



MORE WEIRD MORE WOW

Ways to Squeeze Creative Experiential for SXSW® AUSTIN ROI

It's that time of year again—where brands flock to Austin & the city braces for experiential activations on steroids at the 38th year of South by Southwest® (SXSW®) Conference & Festivals.

Last year, we examined if there was still juice in the squeeze for this historic festival.

We looked at ways brands were capitalizing on emotion to wow attendees with weird ties turning their emotion to action. For us, it was a unanimous:

Heck yeah, y'all. If you're not there already, get your horse & hitch it to the SXSW wagon!!
([Read more here.](#))

So, what's the hype this year? It's Go Big or Go Home time, folks: Hyperbole in its finest experiential form.

Why? Because SXSW Austin is the ultimate backdrop for creativity & culture—the epicenter of where **MORE weird** aggressively meets **MORE wow**.

But let's get real—simply showing up BIGGER won't engage the nearly 229,000 consumers making the trek to Austin or tuning in digitally¹. And it's not enough for B2B marketers to incite action from major decision-makers—who make up 55% of SXSW's audience².

With attention at an all-time premium, it takes an experience so magnetic it keeps attendees talking long after they've left.

In other words, you're looking to make $1 + 1 = 3$.

So, what's the secret to this funny math?

Blending bold creativity with strategy & data, so you can squeeze every last drop of juice for more brand buzz, audience love & business results.

And that allows you to leverage experiential to craft seamless brand immersion, amplify engagement, and drive long-tail business impact.

Because using strategic insights to fuel buzz-worthy creative:

- Positions your activation as your content engine & competitive differentiator,
- Strengthens customer bonds, which increases your Brand Gravity,
- And ultimately transforms **more weird** into **more wow** for bottom-line success.

Here's your chance to let your freak flag fly!

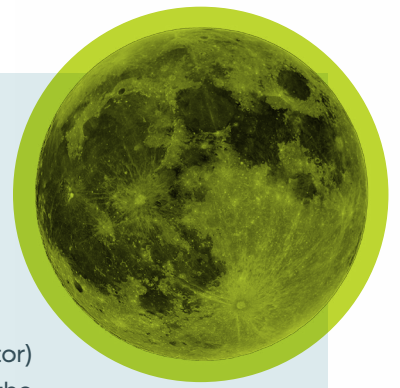
PRE EVENT:

Apply the “hyper-localization halo” to create seamless brand immersion.

Strategic planning lays the foundation for experiential success. The key? Aligning your business objectives & audience behaviors to your event strategy.

Consumers expect brand experiences to feel organic to their surroundings. So, dig in & truly understand Austin—from the city’s cultural nuances to the SXSW landscape.

Identify how your brand’s “weird” (its unique differentiator) can integrate seamlessly into the experience while enhancing Austin’s creative spirit. And remember, impactful experiences are a two-way street that satisfy both business imperatives & customer desires/behaviors. You’re focusing on engagement quality, not attendee quantity.



Smart ways to hedge your success:

- Map your content ecosystem & brand messaging to [SXSW’s annual audience insights](#).
- Identify intersectional engagement points that meet business goals and satisfy audience attraction motivators.
- Use hyperlocalization to create an activation that blends naturally into the festival’s environment.
- Lean into creativity to build a brand world—an immersive, emotionally resonant experience that feels seamless, not forced.

DURING THE EVENT:

Use your activation as a stage to hyper-amplify engagement.

Fun music is pumping. Drinks are flowing. Cowboy hats & swag tees dominate your crowd. And you’re handing out branded chotchkes in abundance. When your in-person audience is engaged, it’s “let the good times roll!”

But here comes the record scratch:

If your activation attracts 50, 100, or even 200 attendees over each festival phase, how do you amplify it beyond the event for greater ROI rationale for your stakeholders & executives?



Enter: Hyper amplification.

Events like SXSW Austin, with multiple waves & diverse audiences, create opportunities to unleash big & bold creativity that sparks more wow. But why put all that effort into an experience that’s a one-off splash?

Use strategic insights to power kick-butt creativity that makes your audiences holler. Position your activation as your brand’s stage & grab every content & data opportunity you can. Then pulse out captured content across channels & integrate insights for the ultimate long-tail marketing play:

- Leverage tech & strategic design to **capture real-time insights**—from heat-mapping & emotional engagement data to first-party customer insights. Use your brand goals & KPIs to pinpoint which insights to gather.

- Treat your activation as a **content engine**. Capture audience engagement with video & photography, your social team, and your on-site sales team. Repurpose that content for social, PR, website, paid digital & press outreach.
- Design opportunities—such as selfie booths & Instagrammable backdrops—that encourage audiences to create **user-generated content** (UGC) you can leverage.

Why UGC Rules: Beyond Engagement to Your Sales Funnel

Sure, designing for UGC increases event engagement. But it can also support your sales funnel through word-of-mouth that increases consumer trust:

- Word of mouth is the **leading source of brand, product & service discovery**³,
- With 88% of consumers **trusting recommendations from people they know** over traditional marketing⁴,
- And 87% of social marketers say **UGC increases sales**⁵.

By treating your experience as your brand's stage, you create a seamless continuation of your brand story—amplifying your on-site reach into millions.



Fallout@SXSW

Image via Prime & Amazon MGM Studios

Prime & Amazon MGM Studios

dropped 2024 SXSW Austin attendees into a full-scale wasteland with its Fallout experience.

Designed for immersion & shareability, its scavenger quests, faction battles & eerie photo ops spread the story far beyond Austin.

#1 talked about SXSW activation racked up 170k social posts during the festival & more than 14.5 billion total media impressions⁶.

POST EVENT:

Squeeze the juice from data & insights gathering.

We all know expanded reach & engagement fuel brand health AND sales funnels, but a huge & oftentimes lost value opportunity lies in the data & insights available at & after each event:

- 93% of marketers believe **collecting first-party data is more critical than ever**⁷,
- And integrating the data into key marketing activities saw a **2.9x revenue uplift & 1.5x cost-savings increase**⁸,
- Also **increasing customer retention by 48% & improved customer lifetime value by 49%**⁹.

Fueling creative with strategic insights can create more impactful & engaging experiences. But get even more return

for your event investment by collecting first-party audience data that can inform future activations:

- **Leverage real-time customer interactions.** The real magic of experiential engagement? Asking your customers the right questions at the right time. Use event surveys & build in feedback opportunities (even with a quick touchscreen tap) to grab actionable behavioral insights.
- **Integrate cutting-edge tech tools** like heat mapping, emotional recognition software & audio sentiment tracking to extract valuable data without being intrusive.
- **Gather data without disrupting the audience journey.** Focus on smooth, natural interactions & avoid collecting personal identifiable data to sidestep privacy concerns.

The bottom line: Positioning your activation as a primary intelligence gatherer can strengthen your stakeholder value perspective—arming you with results to prove that **experiential isn't a marketing expense, but a business driver.**



Delta Air Lines featured specialty cocktails, limited-edition swag & real flight attendants in its SkyMiles Lounge at 2024 SXSW Austin—using the experience as an insights driver & loyalty accelerator.

The airline's app-based lounge entry—and exclusive badge pick-up access for SkyMiles members—reinforced brand preference while capturing audience data¹⁰.

Images via Delta



Add all that smartness together, and you have the recipe for a tasty experiential cocktail, zesty floater included.

Now it's time to confidently shake (OR stir, we're not mad either way) your cocktail & toast to your success.

Cheers to another terrific & valuable SXSW!



Want to talk all things cocktails & squeezing juice out of your experiential?

CITATIONS

1. SXSW 2024: Event Statistics Report.
2. SXSW 2024: Demographics Report.
3. Statista: Most Common Sources of New Brand, Product and Service Discovery Among Internet Users in the United States as of Q3 2023.
4. Nielsen: 2021 Trust in Advertising Report.
5. Hubspot: Why Social Shopping Could be the Future of E-Commerce.
6. Clio Awards: Fallout Experience at SXSW 2024.
7. Acquia: 2024 CX Trends Report.
8. Google: 5 Keys to Creating Value with First-Party Data
9. Forrester: Strengthen Customer Retention and Engagement with Behavioral Data
10. Delta Newsroom: Delta at SXSW.