FUTURE READY:

SXSW Insights for Med Comms Leaders

Bridging Worlds

Med Comms is evolving—demanding fresh ways to engage, inspire, and deliver real impact. By exploring insights from outside our immediate sphere—from digital health and AI to storytelling, design, and patient experience—we can **unlock fresh perspectives and fuel transformative change**.

Since its humble beginnings as a music festival in Austin, Texas in 1987, **South by Southwest (SXSW)**, has grown into a world-renowned event, celebrating the convergence of creativity, culture, and technology. In June 2025, SXSW reached a new milestone by launching its inaugural European edition in London, bringing together visionaries and innovators from across the continent to connect, exchange ideas, and **shape the future.**

Our team was on the ground to capture the pulse of these conversations. In this special edition, we highlight the **key themes from SXSW 2025** and explore their significance for **Med Comms.** Discover how the brightest minds in innovation are redefining the future—and how their ideas can inspire us to reimagine how we communicate, educate, and connect within healthcare.

`>> Keep reading and join us on this journey of discovery`.

#01
BRAVE LEADERSHIP

Nice Is the New Bold

The best Med Comms leaders don't shout the loudest—they listen the hardest. Here's how human-first leadership is shaping the future of creative science

Niceness is often underestimated as a leadership asset but is rapidly gaining recognition as a catalyst for building strong, high-performing teams.

Vanessa Kingori OBE, who spearheaded digital transformation at **GQ** and **Vogue,** emphasized the power of empathy, urging leaders to adopt a human-centric approach to transformation. "Humans aren't rational. Real change starts with empathy—meet people where they are, not just where you want them to go", she shared.

> **Real change doesn't start with strategy; it starts with listening.**

Emma Baines, Global Head of Creative at **Tony's Chocolonely**, proves that kindness is a true leadership superpower. With women still underrepresented in creative leadership, Emma is determined to drive change. She founded The Creative Motherhood, a vibrant community empowering mothers in the creative industry to thrive both personally and professionally.

> **Empathy isn't soft – it's a superpower for future-ready leaders.**

Angela Tangas, former CEO of **Dentsu International,** and Sean Doyle, CEO at **British Airways**, both highlighted the transformative impact of reverse mentoring. This approach gave them a 360-degree perspective, bridged generational divides, and accelerated organizational change.

> **By championing diverse voices and fostering true inclusion, leaders can create safer, more dynamic workplaces and drive meaningful transformativeprogress.**

What does this mean for Med Comms?

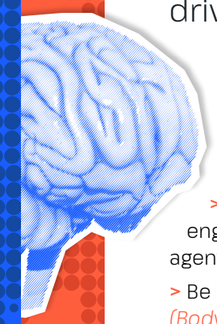
> **Embrace reverse mentoring** to empower inclusive, forward-thinking leadership

> **Lead with empathy** and take a human-centric approach to change

#02
INNOVATION MINDSET

What Can We Learn From the World's Boldest Brands?

Inspiring brands and leaders from across sectors shared their secrets to success. From chocolate companies challenging systems to feminine care companies changing laws and driving cultural change—here's who inspired us and why:



> Doubt the impossible *(Naoki Tanaka)*

> Put the idea first–ask how we can make it happen *(Lego, F1)*

> Obsess over excellence *(Gucci)*

> An empathy-driven approach can drive engagement and enable brands to become agents of cultural change *(Bodyform)*

> Be bold in storytelling - challenge the status quo *(Bodyform)*

> **Bold brands don't ask for permission—they rewrite the rules.**

> Find new allies and seek undiscovered perspectives *(Lego, F1, Naoki Tanaka)*

> Trust your influencers and embrace unscripted, authentic moments *(Lego, F1)*

> Drive impact through multisensory experiences *(various)*

> Listen to your audience. Use tech and data to drive personalization *(Samsung, Uber)*

> Leverage customer insights to break away from category norms *(Tony's Chocolonely)*

> **If it doesn't challenge the category, it's just noise.**

> Don't let success breed complacency *(Vanessa Kingori OBE)*

> Swim against the tide *(Naoki Tanaka)*

> Feel the fear and do it anyway *(Vanessa Kingori OBE)*

> Know that the hard work will be worth it *(Ian Wright)*

What does this mean for Med Comms?

> **Look for ways to add value** across the complete patient/HCP journey

> Consider ways to **leverage digital health solutions** to make education more accessible

Want a deeper dive? The HCG innovation team have the full stories behind each of these lessons. Reach out to Luke Molloy for the full breakdown.

#03
AI, WORK, AND HUMANITY

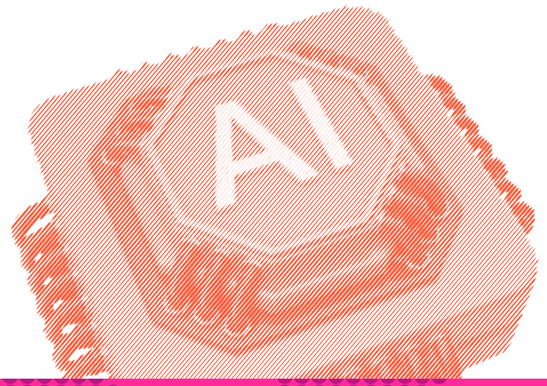
Soul vs Silicon

Why Med Comms Still Needs the Human Touch in the Age of AI

At SXSW, one theme echoed loud and clear: AI is no longer a niche interest–it's a transformative force reshaping every industry and role. Virtually every session touched on AI's growing impact. Here are some of the most compelling ways AI is redefining work and human experience.

> Revolutionizing drug development

Animal testing may soon be consigned to history. Innovators like **Ochre Bio** are leading this shift. Founder Quin Wills notes, *"As scientists, we don't yet have a good handle on generating causal, actionable human data at an early discovery level, and we still validate results in mice, which don't accurately predict human diseases."* Ochre Bio is changing this paradigm by deep phenotyping human liver samples and models at scale to causally map genes to cells, histology, and clinical data. Their RNA chemistry platform can validate drug leads in weeks rather than years, sparing animal testing and dramatically reducing R&D costs and timelines.



> Elevating customer experience

AI is rapidly transforming how brands connect with consumers, demanding new strategies for engagement and relevance.

Consider the Intuit Dome in Los Angeles, where fans can enter the "smart stadium", grab refreshments, and take their seats–no ticket lines, no waiting. Once seated, they can interact with the content on the stadium screen via a controller on their seat. While brands no longer benefit from advertising to customers stuck in a line, AI is also creating **new opportunities** for fan engagement. For example, audio sensors located throughout the dome allow the organizers to track which fan cheers the loudest, and brands can offer them discounts and other rewards.

Another opportunity for brands to stand out in the era of AI is to **spark emotion**. For inspiration, look to Disneyland's MagicBand+, which not only streamlines the customer experience by granting customers access to rides but also illuminates in sync with the environment, turning a simple transaction into a magical and memorable moment.

> **In a world of algorithms, emotion is your competitive edge.**

> Reshaping creativity

Generative AI is rapidly reshaping creative work as we know it, with translators, authors, musicians, and freelancers experiencing profound shifts in their work and fundamental changes to their livelihoods. In response, unions are advocating for fairer compensation, transparency, and protections when AI systems use creative outputs. One emerging solution is to introduce **human-made watermark** and provenance tools that enable consumers to distinguish human creation from AI-generated content and support human originality in commercial ecosystems.

While AI is democratizing creativity and supercharging productivity, Demis Hassabis (co-founder of Google DeepMind) believes it won't replace the need for human empathy and artistry: "there's still the missing component of the soul". Hassabis believes it might not ever be able to create something as "emotionally moving" as what another human can create.

> **Creativity needs AI's power–but still runs on human soul.**

What does this mean for Med Comms?

> AI is sparing animal testing and speeding up drug development

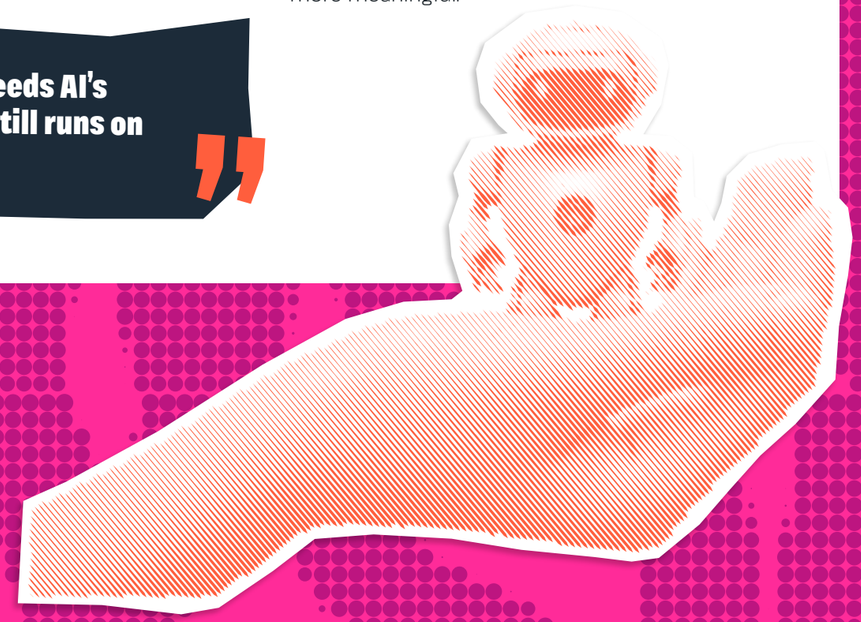
> AI won't replace the need for creative; rather, it will enable creative to draft and prototype things rapidly

> To stand out, brands must deliver personalized, emotion-driven experiences that remove friction and spark emotion

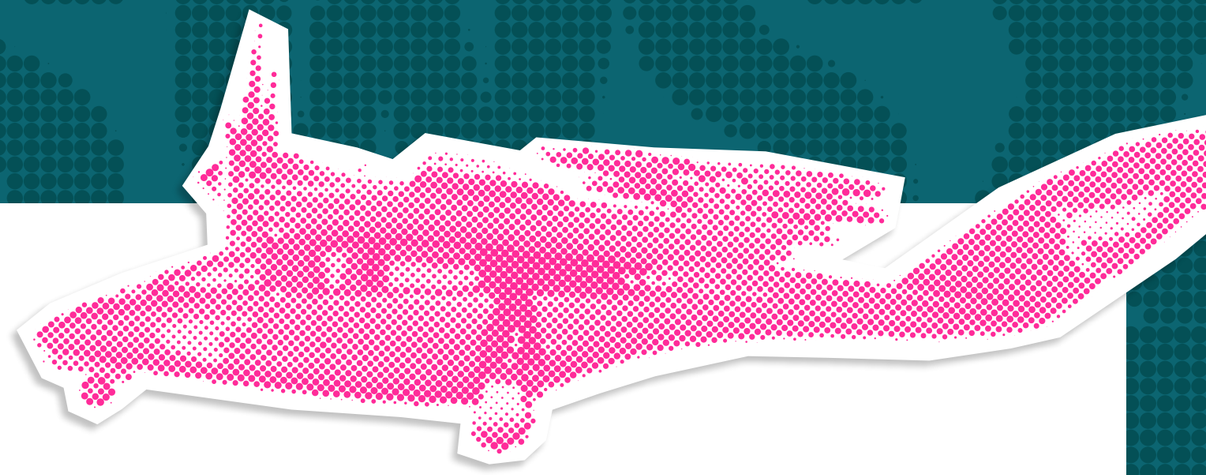
> In a sea of AI-generated content, human-made watermarks could both celebrate and preserve human creativity

> AI is transforming every sector–AI literacy isn't just a competitive advantage; it's essential. We all need to embrace curiosity and explore how we can use AI to innovate the way we work.

As we journey into this new frontier, the call to action is clear: blend human ingenuity with AI's power to create a future that's not only more efficient but also more meaningful.



#04
NEW TECH FRONTIERS



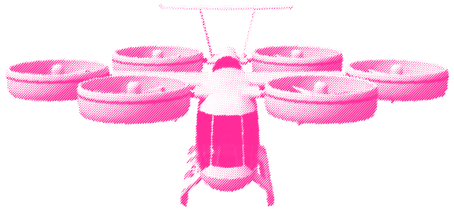
Toward a Greener Future

What can Med Comms learn from Tech's Green Revolution?

Sustainability—and the push for net zero—is a powerful driver of innovation across industries. Startups are rising to meet the world's most urgent challenges with bold solutions. Here are some of the most exciting innovations we discovered.

>Solving the challenges of Gen AI

The surge in use of generative AI poses urgent questions around how we will manage the volume of data generated and their environmental cost. Already responsible for 2% of global electricity demand—a figure set to soar—data centers are at a critical crossroads. Enter **HoloMem**, whose HoloDrive technology is plug-and-play with existing hardware, boasting ultra-high density, long life, and zero energy consumption for cooling, eliminating the need for energy-hungry fans and cooling systems. Pushing boundaries even further, **FinalSpark** introduced the world to biological computers. These "living computers" use neurons—the fundamental units of the human brain—offering energy efficiency that is a million times greater than traditional digital processors. This breakthrough could redefine what's possible in computing.



> Curbing carbon emissions

Concrete is the world's most destructive material, with its repair and replacement contributing to 8% of global carbon emissions. **Mimicrete's** self-healing concrete, featuring vascular tubes filled with a healing agent that activates when the concrete cracks, has been shown to reduce carbon emissions by up to 70% and is already being tested in a major rail project in the United Kingdom.

Urban congestion isn't just frustrating—it's responsible for a staggering 25% of global carbon emissions. But an unexpected solution is set to appear on our horizons. Enter **Vertical Aerospace**, one of the trailblazers in the field of technology. With 1,500 preorders spanning four continents, they plan to launch their fleet of flying taxis in the United Kingdom in 2028. The future of clean, congestion-free cities could soon be above our heads!

> **Green tech is no longer niche—it's the new business case.**

> Powering our future with clean energy

With global electricity demand projected to double by 2050, the race is on for affordable, continuous, and flexible energy solutions. **Shit2Power** has developed a sea container solution that transforms human waste (we create 150B tons of sewage sludge each year) into clean energy and high-quality phosphorus ash, with zero waste byproducts. Their system integrates seamlessly into existing sewage plants, processes various wet biomasses, and slashes energy costs by 30%. Meanwhile, **Space Solar** are looking to the stars for a solution to help us get to Net Zero. Their pioneering technology aims to continuously harvest solar energy in space and beam it back to earth, overcoming the limitations of weather and daylight hours that hamper terrestrial-based wind and solar power.

> **Innovation without sustainability is just delayed damage.**

What does this mean for Med Comms?

Sustainability is no longer a sideline CSR issue—it's a core driver of innovation, investment, and competitive advantage. The future belongs to agencies that fuse scientific integrity with environmental intelligence. Here's how:

> Make sustainability a strategic narrative, not a footnote

Embed sustainability into client storytelling, highlighting its integration across R&D, clinical trials, and patient engagement—not just in packaging.

> Build sustainability KPIs in comms plans

Can we start tracking and reporting the carbon footprint of a medical event, or the energy cost of a campaign? Develop metrics that align scientific communication goals with climate responsibility.

> Help health communities set ambitious targets to shape the future of care

Targets signal opportunity, invite disruption, and give permission to think big. While certain areas of health—such as infectious disease control—already leverage targets effectively, there is significant potential to expand their use. By setting clear, ambitious targets in other areas, we can drive urgency, inspire innovation, and accelerate meaningful change across the health sector.

#05
FUTURE OF HEALTH

From Microrobots to the Microbiome

The health model is flipping—are your narratives keeping up? Here's how Med Comms leaders can harness genomics and digital technology to rewrite the playbook

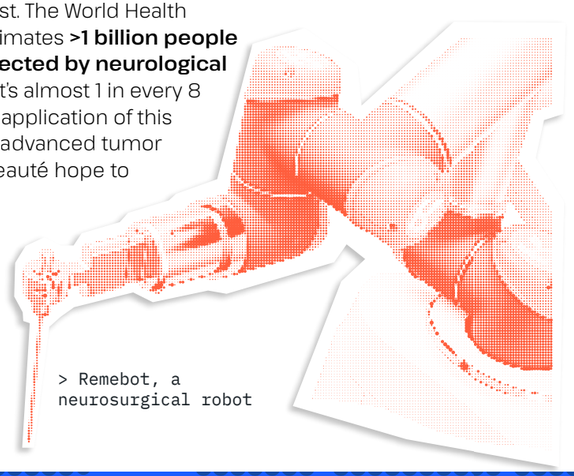
Across the week we heard how advances in technology and AI are enabling us to shift the dial in healthcare from reactive to preventive. Here are our highlights.

Continuous glucose monitors were just the beginning—tech-enabled real-time monitoring of patients is now changing the face of care in other areas of health. For example, one startup, **Neu Health**, shared how their FDA-cleared, smartphone based, AI-enabled digital solution, which enables real-time monitoring of several objective measures of disease such as voice, balance, gait and tremor, is making Parkinson's and dementia care more accessible, optimizing condition management, reducing clinician burden, and improving outcomes for patients.

> **Health is shifting from crisis care to everyday insight.**

Another startup, **XARlabs**, demonstrated how their mixed-reality system is transforming outcomes in surgery. Their "deep surgical vision" approach involves getting patient consent and then using actual patient scans to create patient-specific 3D models, allowing them to perform surgical rehearsals on close-to-real-life simulations. The tool is redefining precision and efficiency and, in the future, will be used alongside advanced robotics during actual surgery.

Robeauté shared how their groundbreaking microrobots are revolutionizing neurosurgery. Their microrobots are able perform a wide range of clinical applications—from sampling tissue to delivering targeted therapies, to implanting electrodes and collecting real-time data from deep within the brain. The application of this technology is vast. The World Health Organization estimates **>1 billion people globally are affected by neurological conditions**. That's almost 1 in every 8 people. The first application of this technology is in advanced tumor biopsy, and Robeauté hope to launch by 2029.



> Remebot, a neurosurgical robot

The human microbiome sits at the fascinating intersection of cutting-edge science and daily life. It influences mental health, gut function, reproductive health, and aging; so, it's no surprise it's poised to be the next big frontier in personalized medicine. Within this category, women's reproductive health represents a breakthrough opportunity. Up to 1 in 3 women have a dysbiotic reproductive system. This leads to inflammation, which contributes toward conditions such as infertility, endometriosis, and premature birth. The good news is companies like **Freya Biosciences** aim to bring FDA-approved treatments to market in the next 5-10 years.

Over 400 million people across the world live with a rare disease. Over half of those are children, and one-third will die by their 5th birthday—yet 95% of all rare diseases do not have any available treatment.

The UK government has a bold plan to transform the **NHS** over the next decade from a service that diagnoses and treats ill health to one that predicts and prevents it.

One part of the plan involves the pioneering "Generation Study," conducted by **Genomics England** in partnership with the **NHS**. Currently in the United Kingdom, all new parents are offered a blood spot test for their babies when they are 5 days old to check if they have any of 9 rare but serious conditions. The Generation Study will see 100,000 newborns screened for more than 200 genetic conditions. Diagnosing rare conditions in newborn babies at the earliest opportunity through genomic testing could be truly **life-changing** for families—it has the potential to give thousands of children the chance to access the right treatment at the right time, giving them the best possible start to life, and for families to better plan for their care.

Another part of the strategy is the **Rare Therapies Launch Pad**, which aims to develop an end-to-end pathway covering diagnosis, design, and rapid manufacturing of individualized therapies, called antisense oligonucleotides (ASOs), for people with rare, life-limiting genetic conditions. One of the key members of this consortium, **Oxford-Harrington Rare Disease** Centre, shared their exciting vision at SXSW to develop 40 new drugs for rare diseases by 2034.

> **Genomics presents us with the opportunity to leapfrog disease, so we're in front of it rather than reacting to it.**
>
> — Wes Streeting, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, United Kingdom

What does this mean for Med Comms?

> Digital technology is revolutionizing health and making trustworthy information on how to manage health conditions more accessible, empowering patients to take better control of their own health journeys

> As patients and healthcare professionals receive more data than ever before, effective data visualization will be key to making insights actionable

> From women's health to rare diseases, advances in genomic sequencing, AI, and microbiome science are powering the next waves of personalized medicine—creating exciting opportunities for scientific storytelling to translate complex science into compelling, personalized health narratives

#06
FUTURE OF SOCIETY

To Infinity and Beyond

Tech is reshaping society—will your comms evolve with it? Get future-fit insights on how to engage smarter, older, faster-moving audiences.

In the 1980s, cartoons like **The Jetsons** brought to life a dazzling space-age future—complete with flying cars, holographic communication, meals in pill form, and robots handling chores. As a child of that era, I never imagined I'd witness any of these visions come to life, let alone all of them. Yet at SXSW London, I found myself playing football with a robot, conversing with a holographic AI avatar, sampling personalized vitamin gummies 3D-printed on demand, and previewing how flying taxis could soon transform London's skies—making travel faster, cleaner, and quieter. If this is our present, what could the future hold? Innovators at SXSW painted an inspiring vision

> XR smart glasses could revolutionize inclusion, provided we develop creative ways—like digital handshakes—to safeguard privacy

> Hospitals of the future will be designed with intention to nurture healing and reduce stress, and will operate as "smart" environments where AI removes friction and drives efficiency, for example, transmitting real-time data on resources and capacity enabling paramedics to make life-saving decisions on where to deliver patients in crisis

> Autonomous and flying vehicles will bypass gridlock, ensuring patients reach critical care swiftly and safely

> Biohacking will enable longer, healthier lives, shifting the focus from lifespan to healthspan

> Artificial general intelligence (AGI), when algorithms are just as smart as humans, will usher in a "golden era," surpassing even the industrial revolution in impact

"Tomorrow's patients won't think like today's—will your campaigns?"

> The path to AGI

Demis Hassabis, CEO and co-founder of Google DeepMind, shared that while today's AI lacks in reasoning and creativity, the industry is making rapid progress. AI still needs a better understanding of the world around it, which is why companies like Google are currently focused on developing video and world-building tools like Veo 3. As these tools advance, Hassabis predicts that robotics will experience a breakthrough moment in the next few years. He expects AGI will be achieved within 5-10 years—unlocking solutions to challenges like advanced battery technology, sustainable energy, life extension, and even space colonization, bringing Hanna-Barbera's vision of The Jetsons even closer to reality. Surprisingly, Hassabis doesn't see technology as the main barrier preventing us colonizing outer space.

"The main challenge facing us right now is the current geopolitical climate and lack of international collaboration."

What does this mean for Med Comms?

> As people live longer and healthier lives, **we'll need to address the evolving health needs of an aging and active population**—rethinking patient education, disease prevention, and long-term management across the health span

> **The adoption of robotics and new tech in care settings** will require clear, tailored communication strategies to guide both users and healthcare professionals in safely integrating these innovations

> As the world around us rapidly changes, we need to **keep our eyes on HCP needs, concerns, and preferences** so we can continue to engage them in ways that are both meaningful and valuable and look for cross-platform opportunities

Now is the time to start innovating how we craft our communications for a future where audiences are older, more mobile, and engaging with smarter technology in ways we've only just begun to imagine.

#07
ELEVATED EXPERIENCES

Science Meets Spectacle

The best engagement isn't just informative—it's immersive. Discover how multi-sensory, made-for-me moments are redefining HCP experiences and brand recall.

Although not as expansive or lavish as Austin, the creative expo and brand activations throughout Shoreditch were selectively curated and packed a powerful punch. Experiences that caught and maintained our attention included:

> Booth attractors & engagements

- 3D-printing of personalized nutrient snacks/ "vitamin gummies"
- AI-booth concierges
- Gimmicks such as robots, claw machines, and token-operated affirmation dispensers
- Personalized experiences, such as design your own poster, sketch your own figure
- Phygital gaming experiences (2x football experiences)
- Shared mixed-reality experiences
- Conversational AI holograms

> Interactive art

- Holographic art that users can adjust with a dial and self-destruct with a button
- AI-powered art that changes in response to human movement and sound
- Haptic wearable womb & spatial sound

> **Multi-sensory moments don't just wow—they wire in memory.**

What does this mean for Med Comms?

> The lines between reality and digital continue to blur, with "phygital" and "shared mixed reality" experiences proving a particularly effective and unique way attract and maintain engagement. It's been shown that **activating multiple senses and fostering real-time collaboration enhances learning by boosting dopamine levels, which in turn enhance memory retention**

> When individuals can create something unique and tailored to their interests, it fosters a sense of ownership and emotional connection with the brand. **The hands-on, creative process stimulates curiosity, increases dwell time at the booth**, and encourages meaningful conversations

Ready to unlock the full story?

This report is just the tip of the iceberg.
Fun fact: The HCG innovation team attended and transcribed more than **130 sessions** at SXSW London. Here are some **additional ways** you can immerse yourself in the content.

Listen to our Future Ready SXSW London Podcast
A fast and convenient way to deliver the headlines.

During her talk at SXSW London, Vanessa Kingori OBE, shared that her **favorite AI tool is 'NotebookLM'**—a tool that converts text documents into engaging audio podcasts. She no **longer reads** lengthy reports ahead of board meetings. Instead, she **converts** them into **podcasts** and **listens during her commute**.

Our team used a combination of NotebookLM and Wondercraft (an AI tool that provides full editing control over podcasts—allowing you to customize scripts and voices). The podcast clocks in at just over 22 minutes long and is available on our HCG thought leadership page: https://www.hcg-int.com/thought-leadership/

Talk to our onsite team (and our AI Agent)
Machine + Human Intelligence

If you have any specific themes or topics you would like to know more about—our innovation team is here to help. Simply reach out to Luke Molloy and tell us what you want to know. Our team will use a custom AI Agent we built to help us quickly identify all potentially relevant sessions. Our team will review and discuss before coming back to you with our perspective as well as any useful materials.

Run an HCG-led "SXSW London 2025: Headlines for Healthcare" live session
Turn this into an interactive opportunity for your teams to think about the future

Our team already have a presentation prepared which covers the same themes presented within this report. We have both a 30- and 60-minute version available, and of course, the content be tailored to your specific needs. To book a **live session**, connect with your main HCG contact or reach out to Luke Molloy.

Stay tuned for our SXSW Bold Predictions Timeline
A microlearning option to complement other approaches.

Expect this to drop on the HCG website in the next few weeks. Our onsite team documented all the **bold predictions** experts made throughout SXSW. If these predictions materialize, we're in for a very interesting journey ahead!

Special thanks to members of the HCG Innovation Team—Emma, Nicole and Tania—and their contributions to this article.

Luke Molloy
EVP, Innovation Lead

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