Case Study: South by Southwest (SXSW)

How SXSW Supported 72,000 Attendees with Hootsuite

With 72,000 registrants and attendees at this year's South by Southwest® (SXSW®) Conferences and Festivals, wading through the massive volume of digital content is a huge undertaking. SXSW's digital media team relies on Hootsuite Enterprise to support event updates, monitor all relevant conversations from one control center, engage with customers in real time, and allot security and resources on-the-ground where necessary.

$315.3M

local economic impact of SXSW 2014 on Austin, Texas

72,000

registrants and attendees for SXSW 2014

Over $1B

five year cumulative economic impact of SXSW on Austin, Texas

South by Southwest (SXSW)

SXSW is a set of film, interactive, and music festivals and conferences that take place annually in mid-March in Austin, Texas. Beginning in 1987, SXSW has grown in both scope and size and is now the world's largest festival of its kind. We connected with their digital media team leaders, Melissa Golding, Digital Content Manager, and Brad Spies, Brand Development and Special Projects, to unearth their social strategy.

What They Did

Major conferences, festivals, and events like SXSW run into the challenge of filtering through extreme volumes of conversations and online data to keep all parties well-informed, safe, and entertained. With 72,000 people in attendance, online chatter around talks, films, music events, lineups, and other related topics, must be monitored in order to amplify positive conversations, answer inquiries, suppress rumours, and manage crowds.

Hootsuite Enterprise and the SXSW digital media team created a pod in their command center where they monitored and managed all aspects of the SXSW event. They used social data to visualize possible outcomes of emergency situations as they arose, in an effort to mitigate risk. While some emergency situations are outside of the team's control, SXSW could ensure that its venues had the resources they required, events ran as smoothly as possible, information was shared quickly and efficiently, and SXSW staff were well-informed in real-time.

How They Did It

Managing Extreme Volumes of Messages

Working together with Hootsuite, SXSW's digital media team sourced sourced keywords, hashtags, and handles related to the event, safety, and potential security threats to monitor relevant communications. With this list of a hundred or so keywords, SXSW's digital media team set up keyword search streams for effective real-time listening and engagement across multiple social channels and apps. Using Hootsuite Teams, important social messages could be flagged or assigned for quick response.

By setting up individual streams, the SXSW team could oversee communications and triage support and resources on-the-ground quickly. For example, during the band Death from Above 1979's performance, the digital media team saw a trend forming on Twitter around attendees hopping fences, and other lineup issues. To combat this congestion, they sent resources and more security to control the lineup. Likewise, due to such popular demand, one large company's massive SXSW party was over capacity and caused the line to be held up. As upset attendees tweeted from the line, SXSW had the foresight to draw online attention to other big shows in order to relocate people elsewhere, and then tighten security and alleviate tension through their customer service channels.

"We love Hootsuite because it's the only platform that doesn't fail us when we need it—despite the massive volume of social messages that we sort through and monitor. Hootsuite supports whatever we need."

Melissa Golding, Digital Content Manager, SXSW

Data Visualization

SXSW relies on the Nexalogy integration in Hootsuite Enterprise to solve the problem of social data overload by mining social media streams to surface important trends. Nexalogy analyzes conversations by generating detailed social graphs and interests maps with nodes and links to show how concepts are related to each other. This allows SXSW to visualize trends forming around certain artists, speakers, or security issues, and to act accordingly. Their digital media team monitored internal social media data, #SXSW tagged Instagram images, Twitter posts for safety keywords, and police @handles. If a trend began to form, custom alerts were setup for quick troubleshooting or amplification.

The Results

SXSW's digital media team measures success by doing everything they can to prepare for the festival and react quickly to mitigate risks if emergency situations should arise. Relying on tools like Hootsuite's Nexalogy integration, SXSW had full visibility into social conversations to give them more intelligence to make educated decisions, allocate resources on-the-fly, and get information out fast and efficiently

"My team is always listening through Hootsuite or our team radios. If something trends on Nexalogy, we'll set up streams in our command center and watch exactly what is being said to nip problems in the bud, share information, put internal emergency response in place, or just to amplify positive trends."

Melissa Golding, Digital Content Manager, SXSW

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