

Five things learned at #SXSW

AUSTIN, US: A handful of themes emerged during South by Southwest Interactive's five days of [wide-ranging programs](#).

Let's start with a painfully obvious one: While there were clearly [startups](#) pitching their technology, their existence here has been downgraded from the big focus to periphery.

For instance, that old question: "What's the breakout star this year?" Hardly anyone asked.

And it seems like the tech crowd is beginning to sour on South By. Here are some potential reasons:

1. Execs flocked to central Texas



There's a message in comedic actor [Mike Myers'](#) directorial debut, [Supermensch](#), which premiered during the film section of the festival, that applies here. The documentary's subject, entertainment biz legend [Shep Gordon](#), says he launched Alice Cooper with a simple idea: "We wanted parents to hate us." Well, Mom and Dad - in the form of brand execs - were totally at SXSW Interactive this year, and chatter around town suggested the development is why [many tech kids stayed away](#). That's no fault of industry players, who were just doing their jobs as marketers. And in the video below, Jason Sperling, RPA svp/ecd, suggests that a shift in crowd demo could be a good thing. But it will be interesting to see in the years ahead whether South By loses its cool factor.

2. Anonymous Austin

Two interesting tech players did show up and create a little buzz - though their hubbub seems more about a digital-cultural phenomena than rising companies do. Many people evidently wanted to leave their identities at home. Secret became the place to get things off one's chest anonymously, such as "I cheated on my wife last night." (Or at least [reveal he was thinking about it](#).) The start-up created a [Secret by Southwest](#) online destination so people at the show could get their [TMI](#) on as well as other randomness. The site, at times, is [hilarious](#). And Whisper was also a [clandestine-styled digital player](#) to which people at the show paid attention.

3. Brands go bigger

Brand activations have been ridiculous in recent years, but they got even bigger this year. Pennzoil, in its first year here, rented an outdoor space the size of a dozen football fields for its [Mario Kart effort](#). Oreo was making Twitter-personalised cookies for passersby in real time, and Chevy had some 50 "cabs" rolling around downtown, giving attendees a free ride to where they needed to go (with a limit of three miles). Check out these Instagram videos as examples.

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