

South by Southwest film festival from a South African creative's perspective

 By [Jessica Tennant](#)

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This year's South by Southwest (SXSW) film festival was "some kind of collective consciousness" according to Daniel Schoeman, creative technologist at TBWA\Hunt\Lascaris, who attended this annual conglomerate of film, interactive media and music festivals and conferences last month.

It presented the opportunity to see where the agency places itself in the global market and what they need to focus on to be part of the rapid change that's taking the industry by storm.

A month in, Schoeman reports back on his experience, how he plans to implement his learnings, and something that exceeded his expectations besides the event itself: that 'Southern hospitality' is not just a saying, it's a real thing...



Daniel Schoeman, creative technologist at TBWA\Hunt\Lascaris

■ ***How did you hear about SXSW?***

The first time I heard about SXSW was back in 2015 when I had just started working at Hunts. One of the creatives had just come back from SXSW and could not stop talking about this overwhelming feeling to want to drive change and aid in direction of strategy to better align with what the company should be focusing on. This was at first a bit strange and I was unsure of where his intentions came from. This was until I did my own research and discovered just how influential this event can be. At this point I had my own ideas and expectations, but nothing would be as real as the actual thing.

■ ***Motivating factors; why did you want to go?***

One of the biggest driving factors for wanting to go is information and how SXSW can give content to developments in our rapidly changing world, with music, film, startups and technology platforms. And with 11 keynotes and over 2,800 sessions, there is ample opportunity for networking and exploring new ideas.



■ ***Greatest learnings; has anything you learnt during the Festival challenged your thinking/shifted your mindset about anything?***

A few of the greatest learnings that challenged my thinking were:

- **Artificial neural networks (ANN)** and how they affect us;
- the use of big data and cognitive computing is critical to the future of communications;
- augmented intelligence/artificial intelligence will not replace professionals, but help us and our businesses to be more efficient;
- to gain insight and most effectively target and engage we should use AI and predictive modelling, and
- **augmented reality/virtual reality/mixed reality**. These technologies will have a great impact in a wide variety of industries and will potentially change the way enterprises do business, reduce expenses and increase internal productivity.

More and more future-oriented companies are exploring new and effective ways to innovate and make their services stand out above all competitors. Adopting these technology platforms at an early stage can facilitate this process.



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■ ***How do you plan to implement some of these?***

Early communication, even if it is only at an idea stage, as preparation for the road ahead is important.

Communicating why these new technology platforms are necessary, what their capabilities are and how these technologies will benefit both the individual employees and the company.

If the staff understand the logic behind the implementation of a new technology, they will be more likely to embrace it and use it to their advantage.

“ *Humans are creatures of habit, so change doesn't come easy. It's not a one-time event, it's a process. Plan for every stage of the process and don't lose sight of the end goal.* ”



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■ **Would you encourage others to attend next year; why?**

It was by far one of the most eye-opening experiences of my life. This is most definitely something I would recommend to a person wanting to truly expand their views of current trends and how to implement these technology platforms and new ways of thinking. It has an absolutely unique culture and vibe to it that I have never experienced anywhere before. 10/10 must go!



■ **How did you fit everything in?**

With more than 80,000 people moving through Austin in two weeks and thousands of sessions to choose from, it was impossible to attend everything I wanted to. There were times that I had wanted to go to several different sessions but they were all allocated to the same time slots. I had to strategically choose the events I went to, based on venue size and their distances from each other. For many of the sessions there were queues of hundreds of people 20 minutes before the session would start. I used the [SXSW Go app](#), which had all the schedules and location details with live venue capacity tracking.

■ **What were your stand-out experiences? The experience that stands out the most for me has to be sitting in on**

Elon Musk and his brother Kimbal Musk talking about the future of humanity, space travel and how future companies should react today to stay relevant. Following that would have to be attending all the networking events for the neural network and VR communities.



▣ **What was Austin, Texas like? Different to what you had imagined?**

That saying about 'Southern hospitality', well it's a thing. It far exceeded my expectations. I had gone over with the mindset of Texans being a very conservative set-in-their-way kind of city but was totally blown out of the water. People will go out of their way to assist you, whether it be to give you directions, take you to the best BBQ dinner in town or just welcome you into an establishment.

“ It was a truly pleasing experience being around so many people who have the greater sense of community than the majority of us. It truly is a future thinking and driven city. ”

I will definitely add Austin to my travel destination even when it's not SXSW.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

Jess is Senior Editor: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com. She is also a contributing writer. marketingnews@bizcommunity.com

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