

A brief overview



By [Keenan Harduth](#)

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Anyone who knows anything about [SXSW](#) knows that it is a frenzied week of interactive conferences, film and music. This year it is even bigger as its the 20th anniversary of the event, which means there are over 5 000 events in the city of Austin, Texas.



Born in 1987 as a music festival only, the organisers added the film festival and interactive conference in 1994. Johnny Cash was the keynote speaker in 1987 and in 2013 the main keynote was Elon Musk.

This is a clear indication of how the super conference has evolved over the years from music dominating the scene up to 2009/2010 to the switch to interactive becoming the biggest pull for people. The numbers speak for themselves, as you can see in the table below.

Conference	Attendees in 2004	Attendees in 2013
Music	7,213	18,988
Interactive	3,270	24,569
Film	6,675	16,490

Here are some quick overviews into the most popular elements of the 2013 interactive conference and the people who attended.

The Attendees

The nearly 25 000 people were made up of young, affluent and educated people, with the majority of the audience between the ages of 25 and 34 years old. Based on profile analysis, these people were mainly decision makers - heads of their department or of companies, with very few junior titles in the mix. They came from all around the world with Canadians, people from the United Kingdom and surprisingly for many, Australians making us the biggest non-US contingent at the conference.

From inside the United States, the most well represented states were Texas, California and New York.

Analysis of the social media data identified the most popular conversation points as South African born Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla, SpaceX and founder of PayPal and Grumpy Cat - the popular internet cat brought to the conference by technology blog Mashable.com. There were nearly 20 000 mentions on these two topics alone. This accurately displays the full spectrum of interests and how SXSW represents the zeitgeist of the digital and technology world.

Deciding which panels, debates and presentations to attend is possibly the single biggest challenge in the week long conference. The major trends in panels were:

- **Space**

With Elon Musk's SpaceX privatising space travel and exploration and with NASA seemingly more willing to share information in recent years, the conversation has snowballed online and made space - and everything that goes with it from design, UX and social media - the most popular topic for panels.

- **Entrepreneurship**

Staying true to what has always been a focus of the conference, panelists engaged with audiences around leadership, funding and commercialising ideas in the technology sphere.

- **Digital vs. Physical**

Another popular trend was the association between software, hardware and the "real world". Products like Leap Motion (a cutting edge gesture motion device) and AR (Augmented Reality) apps and services received widespread buzz.

- **Big Data**

With all the information available about consumers, business, in the media, harnessing information - social media, e-commerce and more - becomes the biggest challenge for any industry. The panels addressed tips and advice to researching and utilising this invaluable pool of information.

Interestingly, these trends present very little utility for predicting what SXSW 2014 will look like but it certainly gives us some insight into what we can expect to see in the press and online for the next little while.

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ABOUT KEENAN HARDUTH

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