu
2. Christian Oestlien, Director of Product Management, You Tube
3. Kathy Payne, Head of Amazon Channels Content Acquisition, Amazon Music

*The panel all made the point that the TV box in the living room is near dead – people want to take their content with them and view it on the devices they want. That might still be in the living room for 'tentpole' viewing, but can happen via smart TV's. Viewers don't want to search laborious EPG's, but be able to easily find the content they want, be recommended content in line with viewing habits, be sent reminder notices etc.

*Customers are craving more choice but want their lives made easier in terms of finding content.

Hulu

*Started in 2008 as a free service. Where you could watch Lost series 3 premiere!

*People are turning off the cab/sat packages because they're faced with a lot of channels they don't want to watch and still paying for them.

*Hulu offer a \$7.99 subscription for their streaming library, and for \$39.99, over 50 channels included as well [these include live OTT programming from broadcast and cable brands such as ABC, CBS, Fox]

*They listened to what viewers wanted and introduced live viewing – sports and news.

*60% of the viewing is on-demand, the rest now live viewing

*Daily sign up rate has increased 100% in the last 12 months

Amazon

*Much content already included for Prime customers for free

*Their choice of a la carte channels means viewer has complete choice – different to Hulu because they only choose the channels and content they really want

*NFL Thurs night football games have proven really popular

*CBS All Access (CBS' VOD and live streaming subscription service) launched in January 2018 [in the US]

*Because tech is changing so rapidly, contract licence terms [for content] are getting shorter, in order to remain nimble and innovative

You Tube TV

*Vast majority of watch time is live

- *They also introduced live news and sports for the 'watercooler' moments
- *Valuable ability to harness You Tube creators to create content around them
- *Challenge is to work on the video infrastructure, to enhance the quality of delivery to benchmark against broadcasters.
- *Big changes on the horizon regarding ad insertion and personalisation of ads

IMMERSIVE

Talk: Surviving VR Wave 1

Topline: Wave 1 of VR industry (2014-2016) had its day and is now starting to die off. Wave 2 companies pioneering storytelling within immersive media are taking shape with a different approach. After 2 years on the front line of wave 1 VR, Daniel shares the hard lessons learned and how next generation companies are taking a different tact bridging the culture gap between Hollywood + Silicon Valley to build the next generation of immersive storytelling.

Speaker: Daniel Burwen of consultancy Adjacent (previous roles at Here Be Dragons, Jaunt VR) <http://danielburwen.com/>

*The term "XR" now stands for all forms of interactive content - VR/AR/MR (mixed reality)

*We need to remember that film and TV have been around for decades, immersive media has only been around for a blink.

*We've already progressed from the cardboard box to bulky glasses, next will be 'sexy glasses' and then, likely, contact lenses. It's made a big jump in a short time, the pace of change in technology has been dramatic.

*Audiences are changing as well. Consumer behaviour is in flux. Gen Z is the focus for immersive experiences – they are different to millennials in that they were brought up on smart phone, they're not on Facebook and don't watch TV. They seek these different experiences and will shape the immersive content industry.

*The convergence between Hollywood and Silicon Valley has progressed but their differences are stark. Adjacent spend time thinking about what brings more convergence. Film and TV historically are big budget media projects in a hits-driven industry. You see the repetition of the same creative ideas and reluctance to take risks on new ideas. Silicon Valley is the opposite- constantly releasing things that aren't always perfect, with a cycle of 'release measure and update'.

*We've seen 3 types of VR creators:

1. 'Avant garde'- those pushing the boundaries of art and tech- art galleries/museums/film festivals – these are about shaping culture and not about the number of people being reached.
2. Early adopters. They do want to pioneer but also reach a commercially viable industry. Quick to learn, lack access to high end equipment.
3. Main stream. Filmmakers. Challenge- storytelling is their expertise but having to navigate user experience, testing and data, all critical things which have not been their main focus.

*One of the most successful projects at his time at Jaunt was You Tube star Lily Sing's green room-to-stage VR content: <https://www.jauntvr.com/title/a852c86690>

*The key to great immersive content is bringing the strong story element together with the medium expertise – a lot of VR content is great on the tech side but the story is weak, and vice versa. At Here Be Dragons, pairing external showrunners with the tech team really worked.

*Still true that no one consuming on regular basis yet. Hard to use head sets in living room, it's not very sociable.

*We need to think about availability on all devices. Content strategy and planning is needed.

*There was not enough thought in Wave 1 about multi- platform availability. E.g. the animated short 'Pearl' that became a short 2D film as well as a VR experience, and won an emmy award, is a good example of this:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqCH4DNQBUA>. But there's no denying that the 'immersive' side of the VR experience is emotionally more powerful than it was in 2D.

*Talking about the concept of 'Lean Studio', Adjacent look at learning from the TV model but working much faster. Only 8% of Hollywood pilots go to commission. With immersive, you can test/hone/accelerate the process and experiment with publishing on different platforms.

*So what's next? Sexy glasses as opposed to ugly ones, and probably contact lenses after that with in-built tech.

*It's going to be a lot about reducing the 'isolation factor'.

Talk: Keynote Speech – Nonny De La Pena

Nonny is an incredibly inspiring woman, one of the first women to pioneer immersive VR in the journalistic space. She made some of the first VR goggles in 2012 for Sundance. She is the CEO and founder of Emblematic Group, a digital media company focused on immersive virtual, mixed and augmented reality.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nonny_de_la_Pe%C3%B1a

<http://emblematicgroup.com/>

Nonny spent the first half of the talk taking us through her amazing career and how she got into immersive content and tech. She's been labelled the 'godmother' of VR, one of the first women in the industry. Her/Emblematic's projects have focused mainly on immersive journalism and bringing stories to life in a more powerful and empathetic way, as well as focused research projects. Some of them have covered hard-hitting topics such as:

*What it feels like to live in solitary confinement (Frontline documentary)

*How to report on a destination when denied access? She built a prison camp in second life, which was rebuilt for the Moscow museum

*she discovered sexual harassment in second life was bad. She wanted to look into it. Women felt harassed in virtual life as well as real life

*A study that looked at the benefit of VR for paraplegics – those in the study developed new synapses which led to some changes in improved movement

*They made the first VR 'goggles' in 2012 for Sundance

*A VR re-creation of a diabetic having a seizure in a queue and being ignored

*Bringing together real audio from the event of someone being beaten by 5 policemen, and creating a VR experience. People said they felt helpless and shocked. It went to BuzzFeed and got 1 million views and generated pages of discussion about the actions of the police.

* A Syria piece in 2012 – an explosion happening near a little girl, which went to the V&A.

*'Across the line' piece- raising awareness of women being shouted at on their way to abortion clinics.

*A project raising awareness of homelessness in the LGBT community. A moving and disturbing video of a son being rejected, shouted at and asked to leave his home, using the real audio.

Her main goal for all of this: she wants us to go back into the world and treat each other more kindly. What an amazing rationale for their work.

In terms of her views on what will make VR more accessible to the masses, she talked about volumetric and edge computing – data that is stored in a 5G network – the data is not held in the goggles it is streamed, enabling a 'walk around the scene' experience. Here's an article that explains a bit more about volumetric: <https://www.roadtovr.com/believe-hype-hypevrs-volumetric-video-capture-glimpse-future-vr-video/>

VIDEO AND SOCIAL MEDIA

AUDIENCE

Talk: Audience Engagement - The New Path to Greenlighting

Topline: How are digital companies and their insights informing which projects to greenlight. The “watch instantly” culture gives new data as to what millennials want to see, expanding content to match new audiences across traditionally underrepresented demographics. This panel will explore the newest methods of film and TV development and distribution between digital platforms and the Hollywood studio system. Key players share their unique positions with online data and what they are looking for in creating feature films and TV from digital platform beginnings.

Panel:

1. Kathryn Shothoefer from Original Media Ventures, a content studio and consultancy passionate about bringing new perspectives and narratives to life for Gen Z:
<https://www.originalmediaventures.com/>
2. Scott Norville, VP Digital Audience Development, 21st Century Fox
3. Hieu Ho, Development Exec, BuzzFeed

Buzzfeed:

*Buzzfeed have always been about shareable and relateable content.

Buzzfeed has a whole section of its business focusing on ideas for long and short form TV/film content, called BuzzFeed Studios (formerly BuzzFeed Motion Pictures)

*Important to the company to find the lenses and perspectives that have perhaps been underserved by more mainstream media companies.

*Case study – there was a video that went viral about millennial parenting, so they looked at that area more. They’ve just sold a comedy based on millennial parents.

-Still need the human element to interpret the audience data and make decisions about what areas to focus on

Original Media Ventures:

*The company is focused on getting into communities in a very manual, non-digital, real-life way, to find heroic stories from new perspectives, for the youth audience.

*They talk to tastemakers and trend setters, they also invite people to sign up on their website.

Larger media and content companies are interested in this approach, and Original did a project recently with Nat Geo- because Nat Geo they wanted to reach a Gen Z audience in particular.

*They have Community leaders on the ground - having conversations on a college campus or bookshop for example. Parkland students access and stories happened this way.

20th Century Fox

*Fox are being innovative for a studio in this respect – studios are paying more attention to what audiences are watching. Really looking at digital audiences to derive insights into fans.

*Fox look at YouTube and Facebook organic ‘story signals’ from vast fan bases.

*Alvin and chipmunks is Fox’ most popular content on You Tube. He gave the example of there being popular Bollywood interpretations of Alvin dancing – being able to show this level of audience insight.

*His team’s job does inform the creative Greenlighting process.

*They can figure out ‘deep fan’ communities to see if an app or other paid product might drive revenue.

*Is why Disney acquired Maker Studios - to get that digital knowhow. But the panel

commented that many of these digital acquisitions haven't panned out due to cultural differences.

YOU TUBE

Talk: Navigating the video revolution in the digital age

Speakers:

Nicholas Thompson Wired - interviewer

Susan Wojcicki - CEO You Tube

You Tube's tag line used to be 'broadcast yourself'. Then it changed to focus on freedom of expression/ freedom of opportunity, but it's been apparent recently that sometimes those freedoms come into conflict.

Susan's interview focused on the misinformation and 'fake news' that's plagued You Tube in the last year and also how You Tube are tackling inappropriate content. In terms of what You Tube are doing to address the fake news problem, she touched on the following:

*a year ago they launched top news shelf - authoritative sources going to the top of search results.

*with Google news- different providers can apply. You Tube algorithms decide who is 'authoritative' enough.

*When pressed, she said that You Tube don't release the algorithm factors, but it could include things like awards won, amount of traffic, journalistic writing. They don't want to create over-bias about what counts as an 'established' source.

*But she acknowledged not quite enough action – there is still misinformation out there. However, she made very clear that You Tube is not a news organisation and therefore it does not have the same fact checking obligations. Instead they focus on looking at the publishers and working out if they are authoritative and genuine, and always developing and honing the algorithms.

*You Tube will soon be launching 'information cues' to offer users additional information. If there is something listed as a conspiracy theory for example, this would be listed in the info panel. Tubefilter have reported on this here: <https://www.tubefilter.com/2018/03/14/youtube-conspiracies-wikipedia-sourced-text-boxes/>.

In terms of inappropriate content, Nicholas asked the challenging question of where morality comes into the optimization metrics – if someone wants to view radical material, are they served recommendations for it? Susan's response was that You Tube have started to build into the system not just satisfaction but also responsibility of recommendation. This could be based on the authority of the publisher, for instance (this phrase came up a lot!). But there wasn't a direct answer given to this difficult question.

Nicholas touched on how Unilever threatened to come off the platform due to conspiracy vids. Brand safety has been a big issue and You Tube have made some big changes to their eco system- in terms of what content is available for monetisation- this recently changed to a requirement for 1000 subscribers and 4K watch time in the past 12 months. Susan said You Tube are regularly speaking to advertisers so they are more informed and feel more comfortable.

Falseness- in general, Susan made the comment that she does not think You Tube should be determining this and that freedom of expression and human rights are key to the brand. It's why they focus on the 'authoritativeness' of the sources to make this decision. On some issues they are of course willing to take a stand.

What are You Tube going to focus on in the next 12 months?

*How to continue to diversify the content the user is seeing, improve recommendations.

*You Tube first looked at clicks and realised not good for click bait. So then moved to views and then watch time- how much the user engages with video. Then finally, the daily users coming to the site.

* Susan explained that about a year ago, they used AI to search and find inappropriate content – the computers found much more content than the humans, but they needed people to view the content and decide if it violated You Tube policies. She thinks they will always need the human element. Susan announced a task force of 10,000 people to remove inappropriate content. They can't just rely on machines to make the decision, they've realised it needs a human element. AI will then learn from human decisions being made and You Tube can continue to refine and change the algorithms. Tubefilter have reported on this here too: <https://www.tubefilter.com/2018/03/14/youtube-human-moderators-four-hour-shifts-preserve-sanity/>.

*Comments on the site are less well regulated it seems. Susan explained that You Tube flags the comments to the channel creator and the creator makes the decision to remove, or not. However, they've introduced rankings to ensure the most relevant comments surface to the top. She highlighted the importance of comments as part of the You Tube experience and community – it's how creators and viewers connect and communicate and the responsiveness that distinguishes it from TV content.

*A goal for YT- even more video overall, and more video with higher quality production. You Tube will continue to be a home for both low quality selfie vids and high quality production.

*You Tube Red will focus on both content based around creator talent and more traditional shows, they've commissioned around 50 programmes so far.

*They will look at other monetisation projects- sponsored content is being tested and built into the service. This will give access for sponsors to live streams and dedicated content, and also an additional revenue stream for creators as well as their ad and subscription revenues.

BRANDED CONTENT/CONTENT MARKETING

Talk: Why the Best Content Marketers Use Empathy

Topline: From “Vajingles” to a baby food company telling you to make more babies, today's most effective content marketing sparks real conversations and inspires connections. More brands are striving to use an empathic approach when it comes to storytelling. But how do you identify topics to explore that feel authentic to your brand voice, not contrived? Learn how to tap into cultural relevance without being trite, take (smart) risks and use humor to resonate with your audience.

Panel:

Dana Neujahr - SVP - Something Massive (Creative agency in LA)

Ben Mand- SVP Brand Mktg & Innovation - Plum Organics (baby food and snacks)

Hanneke Willenbourg – CEO Seventh Generation (green cleaning/sanitary/nappy products)

Key Messages:

*In terms of driving sales of a product or service, people don't want to be sold a product or service, they want to buy into something. Not about pushing products out and interrupting consumers to try to sell. People want to find and learn about products. Marketing is about embedding and being part of the vernacular, entertaining people.

*Brands have to understand their audience and what makes them tick and what they consume in a media context.

*Plum examples – they wanted to reveal the 'real' of parenting- messy, funny. Not perfect images. The content was shared with parents and spouses which they felt was a great

result. It was about keeping it together- the whirlwind of the first year. They've also done 'tips and advice from other parents' recently - to help next generation of parents. Others have been around Mother's Day and Father's Day. Fathers day content did really well, a Dad complaining Mum was always 'favourite': <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=fP0uHlt9xi8>. Another was playfully called 'do your partner' – with the underlying message, Plum want more babies, looking at the message that tending to your relationship makes a stronger family.

*Authenticity – the raw emotion in videos and human to human message is important to Plum. Being authentic and owning up to why they are marketing is important – about being transparent and self-aware.

*Have to have some point of view. Doesn't have to divide. But otherwise will be glossed over. Related to either the mission or the consumer. Acting with true positive intent that is aligned with the brand.

*It's also about marketing with care. Showing a brand and a business that cares, having people working in your business that care and are passionate about meaningful change.

*For Seventh Generation it's about being fun and light hearted in their treatment of big topics. Using humour.

Talk: What Blockchain Means for the Media and Entertainment Industries

Panel:

Nina Brown, Newhouse School at Syracuse University: Nina specializes in the application of First Amendment law in a digital age, transnational copyright issues, and legal and regulatory issues facing social networks.

Sandy Khaund, Founder & CEO Upgraded Tickets, <https://www.upgraded-inc.com/>, a new blockchain-based startup that converts traditional event tickets into "Smart Tickets" by leveraging the blockchain for unprecedented Fraud Protection, Frictionless Transactions, Transparency, and Interactivity

Lillian Ruiz Co-Founder, Head of Operations, Civil, a fully-funded journalism startup running on blockchain, launching in early 2018. <https://joincivil.com/> - a newsroom platform using blockchain.

Blockchain is a hot topic but what is it?! If you need a simple explanation then this article is pretty good: <https://blockgeeks.com/guides/what-is-blockchain-technology/>. This interview with the inventor of Ethereum is also interesting: <http://forklog.net/vitalik-buterin-about-ethereum-smart-contracts-and-himself/> and a quick guide here: <https://blockgeeks.com/guides/ethereum/>.

This talk focused on the use of Ethereum blockchain by the two panel blockchain companies, questions raised by the moderator, and Nina, about the current limits/concerns around the use of blockchain, and how it might change the media and entertainment industry.

Upgraded Tickets – turning event tickets into secure digital assets - each user has an identity for each ticket and there is a smart contract for the purchase of the ticket, via Ethereum – ultimately provides more data for event owners to see who attended their events. Event owners can add on other opportunities – parking, merchandise. Fraudulent behavior is almost impossible.

Blockchain for journalism -

Features- smart contracts- locking in information. Archival nature.

For them, excited about allowance of ownership and a required standard for journalism.

Marrying journalism to Blockchain- can instill and maintain value as a community. Civil attracts entrepreneurial journalists. Creates newsrooms around local policy. Allows newsrooms to interact with each other.

Benefits that were discussed of using blockchain:

*Permanency: needing a digital archive. Documenting history.

*Copyright: can determine who IP owner is of an asset very easily, but the tech will have to be adaptable enough to record new owners if copyright licensed or assigned

*Smart Contracts – permanent record of all drafts, final drafts, each contract has its own code. Will the value of writing the smart contract be different, e.g. based on a % of the contract value and not lawyers usual hourly rates etc..

*Example of a musician collecting royalties directly, no middle men. Faster/cheaper.

Example of content being supplied direct to consumer, also cutting out middle men/platforms. Something appealing to people about direct relationship. Person producing the content having the ability to manage their own content and relationship with consumer - it's an attractive prospect. Young artist/filmmakers entering industry less encumbered. The multiple layers between creator and audience are being removed.

Concerns that were raised:

*How much does a person need to be 'blockchain savvy' to use these services

*Do we want everything to be permanent? E.g. removal of defamatory content is this possible? Apparently yes, records can be edited if the tech allows for that. Ethereum reportedly does.

*Smart contracts – work well if quite simple, the concern is around complex transactions.

Needs a lawyer to write the smart contract in the first place, and to try to capture all the 'what if' scenarios. Does this take something away from the seamless transaction..

*Blockchain needs to become more user friendly, a lot of barriers to entry. Education needed and product development.

*The Blockchain product will be an intermediary wanting a cut as well. It will be about empowering people to know when they are getting a good or crap deal with that product.

Keynote Talk: Linda Perry and Kerry Brown

Artist development

Speakers: Linda Perry and Kerry brown - launched We Are Hear in 2017

<https://www.wearehear.com/> - a record label/publishing company/artist management firm hybrid. Artists include Natasha Bedingfield and Lion.

*They were concerned about the lack of true artist development today

*In the past, you used to go into the rehearsal room, work out songs, play them and get instant feedback. Play, flyer and then get record deal. That A&R person was a fan and helped develop the talent. Not that world anymore and also new talent coming out of platforms like You Tube. Labels now tend to put you in studio right away. Everything you were on You Tube is changed and modified to what music sounds like on radio. Artists 'robbed of the experience of who we really are'.

*Inspiration for their company- getting to know the artist, building a connection with the artist.

*Believe in supporting the community - poets, writers, artists. Create a supportive and nurturing community. Need to know how to listen, know the artists' vision. It's a partnership with artists, not 'the boss' relationship, like with other labels. When artists sign a deal they just 'work' for that label and for very little money. Part of We Are Hear philosophy is not to

'own' the artist and absolutely be a partnership. Artists are friends with each other too and support each other.

*They look at new school avenues of distribution and wonderful ways to partner up with different brands/people/creatives. One example was Quickbooks who asked Willa Amai to sing a cover for their new marketing video, which went viral and boosted sentiment for the brand: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=4flj0u00D1w>. Customers were asking why they couldn't download the track on iTunes, so they quickly addressed that.

Talk: Convergence Keynote: Sadiq Khan

*At the beginning of the talk, Sadiq shared 15 racist tweets he'd received, with the handles, to demonstrate how the availability of social media can have negative effects – he worries about young people reading that stuff, it might make them think twice about being in the public eye.

*Tech is disrupting and shifting everything we do; how we travel and consume news, how we communicate with each other. We need to think also about how we use it to reduce inequality, how we prevent harm to social cohesion of communities.

*We've had major tech revolutions before and come out more prosperous.

*The industrial revolution was born in Britain - rise of middle classes, steam trains, machinery, advancement of trade. Led to protest and unrest from Luddites and unsafe working conditions.

*This 4th industrial revolution poses greater risks. Change can spread across the world faster than ever. People fear that new tech is bypassing the skills they've developed. If managed poorly, this next revolution could lead to more inequality and division.

*Social media giants – a handful of the largest global tech companies have amassed huge power. They've made it easier to communicate and stay in touch and for talented people to share their creativity. However, there are growing concerns about how this is impacting our lives and wellbeing. Some new platforms have fueled divisions in communities. Elections and referendums have been influenced, fake news, terrorism and extreme groups are able to have a platform to brainwash others.

*We must focus on protecting people on online platforms - must do more to protect them in the online environment. Facebook twitter and other platforms are finally starting to react to ensure the reporting process is quicker and more effective. German courts have gone as far as to introduce laws about not removing harmful content, however Sadiq made the comment that self-regulation can be less harmful to tech development as opposed to strict regulation sometimes.

*Regarding the sharing economy- he said there needs to be adequate protection around workers' rights and regulations. This new way of doing business - breaking up hard won rights. Companies should not think of themselves above local laws. Uber is one of them he said.

*Onus for change should not be on tech companies and innovators- the government needs to keep up and be prepared and relevant. Can't blame companies, politicians must fix things when regulation out of date. Governments shouldn't slow down innovation. How mitigate potentially negative impact of disruption. Harness same technologies to harness more equal society.

*There is an online hate crime hub that has been set up in the UK:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-announces-new-national-online-hate-crime-hub>

*An important focus is breaking barriers for girls and women to reach potential in all parts of our society. 2018 pivotal year for London – anniversary of women winning right to vote. He is a proud feminist - campaigns to celebrate achievements of women from all walks of life. Still a way to go for full gender equality.

*New digital skills programme launched, boosting skills for a world leading, inclusive digital economy: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-digital-skills-partnership>

Ultimately, everyone should be able to benefit from the fruits of this next tech revolution.