

SXSW return in-person meant many a unique experiential activation—but the pandemic's influence lingers on

Article

The news: **SXSW** returned as an in-person event for the first time since 2019, taking over a large swath of downtown **Austin** for conference sessions, film screenings, and live music shows.

- The festival was one of the first major casualties of the pandemic, canceled just days before it was scheduled to begin in March 2020.
- For the past two years, organizers pivoted to online; last year, they included a virtual recreation of the city's SXSW venues for attendees to explore.

This year's in-person SXSW appeared to be back in full force, albeit with a somewhat reduced international presence. Many of the speakers who took to the stages expressed their appreciation for being able to gather in real life.

But for the marketing activations that make up a big part of the SXSW action, in-person is key, even when they are promoting virtual worlds and experiences. Tech companies with a presence at SXSW strive to outdo each other by taking over event spaces and parking lots to get their innovations in front of attendees.

Some of those who made the biggest splashes this year:

Blockchain Creative Labs: The **Fox Entertainment**-owned NFT studio drew long lines for entry to a space where attendees could scan QR codes to win NFTs and witness “the world’s largest co-created NFT” as an immersive experience. The studio announced new NFT projects at SXSW, including the **WWE’s Moonsault** platform and **Dolly Parton’s Dollyverse**, aimed at monetizing fandom through digital collectibles, and created the official SXSW NFT, “**Batfan**.”

Prime Video: **Amazon**’s streaming service took over a large parking lot near the convention center to create a carnival-like atmosphere promoting two of its shows: The **Lizzo**-fronted reality series, “**Watch Out for the Big Grrrls**,” and the third season of superhero comic adaptation “**The Boys**.”

Doodles: In a partnership with **Shopify** and **Behr Paint**, **Doodles**, a project with a series of 10,000 ultra-cute NFTs, offered a colorfully rendered warehouse space (think pastel rainbow vomit) to showcase the potential of “token-gated commerce,” in which NFT holders are granted special access and privileges not available to the general public.

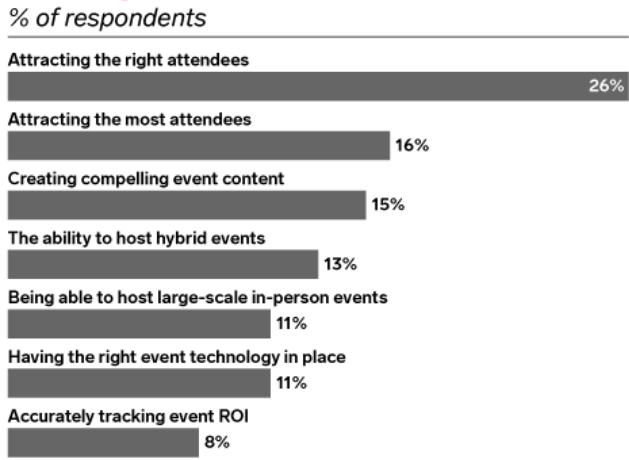
FLUF World: Another NFT project, this one a series of 3D rabbits, presented the **SXSW XR Experience**, which took last year’s “virtual Austin” a step further to introduce an expo-style

exhibition of immersive projects from a variety of international producers that attendees could experience by strapping on headsets.

The post-pandemic event: One legacy of the pandemic is the expanded role for online access as part of the conference. Those unable to attend in person could opt for an online-only pass, which provided access to many events live via streaming or later through on-demand video or audio.

In-person attendees could also enjoy the benefits of online access, giving them a chance to catch up on some more of the hundreds of overlapping sessions. “They’re recording a lot more content than they ever have before,” said **Jeff Sinclair**, CEO of **Eventbase Technology**, which built the official mobile app for SXSW.

**Most Important Factor to Event Success in 2022
According to US Event Professionals**



Source: Splash, "Splash 2022 Outlook Report," Jan 12, 2022
272870 eMarketer | InsiderIntelligence.com