

[AN HCG THOUGHT LEADERSHIP PIECE]

HCG

# INSIGHTS & INNOVATIONS FOR IMPACT

HCG @ SXSW 2025

## AT A GLANCE: KEY INSIGHTS



1. **AI Everywhere:** AI applications were showcased across healthcare, for goals ranging from accelerating drug discovery to personalizing medicine and transforming marketing approaches.
2. **Human Connection:** Despite technological advances, the importance of balancing AI with human intuition and empathy remains crucial.
3. **Immersive Experiences:** Novel approaches like the Fulldome and 3D sound experiences demonstrated innovative ways to engage audiences.
4. **In-Person Value:** The irreplaceable benefits of face-to-face connections and shared experiences with industry colleagues and thought leaders were on display.
5. **Future Implications:** AI integration is reshaping healthcare communications, and novel sensory approaches can enhance HCP education. Technology will augment, not replace, human healthcare relationships.

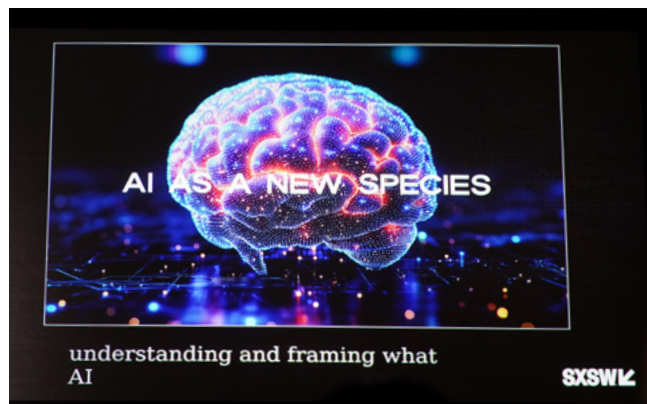


Thirty-eight years ago, 700 music-lovers joined the inaugural South by Southwest (SXSW) Festival in Austin, Texas, to bond over a shared passion for music and entertainment. With an emphasis on intellectualism and discourse about the future of media, SXSW aimed to be a symposium combined with a rock concert. That 4-day music industry event had just 15 panels, 177 artists, and 15 stages—and their first keynote was recorded on Betamax tape!



Fast-forward to today, when Austin annually transforms to host this mammoth inspirational event. For 9 days each March, SXSW draws nearly 350,000 attendees, far beyond its humble beginnings as an intimate gathering of musicians.

This year, travelers made the pilgrimage to Austin for over 450 conference sessions, keynotes, screenings, exhibitions, and competitions; with tracks including Health & Medtech, Design, Advertising & Brand Experience, Climate & Sustainability, and Artificial Intelligence. Our HCG team loves to tee off each year by looking outside Pharma for inspiration, and SXSW's broad mix of topics offered us insights from far beyond our scientific world.



## / Session highlights AI Everywhere

It will come as no surprise that AI was the talk of the town this year. A transformative force in drug discovery, marketing, creative communications and research, the applications and opportunities of AI were front and center. Sessions from IBM to Colossal Biosciences highlighted the incredible spectrum of utility for AI. IBM focused on practical applications in drug discovery and clinical decision support, while Colossal Biosciences is leveraging AI for genetic analysis and ecosystem modeling—to revive extinct species and conserve endangered ones!

AI-powered platforms like GEEIQ are transforming audience engagement by leveraging data from gaming and virtual worlds, opening new avenues to connect with patients. GEEIQ made the

argument that Gen Z and Gen Alpha are shifting towards immersive platforms, creating a new frontier for brand marketing.



## Finding the Lock and Knowing You Have the Key

In “Tailored Therapies: Healthcare That’s as Unique as You Are”, Johnson & Johnson’s Dr. Troy Sarich spoke with Dr. Debra Patt about the importance of AI in personalizing cancer treatments and improving healthcare outcomes. Dr. Sarich conveyed that “personalized medicine is like finding the lock and knowing that you have the key.” New technologies are accelerating discovery, trials, education, and the speed at which we can bring personalized therapies to patients. But challenges remain, such as ensuring patients receive appropriate testing and educating providers on the use of new therapies and guidelines. Drs. Sarich and Patt discussed the need for tech innovators to help advance healthcare by making better clinical decision support tools, improving data integration, and enhancing patient engagement.







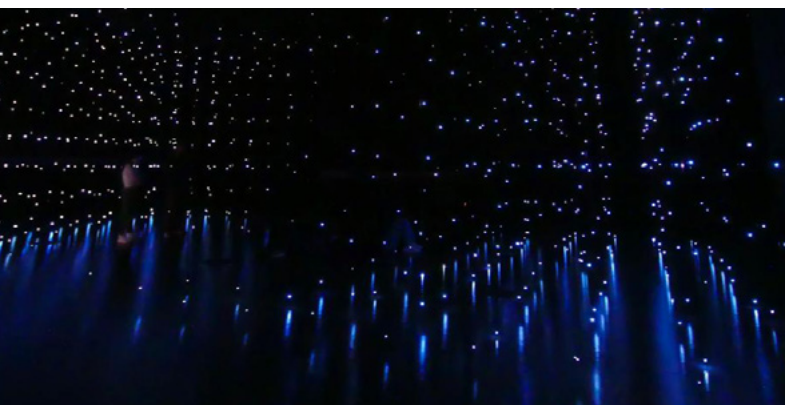
## The Importance of Human Connection

While AI and data-driven solutions took center stage, every session emphasized balancing AI with human experience. Data enhance hypotheses, but knowledge and human intuition remain essential. AI can decrease strategy development time, opening up time better spent on creating deeper emotional connections with customers through empathetic scientific narratives.

### / Event highlights

#### **NOWISWHENWEARE (the stars)**

In this unique installation, artists Andrew Schneider and Bobby McElver demonstrated sound's overlooked power for audience engagement. Participants experienced precision-targeted sound and light in total darkness, showing how sophisticated audio can be paired with creative storytelling to enhance booth interactives. Targeted audio is rarely used in conference settings, yet it can be deeply moving when harnessed successfully. NOWISWHENWEARE was an incredibly moving installation and idea starter.



## A SXSW First in an XR Dome

In recent years, the SXSW XR Expo has established itself as a must-visit event for the latest immersive tech. But when VR and AR headsets are familiar sights, what new ways can we use to reach audiences that stand out from the crowd? This year, we found the answer in an installation that offered virtual reality without a headset: a Fulldome! The Fulldome is essentially a miniaturized, portable version of the Las Vegas Sphere, where around 25 people could experience immersive content together. The short film "Resolution: A Cinephonic Rhapsody for the Soul" by the band The Polyphonic Spree was presented inside, with stunning animations and euphoric storytelling moments. The experience extended to a print piece, which was paired with a mobile AR experience for visitors to take home—a nicely executed new way to potentially engage HCP audiences.



## Bonding Over Innovation

So, if you've been following the LinkedIn posts this past week, you might be asking: Why is SXSW such a big deal to experience in person? What makes it worth the trip for Pharma? Well, we don't need AI to answer that. The importance of human connection is never clearer than when you're face-to-face with colleagues and clients, surrounded by world-class thinkers. At SXSW, everyone you meet is sharing their raw excitement for world-changing ideas. We were thrilled to see so many clients who were able to make the trip and were energized by their passion to explore with us. In many ways, the most valuable parts of SXSW were the shared once-in-a-lifetime moments. No AI can replace the first-hand reactions, challenging perspectives, and creative spark you get by adventuring and ideating with partners, friends, and leaders. SXSW may have changed in a million ways since 1987, but the bonds over shared passions are as strong as ever.

## What Does This Mean for Pharma and Medical Communications?

The convergence of AI, immersive technologies, and human-centered design signals a pivotal moment for healthcare communication. As AI advances in drug discovery and personalized medicine, communicators must effectively translate complex science through new technological paradigms.

The experiences we joined demonstrated that novel sensory approaches can create powerful connections, a lesson pharma can apply to HCP education and patient engagement.

Success will depend on maintaining the human element while leveraging novel sensory approaches for engagement. The future lies in thoughtfully integrating those sensory approaches to enhance, rather than replace, the human relationships that remain at the heart of healthcare.



**David Ferguson**  
SVP, Creative Director



**Susan Spallina**  
SVP, Client Services



[hcg-int.com](https://hcg-int.com)

© 2025 Healthcare Consultancy Group