

SXSW Interactive: The top takeaways for legal marketers

South by Southwest (SXSW) Interactive took place earlier this month in Austin, Texas. This five-day festival – part of the bigger 10-day SXSW event that includes the popular music and film festival – attracts some of the most innovative marketing and PR agencies, in-house marketing departments, and tech companies of all sizes from across the globe. Literally scores of breakout sessions occur, sometimes as many as 20 simultaneously, throughout the city's convention center and nearby hotels. It is by far one of the largest marketing-related conferences in the world and one of the most important for many brands (including the likes of Twitter, FourSquare and Airbnb, all of whom have received breakout success at SXSW events in year's past), which capitalize on the presence of so many savvy, innovative marketers by generating awareness for their brands in some of the most unusual and inspired ways.

Because there is so much thought leadership floating around at SXSW, the conference is known to be the place where new marketing trends and best practices are born. The authors of a recent [Ad Age article](#) identify a number of trends that came out of the conference. The one that caught my attention was the authors' observation that "Every brand is a tech brand now – or at least wants to be one."

Are Law Firms Tech Brands?

What *Ad Age* meant by its declaration is that, like the Silicon Valley darlings of Uber and Airbnb, every brand is attempting to appeal to an increasingly tech-savvy audience by leveraging technology in its marketing strategies. Law firms, of course, are not exempt from this. Take, for example, the legal industry's [ever-increasing use of social media](#) and digital marketing tactics to engage audiences.

Specifically, legal blogging continues to be a growing tool for law firms looking to expand their thought leadership footprint. Just consider how effective it can be for business development for an attorney to share his or her own analysis of a legislative or regulatory development. This is the epitome of "show, don't tell," one of the core rules of [effective storytelling](#). By demonstrating your knowledge and experience through engaging content, your audience will believe your effectiveness much more than if you merely tell them that you are, in fact, effective.

Of course, a blog on its own is not enough. It's merely the center of an integrated content marketing program that should include distribution tools such as social media to help generate traffic.



Carlos Arcos

Senior Vice President
Public Relations
713.826.5195
carcos@jaffepr.com

Never Forget the Human Element

While technology has empowered legal marketers with an entirely new arsenal of tactics to reach their audiences, it's important not to become too focused on the gimmicks of the tech at risk of neglecting the reason for using it in the first place. And that reason is entirely *human connection*.

According to attendees at SXSW whom Jaffe spoke with for this post, there is a growing emphasis in larger marketing circles on a return to the human element. You can use all the gamification, social cloud-based "whatever" you want, but at the end of the day, your efforts must be about human connection. And at the core of this connection is the story.

While I could expand on how to incorporate storytelling into your marketing, PR and business development practices, I will defer to our Content Strategist, Keith Ecker, who recently published [an article in the National Law Review](#) on the topic. I highly recommend you give it a read.

Beyond concentrating on story, finding opportunities to actually get people into the same room is also important. No matter how much engagement you do on social media, nothing compares to face-to-face interactions, so law firms would be wise to allocate some attention to attending and hosting in-person events to cultivate relationships and market their services. As we see with SXSW, a big part of the success of the conference is the experience of being there.

Legal Marketing at SXSW?

While we often don't think of legal marketing as the kind of tech-savvy, hip niche that SXSW attracts, the SXSW conference itself is changing. The conference has ramped up its breakout session offerings for other non-B2C sectors, including health care. And as more innovative legal service providers enter the market, such as [Axiom Law](#), it wouldn't surprise me to see SXSW give areas like ours more attention.

Still, no matter how tech-saturated the marketing world gets, the focus will always be on the service provider making a real and meaningful connection with its audience.

Did you hear about any new trends from SXSW? Leave a comment or send me, Carlos Arcos, a message at carcos@jaffepr.com.