

EXPECTING
THE UNEXPECTED

SXSW ↙ Omnicom
2024

OMNICOM'S UNEXPECTED TAKES

SXSW was born 37 years ago as a place for creatives of all kinds to develop their careers by bringing together people from around the globe to meet, learn, and share ideas.

What started as a music festival quickly evolved into a music and media conference, which then grew to encompass digital, tech, innovation, and more. Though SXSW has evolved significantly over the years, what hasn't changed is that at SXSW, creativity lives everywhere.

We feel the same way about Omnicom. We don't look at creativity as just an end product. It's a way of thinking, working, problem solving, and innovating that comes as a result of our specialist talent partnering with the world's leading brands.

And this is why we're bringing back SXSW insights through the lens of 'Expecting the Unexpected' – because while machines are great at classifying and predicting, the creativity that underpins 'the unexpected' is a unique quality only humans have the power to bring to life.

Read on as our colleagues across Omnicom give us their 'Unexpected Takes' from SXSW 2024.

EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED

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GO ALL-IN ON ACTIVATIONS

Through the history of SXSW, the notion of marketing and advertising has expanded as we evolved from campaigns to connected brand experiences. This year, the brand activations at SXSW exemplified this in spades. Delta doubled down on the experience across multiple touchpoints, from messaging on in-flight WiFi en route to Austin to a pre-activation experience in the airport, and they dialed up the authenticity and credibility by staffing each activation with real flight attendants rather than brand ambassadors. Porsche took road trips to a whole new level, leaning into surprise and delight with five mystery doors that when opened, each catered to a different sense reminiscent of the Porsche driving experience, and they made sure word traveled with a station where attendees could send postcards from the “road trip.” While Audible boasted the whimsy of an actual ferris wheel, the sounds were still the real showstopper. Audio-enabled passenger gondolas allowed Audible to create an environment where even when you could see the whole city, you still just wanted to listen.



BREAKING IT DOWN FOR BRANDS

This year's activations proved that experiential doesn't have to live in one-off moments, but can serve as a meaningful element of a long-term brand strategy with real commercial impact.

A VIRTUAL BURRITO TASTES JUST AS GOOD AS THE REAL THING

Chipotle found that on average, customers spent just as much time unwrapping and savoring burritos on Roblox as they do IRL. This behavior is exactly why these platforms are shifting from using the term “gaming” and instead referring to their products as “virtual experiences.” Consumers are mimicking IRL behavior in these virtual worlds, and are now conversely experimenting with new behaviors virtually, which they then adopt in their physical lives.



BREAKING IT DOWN FOR BRANDS

Beyond the obvious implications of new channels of audience engagement and changing consumer behavior, there are major possibilities for R&D efficiencies. Imagine testing consumer sentiment around a new product without ever having to manufacture it — or the ability to test numerous iterations of that product — all with real-time feedback.



DATA PRIVACY GOES BEYOND BIOMETRICS

The work of Dr. Joy Buolamwini has made a huge impact on the public discourse on the collection and use of biometric data by government and commercial organizations. Consumers are becoming increasingly interested in protecting their data privacy, but regulation in the U.S. has not kept up with new ways of collecting data. Devices like the Apple Vision Pro track our gaze and gestures. Even without biometric data like retina, face, and fingerprints, the way we gaze and gesture are as unique as a fingerprint, and can be used to track and identify us. For the first time ever I was asked to accept a specific “Biometric Data Policy” for a brand experience during SXSW.



BREAKING IT DOWN FOR BRANDS

Brands should at least consider having a biometric data policy as an addition to existing privacy policies. For years, Apple has demonstrated how respecting consumer privacy can give a brand a competitive edge. As data privacy goes beyond biometrics, others can follow their example.

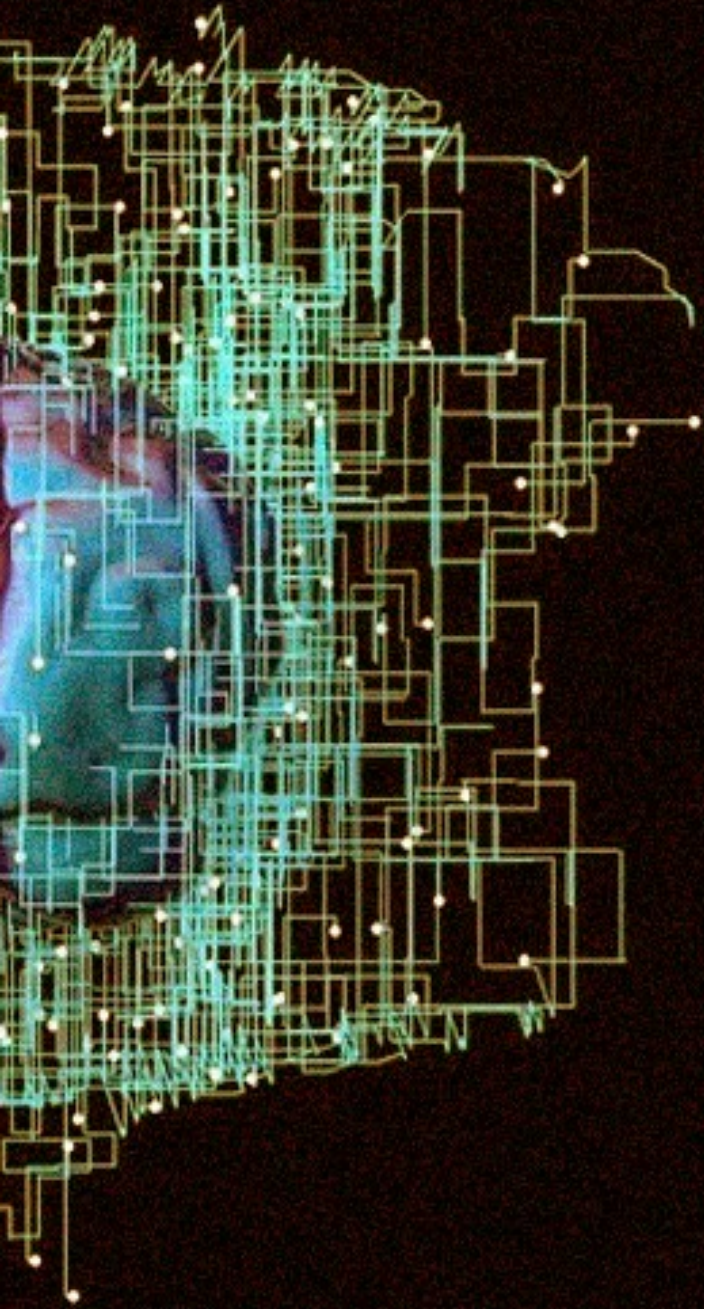
THE GEN AI EVOLUTION IS MULTIMODAL

Numerous sessions across SXSW explored the potential of AI in dynamic worldbuilding and creativity by leveraging its 'multisensory' capabilities, such as audio and video. Activations like Tide's launch of the 'evo laundry tile' even used their distinctive Tide smell to create an experience that lingered long after the fresh scent faded away. How can we use the power of AI to supercharge these multimodal brand experiences?

BREAKING IT DOWN FOR BRANDS



While social and regulatory frameworks for AI-generated content distribution remain unsettled, the opportunity for brands to create entirely new, multimodal experiences that captivate and inspire consumers is vast. The question of whether consumers care that content is AI-generated will become trivial compared to the profound influence of next-generation storytelling that holistically uses all of the senses to trigger consumers' emotions.



INFLUENCERS ARE NOW EXPERIENCE ARCHITECTS

Blockade Labs and Lovelace Studios showcased how their platforms leveraging AI can empower anyone to build virtual worlds – think of it as the smartphone camera revolution for gaming. This shift will enable a new breed of influencer, one who guides us through immersive adventures instead of simply sharing static content.



BREAKING IT DOWN FOR BRANDS

The lines between brands and influencers will blur. Brands won't simply sponsor posts or videos. Successful partnerships will involve deep collaboration in designing experiences, branded virtual worlds, games, or interactive events within existing platforms.



COLLABORATIVE ADVANTAGE > COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

You can't do it alone. Underlying the collaboration between humans and machines is the data collaboration between companies for better marketing intelligence. Delta and American Express talked about how they're using their incredible wealth of collective data to build best-in-class co-branded experiences. Yelp, QSRs, and CPGs are partnering to use their data to serve the right products, at the right restaurants, at the right times.



BREAKING IT DOWN FOR BRANDS

Of course, this must be done in an ethical and privacy-compliant way, but breaking down silos between brands and partnering around shared outcomes is more important than ever to keep up with the pace of change. Brands can benefit from collaborating around data to gain deeper insights into consumer behavior, enhance marketing intelligence, and ultimately drive business growth. By pooling resources and expertise, companies can unlock new opportunities and stay ahead in today's data-driven economy.

THE WINNING BRANDS OF TOMORROW WILL BE CO-CREATED

GSD&M hosted a fireside chat with client Jenn Reeves to talk about how PMI's 111-year old brand has lit the internet on fire. TikTok, Creators, Community, and Company Culture are at the heart of Stanley's classic brand, helping it evolve from a heritage outdoor brand earning \$70M in 2019 to a \$750M lifestyle brand and the #1 gift of 2023. This is underpinned by importance of understanding audience needs outside of your core, galvanizing a whole company when product strategy shifts, creating a value equation where retail partners like Target and Amazon are real partners, and how social media underpins success in every aspect of the above.



BREAKING IT DOWN FOR BRANDS

Community-building may sound naive in our fast-moving world where new technologies promise to automate marketing into a finely-tuned machine. But, by listening to influencers, brands can shift their product assortment. By listening to their retail partners and what matters to their consumers, they can create crazes for exclusive products at the biggest retailers and Amazon. By listening to their social communities, they can respond and set the internet ablaze. And by listening to employees and tapping into their strong brand love, they have a long innovation pipeline ahead that will delight consumers for years to come.

THE QUANTUM COUNTDOWN IS HERE

During the “Why we should be talking about quantum” fireside chat, experts highlighted mind-bending applications of quantum computing – like simulating every possible configuration of the COVID-19 spike protein (10^{623} possibilities) to find an optimal vaccine, or modeling protein folding to accelerate drug discovery. Clean data and labeling pipelines will be ever-more important. While still emerging, quantum computers promise to solve problems impossible for classical computers.



BREAKING IT DOWN FOR BRANDS

The “quantum revolution” may still sound a bit sci-fi, but it's closer to reality than we think. Businesses can start exploring use cases now, from supply chain optimization to unimaginably personalized marketing. Customer data and simulations will reach a whole new level of precision and scale. Converging fields will yield innovative product/service applications. Those brands who silo themselves risk disruption or extinction. Brands who invest early could gain massive competitive advantages over laggards still stuck in classical computing.



LONELINESS IS THE NEW SMOKING

While humans may be more connected than ever, many don't actually feel that way. Superficial online interactions can exacerbate feelings of isolation, leaving individuals craving genuine human connection amidst the noise of constant connectivity. The Department of Health & Human Services shared that lacking social connection can increase the risk for premature death as much as smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day – and has more an even greater negative effect than that associated with obesity and physical inactivity.



BREAKING IT DOWN FOR BRANDS

Brands have the opportunity to be the center of communities and fandoms – and to foster meaningful consumer connection around them. Throughout this report, we've referenced connected brand experience made stronger by physical activations, and these new occasions to connect are proving to have implications beyond those moments themselves. In the pursuit of convenience, brands have lost some of the more “human” moments that make consumers feel connected to the brand and the communities that surround them. Where can a brand add back in a bit of positive friction, opportunities to make a customer feel heard and seen?

TREND REPORTS AREN'T MEANT TO BE READ

Amy Webb released her annual Emerging Technology Trends report at SXSW, one of the biggest draws of the event. This is downloaded over a million times each year. 2024's edition is packed with over 900+ pages. But here's the kicker – these reports rarely get used to their full advantage, often simply flicked through and left to collect digital dust. What if you could 10x the value of these reports for your brand?



BREAKING IT DOWN FOR BRANDS

Heard of GenAI? Yes, you have. Take a report and upload it to your platform of choice and have a natural language conversation with the report. Ask it questions, ask for summaries. Better yet, set the context of the interaction to get the most out of it. Tell AI about your industry, your brand, your goals, customer insights, competitor intel, etc. and ask for ideas, strategies, and tactics from the material in the report.



OMNICOM ACROSS AUSTIN

Changing Tunes: The Role of AI in Music Creation

BBDO | Rolling Stone | Bacardi

The ReFresh: How Classic Brand Stanley Rebooted on TikTok

GSD&M | Stanley 1913

Music + Ads: Breaking Through in an Ever-Changing Landscape

GSD&M

Author Your Life: Clarity in an Age of Uncertainty

Bonnie Wan, GS&P

Salvador Dali, AI, and The Future of Creativity

GS&P | The Dali Museum

No Algorithm for Culture: How Humans See What AI Can't

TBWA\Istanbul

Ideas by Design: Unveiling the Power of Design in Advertising

TBWA\Media Arts Lab

ICYMI...you can still listen in.

EXPERT CONTRIBUTORS ACROSS OMNICOM



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