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All Your Data Are Belong to Us

The new world of privacy (or lack thereof) starts with data. There's an increasingly pervasive, relevant, and valuable world of digital information, easily stored and replicated and transmitted. Revolutionary digital communication technologies have taken the world's information and media products and converted them to digital formats. As a result, we have digital convergence, a merging of information technology with telecommunication and networking, consumer electronics, and infotainment media. This started in the latter part of the 20th century era of mass media, and it's proceeded apace over the last decade, in which we've seen the ascendance of smartphones and similar mobile devices, streaming music and video, and high-definition media. Cinema, television, and music are all now created, stored, and distributed via digital processes. In this new world, we've all become "users," and we are referenced by many forms and factors of data. We live by our numbers and passwords and digital devices. We carry powerful computing devices in our pockets, networked persistently with all the other similar devices across the globe.

Eventually, the digital and the material will merge in an "Internet of things," wherein objects as well as personal data points are referenced and findable through related data. So much of our lives depend on the security and integrity of the computer systems that hold this new world, and our stake in it, together. As there's more and more data created and stored about each individual, containing it, while sustaining some realistic expectation of privacy, is challenging. Our information ecosystem is outrunning our ability to secure it, leaving our most personal and sensitive data vulnerable to attack.

Here's a story to illustrate online vulnerability in a personal context, where one individual was "pwned" by another. Last May, activist Ruby Sinreich had the rudest of awakenings: She'd been hacked, and hacked bad. In a day's time, she lost control of almost a dozen Web properties associated with her name and identity, including her Amazon and Apple accounts, her Twitter account, and most damaging, her DreamHost account, which included her primary email and all of her websites. So much of her data had been compromised that it was difficult for her to prove her ownership of the accounts.

This wasn't a hack perpetrated by professional criminals – it was an intrusion by a

17-year-old computer maven who attempted to sell her @ruby Twitter account in an online forum. Ultimately, it took Sinreich several days to get her accounts back. Every day without access was a day of potential personal and reputational damage.

This is just one personal instance of data vulnerability exposed, out of a large and growing set of privacy and security issues that are only growing. As we extend the scope and reach of our lives online, our precious bits proliferate and are stored on

Watching the Watchmen

A CRASH COURSE IN PRIVACY, IN CASE YOU'VE BEEN (NOT UNREASONABLY) LIVING UNDER A ROCK

BY JON LEBKOWSKY

Perhaps counterintuitively, privacy is an inherently social concept. What are people willing to expose, to whom, and at what scale? Activist efforts and government responses will doubtless have some impact on government and commercial uses of data, but there's a bigger question of what futurist Jamais Cascio referred to as "the participatory panopticon." A panopticon is a space arranged so that everything is visible from a single point. In 2005, Cascio wrote: "Soon – probably within the next decade, certainly within the next two – we'll be living in a world where what we see, what we hear, what we experience will be recorded wherever we go. There will be few statements or scenes that will go unnoticed, or unremembered. Our day to day lives will be archived and saved. What's more, these archives will be available over the net for recollection, analysis, even sharing." He noted that this panopticon is "not imposed on us by a malevolent bureaucracy or faceless corporations," but something we built ourselves. Cascio's comments were prophetic.

The actions of Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, and WikiLeaks are examples of challenges to surveillance authority, but within the participatory panopticon, there's also the concept of "sousveillance," which is the opposite of surveillance; it's what you have when the "veillance" is in the hands of ordinary people doing the watching, including watching those who watch them. So we're not just being watched – we're also the watchers, and we're documenting what we see via social media, stored as data.

For all the talk about online privacy, the social tendency is to communicate and share. John Perry Barlow, at the Conference on Computers, Freedom, and Privacy in 1993, talked about his hometown of Pinedale, Wyo., where there wasn't much privacy, where everybody knew everybody's business. My own hometown was the same way, and your hometown or neighborhood was probably that way, too. Information sharing via gossip over the (real or virtual) fence is a feature of any community. People talk about one another all the time, and watch one another's doings, and whatever we might want to hide

or just hold close is liable to be exposed, discovered by others through observation, be it snooping or spying or news gathering. Journalism and surveillance are both about exposing facts about people; the difference is what is shared by whom, with whom, and with what intent. The NSA shares its information on a need-to-know basis; journalists figure everybody has a need to know.

Cascio suggested that users, not authorities, were creating the new participatory panopticon, and given our traditions of distributing and reporting knowledge and information, that's not surprising. Communication technologies have accelerated in the 21st century so that social sharing is becoming the pervasive, persistent rule. Given this, you might say there's a new addendum to the social contract about the expectation of privacy, and it's still being negotiated as we realize how public and exposed we've become. As I write these words, new proposed laws and regulations are being debated, as is the role of privacy in the marketplace. It's an interesting time.

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Related Events

Is Privacy a Right or an Illusion?

Friday, March 7, 5pm
Sheraton Austin Capitol View North

A Virtual Conversation With Julian Assange

Saturday, March 8, 11am
Austin Convention Center Exhibit Hall 5

In Data We Distrust: Fixing Online Privacy

Saturday, March 8, 12:30pm
Sheraton Austin Capitol View North

After Snowden: Privacy, Surveillance, & the NSA

Saturday, March 8, 3:30pm
AT&T Conference Center Room 106

Privacy Is Dead: Long Live Privacy

Sunday, March 9, 3:30pm
Sheraton Austin Creekside

increasingly distributed systems connected through various broadband network service providers and what Bruce Sterling calls “stacks” – vertically organized corporate silos like Google, Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, and Facebook – as well as smaller systems that aggregate our data behind more or less simple systems of authentication. These are the new cross-sector industrial powers that have emerged in the era of convergence, and their business models depend on user data.

Big Data, Big Problems

Sinreich’s story illustrates the susceptibility of computer systems to the kind of hacker mischief that has been going on since the Nineties, and it points to difficulty in protecting personal systems and data from attackers with the knowledge, time, and more or less malicious intent required to do harm. If it’s that easy for a teen who’s just screwing around to take ownership of an experienced user’s Web properties, what might professional criminals do?

Then there’s that issue of surveillance. In today’s clouds of networked distributed storage, personal data tends to be imperishable and persistent, and the online move-

ment of data leaves a trackable trail. Larger entities, corporations, and governments, can analyze “big” data for intelligence about social behavior and movement, macro and micro. As we users generate and depend on data, we can be tracked and sorted, with or without our awareness or consent. A conversation over the fence in the Fifties had no more persistence than memory, which is inherently flawed, but a conversation on Facebook can be stored accurately and forever, and as stored data, it can be aggregated with other data, packaged, and interpreted in various ways. This is happening faster than we can build policy around it.

In addition to potential personal hacks we’ve described, commercial abuse of online personal data is a growing problem. As commerce has moved online, data about consumers has become a commodity – bought, sold, and manipulated as an inherent aspect of market activity. Email spam was the first step on the path to more sophisticated and less obvious forms of data harvesting and marketing. The ultimate data-driven marketing systems are Amazon, Google, and Facebook, all of which use algorithms to drive marketing subtly but effectively into the user’s social experience. While some activists deplore any involuntary use of personal data for marketing purposes, consumers are taking it in stride. The trade-off is that we all have free, powerful online tools that support social interaction and sharing.

Outside the U.S., the story’s somewhat different. The European Union foresaw issues of data exploitation and created a Data Protection Directive that includes principles of notification when your data is collected, limitations on the use and sharing of data, and requirements for data security. This doesn’t prohibit personalized marketing, but it does include stringent protections for identifiable personal data.

So far, the U.S. hasn’t adopted similar principles as enforceable policy, though there are relatively strict protections for certain kinds of information, most notably the HIPAA protections for the privacy and security of personal medical data.

While the “social” industry provides many services to its users, those users are not customers; they’re the product, sold in aggregate to advertising and marketing organizations and to the brands they serve. Companies like Google and Facebook will argue that they’re using your data to enrich your online experience and many consumers accept the bargain, either because

they’re barely aware of it, or because they feel that they’re getting sufficient value in exchange.

Surveillance by government agencies is another high-visibility privacy issue where technology has outrun policy, and policy is trying to catch up. Recent WikiLeaks and Snowden revelations tell us that government surveillance programs are collecting more and more data about our lives and activities, stored in the various “clouds” of networked computer systems. For example, cell phone technology depends on tracking each device’s proximity to cell towers, with tracking data stored by service providers and accessed repeatedly by the NSA and law enforcement agencies. It’s broadly accessible via subpoena with no judicial oversight, though there’s a Fourth Amendment argument that a warrant should be required. The FBI and some local and state police departments also have a mobile device called Stingray, which simulates a cell phone tower, and can intercept and relay cell phone traffic while capturing surveillance data, also without a warrant. Legislators like Sen. Edwin Markey (D-Massachusetts) and Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah) are seeking legislation requiring law enforcement to show probable cause and obtain a warrant in order to capture and use any domestic cell phone data.

The issue of domestic surveillance in the U.S. is heating up. Criticism of NSA surveillance programs led President Obama to end some of the routine surveillance practices, meanwhile Rand Paul and FreedomWorks are suing Obama and the NSA, challenging the constitutionality of the phone surveillance program.

Go Forth

So as you head into the Social and Privacy sessions at SXSW Interactive – some of which focus on privacy in a world of social media and in the data-driven marketplace, while others tackle breaking issues about government surveillance – remember there are no easy answers forthcoming on any of this. In the participatory panopticon, security and privacy are wicked problems. And with no purely technical solution, it’s a social and political problem that we, the users, have to resolve. ■

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What Would Mindy Do?

HER PROGRAM IN PERIL, SHOWRUNNER AND STAR DISCUSSES DIGITAL MEDIA AT SXSW

BY AMY GENTRY

The second season of *The Mindy Project* won't return from winter hiatus until April 1, but Austin will get an early dose of showrunner and star Mindy Kaling in a SXSW Interactive session moderated by *Marie Claire* editor Anne Fulenwider and followed by a panel with castmates Ike Barinholtz and Adam Pally. In her session, Kaling will discuss "the emergence of digital players like Netflix, Amazon and Hulu, evolving audience expectations and the opportunity for women in television to leverage these changes."

If you fell asleep during that last sentence, wake up. Women are still a minority in television production (about 30% of TV writers, producers, and other creatives are women), but over the past few years, female showrunners have gained significant ground and visibility at the helm of hot network properties like *New Girl* and *Scandal*, long-running fan favorites like *Supernatural*, and critical darlings like *Girls*. As one of the sharpest writers of *The Office* and the first South Asian showrunner, Kaling has enjoyed a particularly high profile.

Nevertheless, *The Mindy Project* has struggled on broadcast television. Despite its sharp comic sensibility and attractive premise, the first season of *The Mindy Project* failed to find a broad enough audience, disappointing critics and audiences alike with a muddled tone and shifting cast. Fox previewed the second season premiere on Hulu, and ratings for the show's will-they-or-won't-they winter finale surged. Still, the fact that it nabbed a second season at all would be hard to account for if it weren't for Kaling's enduring buzz, fed by her canny presence on Twitter, where she has more than 2.7 million followers.

Kaling has always been a new-media natural. Back in 2006, while writing for *The Office*, Kaling gained a devoted online following despite her character Kelly Kapoor's limited screen time via a blog called Things I've Bought That I Love. Reveling in her then-new L.A. lifestyle like Charlie

in the chocolate factory, Kaling wrote lovingly about hundred-dollar hairbrushes, sequined Christian Louboutins, and the Slanket, of which she was an early partisan. Reading Things I've Bought was like having the funniest, snarkiest best friend in the world, a brainy yet celebrity-obsessed girlie-girl who calls you up just to dish about Oprah's skincare regime. ("She looks like a bar of milk chocolate. I can't even deal.")

Over the course of her career, Kaling's girliness has evolved into a kind of performance art. *The Mindy Project*'s Dr. Mindy Lahiri, a successful gynecologist, may be oodles more competent than dim, shallow Kelly Kapoor, but her penchant for sequins, cupcakes, and Katy Perry remains unabashed. Other successful female showrunner/stars have downplayed their alter egos' femininity, like Tina Fey on *30 Rock*, or made it deliberately edgy and avant-garde, like Lena Dunham on *Girls*. *The Mindy Project* asks whether a broad network audience – including men – is ready to laugh at, and with, a female boss who loves pink and regularly dines in the American Girl tea room. That question likely won't be answered until spring.

Related Events

Running the Show: TV's New Queen of Comedy

Sunday, March 9, 11am
Austin Convention Center Ballroom D



Given her precarious position, we'll be listening closely to Kaling's words about new opportunities for women in digital markets. There's some reason to believe that online platforms might favor women and minorities. Where traditional broadcast TV favors safer, tried-and-true programming in its quest to attract the largest audience possible, online content – which needs only to find a niche to flourish – can afford to narrow its focus. The success of Jenji Kohan's *Orange Is the New Black* on Netflix proved that risky online programming can pay off, and more recently,

critical conversations about this season's Amazon original programming were dominated by another woman-run show – *Transparent*, by *United States of Tara* and *Six Feet Under* veteran Jill Soloway.

It would be a shame if *The Mindy Project*, which has loads of wit and charm, went off the air. On the other hand, it's hard to imagine that Kaling herself will ever go offscreen. ■

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How to Run a Very Successful Crowdfunding Scam

OR EPICALLY FAIL AT LAUNCHING A TECH PRODUCT

BY DAN GENTILE

The average Instagram user spends more than four hours a month looking at their friends' photos, so it's no surprise that a Kickstarter campaign promising to stream those photos into a digital picture frame would be a hit.

The product is Design to Matter's Instacube. When it launched on Kickstarter, the tech blogs went wild, backers tripled the donation goal to the tune of a whopping \$621,000, and Savannah Peterson, head of "PR and hustle," worked so hard on the project that she closed the campaign from the emergency room with a failing kidney.

But nearly a year after the product's promised ship date, only a handful of beta-testers have actually seen the Instacube, making for 3,000-plus very unhappy donors, whose constant stream of vitriol has led to the resignation of both Peterson and the chief product designer, and forced Peterson to deactivate her voicemail due to a barrage of hateful messages.

Peterson is sharing her story for the first time at SXSW in the panel "I Ran an Extremely Successful Crowdfunding Scam." The scintillating title implies escaping into anonymity with suitcases full of pledge dollars, but the reality is less *Catch Me if You Can* and more *Catch-22*.

"At no point was it ever intended to be a scam, but when you've put money behind a project and the communication has been ambiguous, it makes it hard not to feel like you've been scammed," says Peterson.

So where did the money go? Confidentiality agreements keep Peterson from going too in-depth, but as Design to Matter realized the potential of the product, they spun it into a new company full of bureaucratic pitfalls and snowballing development costs. Other unexpected setbacks included a last-minute back-out by the factory in China and a worldwide shortage of LCD screens.

"The money was used for development; it went where they claimed," says Peterson. "But if the company was run in true start-

up fashion, an eating-ramen-style situation, the Instacube would've made it."

The latest stats from Kickstarter state that 44% of campaigns reach their goal, but there are no numbers on those that fail to fulfill their promises. Peterson says that 78% of funded tech products ship late, but she only knows of one instance of a blatant scam: a pair of video-recording eyeglasses called ZionEyez, whose creators have completely disappeared. Sadly, Kickstarter's terms of service offer backers little to no recourse, and there's yet to be a big enough case to warrant a class-action suit.

Although most online shoppers know a bogus vendor when they see one, in the sphere of crowdfunding, even those with the best intentions can sometimes fail to deliver. One of the goals of Peterson's SXSW appearance is to help show consumers how to identify unrealistic projects. "I'm not trying to smear the company I used to work for," she says. "The panel is mainly about educating people about the hardware development cycle, the problems of bringing something to market, and then letting people know when you should put your money into something."

One of the most important things to watch for is whether the company actually has a working prototype. If you don't see a video of someone interacting with the gadget or read a media report of a journalist testing it, then it's likely that the product is still in the very early stages. To help curb this pre-prototype promotion, Kickstarter has disallowed the use of renderings as primary campaign images, but be wary of anyone who makes computer models a big part of their presentation.

Another red flag has to do with how much money the creators are asking for. Consumer electronics companies spend enormous amounts of money to bring products to market, and while bootstrappers can often do so at a fraction of the cost, there's still a ton of money involved. Between



Below, a prototype of the Instacube, for which Savannah Peterson (left) was charged with doing PR



design costs, injection molding the physical body, manufacturing the chips, and paying a staff competitive tech industry salaries, the overhead is huge, and any unexpected production problem can cripple a project. "If what you're looking at has a computer chip inside, the person should probably be asking for \$500,000," says Peterson.

The lessons learned from Instacube's exorbitantly pricey path to market have led Peterson to join Shapeways, a company that connects scrappy entrepreneurs with cost-effective 3-D printing. It aims to be the Etsy of the 3-D printing world by serving as both a manufacturing hub and a marketplace for completed goods ranging from jewelry to robotics. Most vendors on the site have spent less than \$1,000 to start their businesses.

As for the Instacube, the latest updates from the development team claim that the beta testing is going smoothly and that the product could ship by the second quarter of 2014, but backers are still leaving daily comments accusing the company of being a scam. Peterson does believe that donors will eventually receive their Instacubes, but until people actually have the products in their hands, don't expect to be able to leave her a voicemail. ■

Related Events

The "Real" Crowdfunding Investment

Friday, March 7, 12:30pm
Hilton Austin Downtown Room 616AB

Ethics & Future of Crowdfunding for Communities

Friday, March 7, 12:30pm
Austin Convention Center Room 5ABC

I Ran an Extremely Successful Crowdfunding Scam

Sunday, March 9, 12:30pm
Hilton Austin Downtown Salon G

It Takes Money to Make Money: Alternative Funding

Tuesday, March 11, 11am
Hilton Austin Downtown Salon A

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The Flapper Era

WHAT 'FLAPPY BIRD' CAN TELL US ABOUT THE PRESENT AND FUTURE OF VIDEO GAMES

BY JAMES RENOVITCH

This is the story of *Flappy Bird*, a little game about flying and avoiding pipes – such a simple idea that enchanted the public, if only for a little while. Its rise was meteoric, its success inexplicable, and its disappearance confounding. Whatever *Flappy Bird*'s legacy might be when the dust settles is uncertain, but, if nothing else, it was a model of a modern major game release. Perhaps more importantly, it held up a mirror to the best and worst aspects of gaming culture. But did we learn anything?

The Rise

The biggest mystery of *Flappy Bird* is why it became popular in the first place. Some chalk it up to some unknowable recipe for virulence that made the game exceptionally sharable. Sure, a \$0 price point and having a cute bird protagonist can't hurt, but there are oodles of gratis aviary options that never take flight. More jaded critics claimed *Flappy Bird*'s creator, Dong Nguyen, cheated his way to the App Store's most-downloaded list (which makes a game infinitely more visible) by employing bots to download the game over and over. That accusation is difficult to prove, however.

Either way, it was the dream of wild success becoming reality ... again. Markus Persson, aka Notch, planted the seeds of such dreams in developers' heads when *Minecraft* went on to make him a household name with a heavily comm'd income. Before the age of DIY publishing on mobile devices, success on that scale was thought to be limited to large teams with hefty marketing budgets. Nowadays, anyone can submit their creation to one of several stores that distribute to phones and tablets everywhere. This increasingly egalitarian marketplace is mirrored on the development side as tools to make games require less formal training. Zoe Quinn, co-presenter of "Riot Nrrrd: The DIY Future of Games" panel, sees this as inherently good: "That's really opening the door to who has the skill set to make games and making that barrier to entry lower and lower." Nguyen may not be the perfect case study for this leveling of the playing field, but there's no denying he benefited from the market doors being so wide open and putting a largely unremarkable game in front of millions of people.

The Reaction

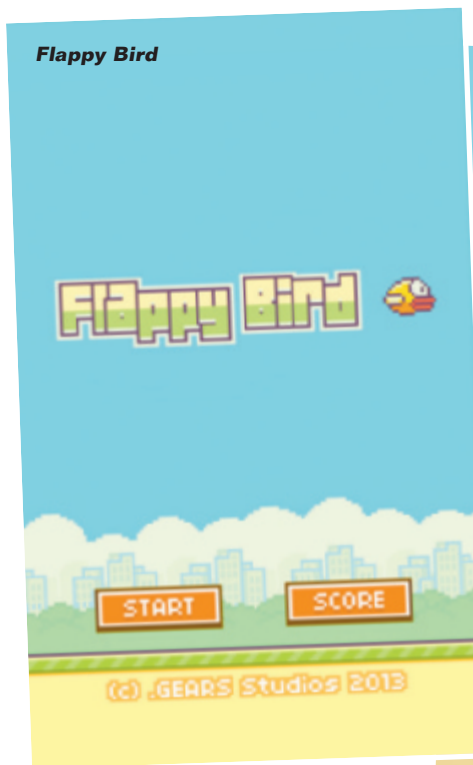
With great popularity comes great blowback, and those forces tend to even out. To balance the \$50,000 Nguyen was reportedly making per day from ads in his game, the response was laden with bile. Twitter oozed with complaints that it was too hard, too frustrating, or too addictive, three attributes that are just as often used to paint quick-play games in a positive light. Accusations arose of Nguyen's pipes too closely resembling the iconic pipes found in *Super Mario Bros*. But if every game using

imagery, tropes, or gameplay from classic Nintendo titles were yanked from the market, gaming libraries would be gutted.

Some of the people with *Flappy Bird* in their crosshairs were fellow developers who couldn't help but come off as jealous even if they made valid critiques. Another vocal group of detractors were avid gamers who have earned a reputation for often personal and ugly vitriol. In the past year alone, the seedy underbelly of gaming culture has surfaced more than a few times. Take Anita Sarkeesian, whose webseries on sexist tropes in video games was well-researched and eye-opening. However, some individuals wanted to remain blind and responded to her videos with personal threats of violence and death. Instances of outing trans individuals or displaying woeful and willful ignorance of gender identity were also shockingly commonplace. Some gamers just don't like having their subculture "threatened" by would-be interlopers. It's a shame, since the term "gamer" continues to broaden in scope with each passing year to include just about everyone to some degree.

Power fantasies have long been a popular mode of play, and posting opinions online can be seen as another mode of that false empowerment. It often takes the form of attacks on those with opinions outside the norm. And the norm on the development side is still white and male. What's the point of breaking down barriers to making and distributing games if the sign on the door still says "No girls or minorities allowed"? *Canabalt* and *Hundreds* designer Adam Saltsman – who openly admits to being a white male – strangely came up against this invisible barrier, when he asked female artists via Twitter to submit résumés for possible collaboration on a future project.

Claims of reverse sexism soon followed. These reactions obviously ignore decades of hostility toward a minority in the industry, but Saltsman also saw the call as much about encouraging women to apply as it was about improving the quality of the final product. "When you see studios push back against those trends in a notable way ... the work that they make is really remarkable." Saltsman points to *Gone Home* and *Journey* as examples. "Are things better than they've ever been? It kinda feels like it. Are they good enough? No."

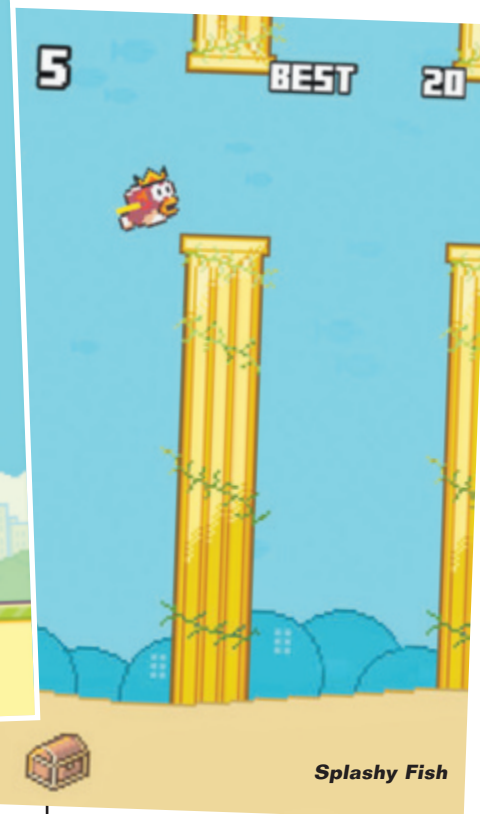


The Game

So, what makes this bird flap? Critically speaking, the game is made for short bursts of play with each round lasting little more than a few seconds. The controls consist of tapping to make your bird thrust upward. That's it. It's accessible and understandable to a wide audience without hand-holding. The design is generically retro, and the difficulty goes from zero to impossible in about two flaps. Does it revolutionize the industry? Not at all. Is it destroying the very fiber that great designers have sown over decades of game creation? Certainly not any more than other popular games like *Candy Crush Saga* or *Angry Birds*.

But what about the medium as a whole? Should the goal be interactive cinema like the big-budget *The Last of Us*, or does the focus need to shift to what makes video games unique from other art forms, namely systems and mechanics? *Flappy Bird*, while not the most elegant example, belongs largely in the latter category. The story arc is all but spoiled in the title. The real reason to play is not the story. It's to perfect the mechanic of flapping.

Beneath the best examples of narrative-centric video games lies the fact that interactive media has two authors: the creator and the player. Even with innovations in storytelling like *Mass Effect* that offer decisions and consequences, there continue to be awkward moments when actions during a massive shoot-out are ignored in cinematic portions to keep the plot moving. Indie developer Shay Pierce, who will sit on the panel "The Narrative Debate in Game Design" sees a happy middle ground, "Games as story-generators instead of just storytellers is their strength." In other words, finding ways to let players create their own unique stories



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Learning From the Space Between Digital & Paper

Saturday, March 8, 11am
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Riot Nrrrd: The DIY Future of Games

Saturday, March 8, 2pm
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Saga of the Banner Saga

Saturday, March 8, 3:30pm
Long Center AT&T Education Room

The Narrative Debate in Game Design

Sunday, March 9, 3:30pm
Long Center Kodosky Donor Lounge

within a system of rules embraces the nature of the art form while still spinning an engrossing yarn.

Whereas books are uniquely equipped to tell a character's internal story, and movies show action well, games are equipped to evoke feelings of empathy. Zoe Quinn's *Depression Quest* and Lucas Pope's *Papers, Please* both place players in unfortunate circumstances, but instead of overcoming the odds in a blaze of bullet-strewn glory, one leaves with a sense of what it is to live with inescapable depression or to make difficult decisions that gravely affect others.

Perhaps something worth striving for lies at the other end of the "purpose of gaming"

spectrum, too. Saltsman plays devil's advocate and posits another aim for the medium put forth by academics like Frank Lantz and Jesper Juul. "We could be aspiring to soccer or chess," Saltsman says. "Why would you even try to tell artistic stories when you could be helping to create a new human activity that would change millions of peoples lives forever?"

The Disappearance

When we left him, Nguyen was making money hand over fist and becoming an overnight sensation, for better or worse. Just when *Flappy Bird*'s popularity began to peak, rumblings cropped up on Twitter. Nguyen's tweets between Feb. 4 and 8 show a downward spiral:

Press people are overrating the success of my games. It is something I never want. Please give me peace.

I can call 'Flappy Bird' is a success of mine. But it also ruins my simple life. So now I hate it.

I am sorry 'Flappy Bird' users, 22 hours from now, I will take 'Flappy Bird' down. I cannot take this anymore.

True to his word, on Feb. 9 the game was gone.

The Imitators

That sucking sound you hear is millions of people Googling "Flappy Bird" only to realize that bird has flown. The vacuum created by the game's removal was quickly filled the next day. The top free apps consist of *Splashy Fish - The Adventure of a Flappy Tiny Bird Fish*, *City Bird - Flappy Flyer*, and *Fly Birdie - Bird Flyer*. Needless to say, those titles look strikingly similar to the original.

The App Store remains the holy grail for independent developers, but it's also the Wild West. Cloning runs rampant, as teams capitalize on what's popular at any given moment and make a quick buck - or a few million bucks, for that matter. Apple takes action against some of the more egregious offenders, but the volume of imitators flooding the market make it a Sisyphean task.

King - creators of another viral hit, *Candy Crush Saga* - decided to fight its army of imitators with legal action. The company notoriously trademarked the words "candy" and "saga" and sent notices that games using those words would be subject to lawsuits if they didn't cease and desist. The clones of *Candy Crush* are admittedly legion, but this blanket action drew the ire of indies whose games had no resemblance to *Candy Crush* and couldn't possibly pay court fees against a money monster like King. Is trademarking the only way to end the clone wars? Is it possible to trademark the act of flapping? "A patent system should exist, but I've seen that system abused so badly I wouldn't want to see it introduced to game design," Pierce admits. "I'd rather err on the side of saying ideas are free, even though it's frustrating."

The Solidarity

Lest you feel too badly for Nguyen, he continues to make profits off ad impressions from the millions of devices that downloaded *Flappy Bird* before its disappearance. His unique rise to fame and press attention has only served to grow his mystique. Whatever Nguyen decides to do next will have the eyes of the world on it.

Soon after *Flappy Bird* flew away, notable developers surfaced with encouraging words. A few developers went so far as to create games as homage to the fallen flapper. Terry Cavanagh made *Maverick Bird* in the style of his frustratingly hard, arcade-style game *Super Hexagon*. Free to play and sans ads, Cavanagh wasn't making any money from his iteration on Nguyen's creation, but made it clear that the original wasn't without its merits. Saltsman also got in on the fun, making a mash-up of *Flappy Bird* and his game *Canabalt: Flappybalt*.

In a medium rife with trolls, clones, and artistic corruption is the pot of gold at the end of the often shitty rainbow worth it? Zoe Quinn seems to think so. "One of the reasons I stick around is because I'm surrounded by these people who take this medium that I love with my entire being and do amazing things with it." ■



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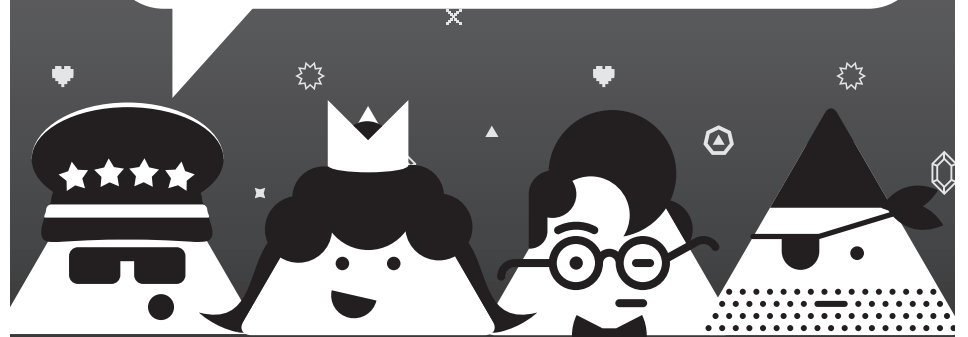
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Navigating the New Handmade Economy

Sunday, March 9, 11am
Omni Downtown Lone Star

Maker Culture & Digital Marketing

Monday, March 10, 11am
Omni Downtown Longhorn

It's Do or DIY

WHETHER QUIET PROTEST OR PARADIGM SHIFT, THE HANDMADE CROWD HAS PLENTY TO SAY

BY BRANDON WATSON

The cultural obsession with all things knitted, pickled, hand-stitched, and potato-stamped has now been around long enough to become joke fodder. *Portlandia* reworked its “The Dream Is Alive” sketch for a generation turning back the clock to the 1890s. April Winchell made it a cottage industry in her now-defunct Regretsy blog. The pop culture mockery is telling. Do-it-yourself is no longer a fad; it’s a national fixation.

So it should not be surprising that several panels at the touchscreen-devoted SXSW Interactive Conference are dedicated to the idea of getting more hands-on. But it does provide a snapshot of how comfortably handmade now fits with tech. What constitutes the “yourself” part of DIY is expanding. Increasingly inexpensive 3-D printers allow home users to manufacture gewgaws with no trace of homespun texture. “Printables,” fair use templates for cards, labels, and decor, have become a favorite craft. Handmade today could just as easily mean using a laser-cutter as a crochet needle.

The definition of “yourself” is expanding in other ways, too. If not always a solitary activity, DIY has always been intimate – slow work done at family gatherings or quilting bees. But all of the panels use language suggesting a larger community. It’s a “movement,” even a “democracy.” If the current form of DIY started as a form of quiet protest, it’s now found a way to influence the larger culture.

One panel, “How the DIY Movement Is Reinventing America,” evokes revolution. Looking at GE, Apple, and Motorola’s ten-

tative return to U.S. manufacturing, VentureBeat Editor-in-Chief Dylan Tweney sees a new American willingness to “get our hands dirty.” In the video introduction to his panel, he sees connections between the way America participates in hobbies and how it creates work. Tweney’s panel seeks to answer if maker fervor can shift the job landscape, considering if vocational education and entrepreneurial fellowships can lift the U.S. out of economic malaise.

Another panel, “Maker Culture & Digital Marketing,” suggests that DIY has already shifted the economy. It’s in the way that consumers can interact with brands, sharing a virtual, personalized Coke or map-

ping a theoretical route for the Nissan Rogue. In this way, brands can target a specific demographic or take advantage of social media chatter, like with the much-

shared rainbow-striped cookie and Super Bowl “You can still dunk in the dark” memes from Oreo. It’s even in the way Kickstarter campaigns are now just as likely to fund products as culture. Recently, the 3Doodler raised more than \$2 million toward its goal of creating a 3-D printing pen. If consumerism is increasingly personalized, where is the room for traditional, broad-appeal brands?

The burgeoning business of TechShop should have those in the traditional economy worried. Its seven (and counting) locations give anyone who can afford the monthly fee access to equipment once well out of public reach. Each location is packed

with tools ranging from powder-coating guns to industrial sergers. Much of what consumers can buy at big-box stores can be approximated in their studios, but without “one size fits all” specifications.

TechShop CEO Mark Hatch’s panel, “Maker Democracy Spurs Innovation,” suggests that the maker spirit can drive American entrepreneurship. And it’s another indicator of how far the contemporary DIY ethos has veered from its hippie and punk roots. Modern makers dream big – not so much seeking an anarchic destruction of the American corporate culture as the creation of a whole new paradigm.

That’s not to say that the new paradigm doesn’t have room for artisanal furniture, recycled fiber scarves, and the rest of the traditional domain of DIY. Even the most accidental example of *wabi-sabi* is now finding an audience through algorithms. Etsy is of course the largest of the online marketplaces, but its imitators – Ravelry and BurdaStyle – have attracted large user bases, too. They have also attracted raiders. Urban Outfitters in particular has been accused of stealing everything from punk rock sock monkeys to state-shaped pendants from crafters. “Navigating the New Handmade Economy” seeks to educate small-scale producers on the thornier issues of DIY culture and how to use networking to their advantage.

There’s no doubt that jokes will still be cracked. DIY culture still has one foot stuck in the retro and twee. But the movement is also on the leading edge of what can be done with technology. Innovation always seems a little silly until it gets the last laugh. ■

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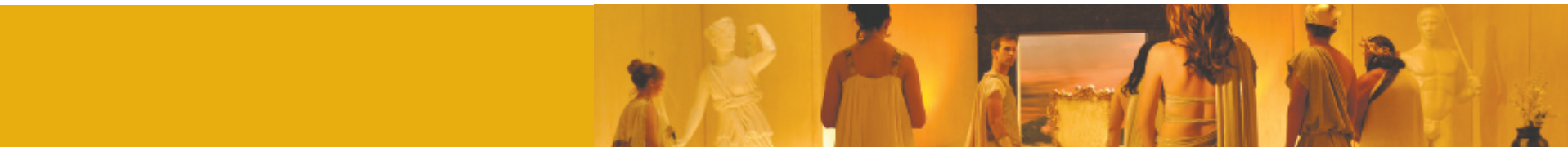
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MEET THE SLAM-DUNK SPEAKERS OF SXSPORTS

BY CHASE HOFFBERGER

Other panels may boast more prominent speakers – Bill Simmons, Nate Silver, and the U.S. Men’s Soccer coach Jürgen Klinsmann, among them – but the enduring title from the initial SXSports panel list remains a small session hosted by a South Dakotan named John Meyer.

“Sports Don’t Look the Same Anymore” is the name. Though Meyer – who founded Lemonly, a visual marketing firm specializing in infographics and data visualization with a soft spot for sports, in 2011 – plans to center his particular session around those visualizations and the way we look at statistics in all sports, he’s talking about the trajectory that every vertical of the ever-burgeoning industry’s taking.

Consider, for example, the way we look at ticket prices. Barry Kahn of QCue, an Austin company, has worked with D-1 universities and teams in both Major League Baseball and the NBA to institute a theory of ticket pricing that revolves around flexibility and filling up venues “so that everyone’s happy,” introducing a back-end solution to ticket vendors that slides based on supply and demand. He says the industry’s evolution is just about halfway there, with tremendous changes to the monopolies that are ticket brokers coming in the very near future.

“There’s going to be a 20-year-old kid who cracks the codes and figures out how to sell tickets on Facebook, turns your friends into group sales reps, and fills the stadium that way,” he hypothesizes. Once that happens, “you’ll see significantly less of a resale conversation.”

The Good-Samaritan goal there is to increase public desire to get out to a sporting event, something people have been doing less and less of since the advent of



high-definition TVs and the Internet, two entities that, along with the pause button and cheap nachos (not to mention a dearth of cheesy in-stadium promotions), have helped make the prospect of watching the game at home more attractive.

“The younger fan – the millennial – has a completely different background and outlook,” says Bryan Srabian, director of social media for baseball’s San Francisco Giants. “They’re wired a little different. From our end, we’re trying to obviously drive ticket sales, but also remind people that there

really is no better way to experience a baseball game than by being here. Part of our strategy is encouraging our fans to share that experience. Things like Instagram have become very big for us and our fans.”

Srabian says his team has employed a number of tactics to ensure that humans’ recently acquired addictions to their mobile phones benefit the Giants most fully.

“We’re trying to display not only the score and the happenings on the field, but the whole experience of being at the ballpark,” he says, noting that garlic fries and trending hashtags are now just as important as Pablo Sandoval and McCovey Cove. He points to the @Cafe, a social media command center cum coffee shop inside the stadium looking to get some interactive perspective on the ball game, as a prime example of the ways organizations are having to broaden their presentation.

“Part of our strategy around the Giants brand is ‘What is happening at AT&T Park?’” he adds. “That’s the music, the food, and the general ambience and atmosphere.”

It’s a thin line Srabian and his colleagues walk. As Mark Drosos suggests, that same strategy, when applied incorrectly, can wreak havoc on a fan’s experience: It’s hard to watch a game when you’re getting pummeled with free T-shirts shot from a miniature cannon wielded by a male cheerleader.

“The sponsorship in the corporate world overtook the stadiums, and there are developments in there specifically to drive sponsors that have nothing to do with fan engagement,” he says from here in Austin, where he heads up Lodestone Social Media. “[Promotions] have to be used widely to create an experience that you can’t get anywhere else.”

Drosos references the way the Seattle Seahawks built a football experience designed to enhance crowd interaction, with a stadium constructed to amplify natural noises and the home-game hoisting of the 12th Man flag.

“You don’t see many people looking down at their phones and tweeting at those games,” he says. The same goes for the fans who pack SEC football stadiums every weekend, one of the few divisions of ticketed sporting events where attendance is up across all entities.

Of course, it’s the student-athletes they’re all witnessing who make game day so excit-



Barry Kahn



John Meyer



Mark Drosos

ing – and deepen the pockets of the administrators and affiliates presenting the product in the process. No sport articulates the whoa-this-all-looks-different-these-days nature of sports quite like college football, a once-collegiate idea that’s blossomed into the only multibillion-dollar industry in the world that pays their public personalities – the players – no money.

Spencer Hall, the editorial director of the sports-centric SBNation website, believes we’re coming upon a time of significant change regarding the perception and treatment of the individuals the NCAA’s dubbed “student-athletes.” He thinks, should a few shoes fall over the next few years – former UCLA Bruin Ed O’Bannon’s antitrust class-action lawsuit challenging the NCAA to provide a graduated student with a trust of financial compensation for money made off his or her image, Northwestern football’s attempts to unionize, among others – we could be looking at a world in which it’s

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Where Are The Fans? What Happened to Traditions?

Sunday, March 9, 3:30pm
Driskill Hotel Jim Hogg Room

totally fine for Johnny Manziel to sign a few autographs for cash.

Hall believes the most likely scenario for athlete compensation will come by way of the Olympic athlete model, which allows athletes to sign off individually on sponsorships and endorsements.

“Let players make as many endorsements and as much off their image as they’d like,” he says. “It’s theirs. When people buy a Cam Newton Auburn jersey, none of that money went to Cam Newton. Johnny Manziel’s cash value to Texas A&M is insane, and he saw none of it.”

He acknowledges the insane number of moving pieces that must fall into place in order to bring appropriate compensation methods to the athletes, but he stresses a few important changes – a reformation of the NCAA, for one – that appear all but imminent.

“A lot of people say this will kill amateur athletics,” he says. “That’s the idea! What’s happening now isn’t moral. What’s happening now may not be legal. What’s happening now is unjust, and it will change significantly.”

Chances are Lemonly will find a way to track those sponsorship payouts and deduce proper player values through some smooth interactive graphics.

“You can tell a better story than just looking at an Excel sheet with rows and rows of data,” Meyer says. “Look at your average football fan, who’s grown up with John Madden and fantasy football. They probably view the game quite different than the grandpa who’s been a Steelers fan for 40 years.”

Look alive, gramps. The future’s now upon us. ■

The Good-Samaritan goal there is to increase public desire to get out to a sporting event, something people have been doing less and less of since the advent of high-definition TVs and the Internet.

0 Death, Here Is Thy Sting

LEVERAGING A SCORPION'S DEADLY SYNERGY IN THE BATTLE AGAINST CANCER

BY WAYNE ALAN BRENNER

Some things on this planet are beautiful but deadly. Some things on this planet are deadly and *ugly*. Let's acknowledge scorpions, the frightening arachnid staple of many a spaghetti Western, as one of the former; among the latter, of course, is cancer.

How odd (or maybe appropriate), then, that when you're looking for a way to combat cancerous tumors that occur beyond the human blood-brain barrier, it turns out that your best bet may lie within the venom of Israel's Deathstalker scorpion.

That's what pediatric neurosurgeon and cancer researcher Jim Olson and his team (of humans *and* scorpions, we imagine) have been developing: the peptide chlorotoxin, part of the chemical cocktail that makes the Deathstalker such a dangerous creature, that can be used to smuggle luminescent molecules past the brain's meticulously guarded border and then selectively bind those molecules to cancer cells – and *only* cancer cells.

This means that, when you've opened up a living skull and are scalpeling around in somebody's delicate gray matter, trying to excise the diseased parts and leave the healthy parts intact, you're not just making best guesses based on what *might* be discernible on the recent MRI image displayed nearby. It means, instead, that every bit of compromised cerebral pudding that needs to be removed is conveniently *glowing* for you.

You don't need to be a neurosurgeon to realize how helpful – how much of a literal life-saver – this could be.

"Scorpions have been evolving over millions of years to make a drug that can get into the brain and paralyze the victim," Olson said during a lecture at 2013's PopTech convention. After adding a

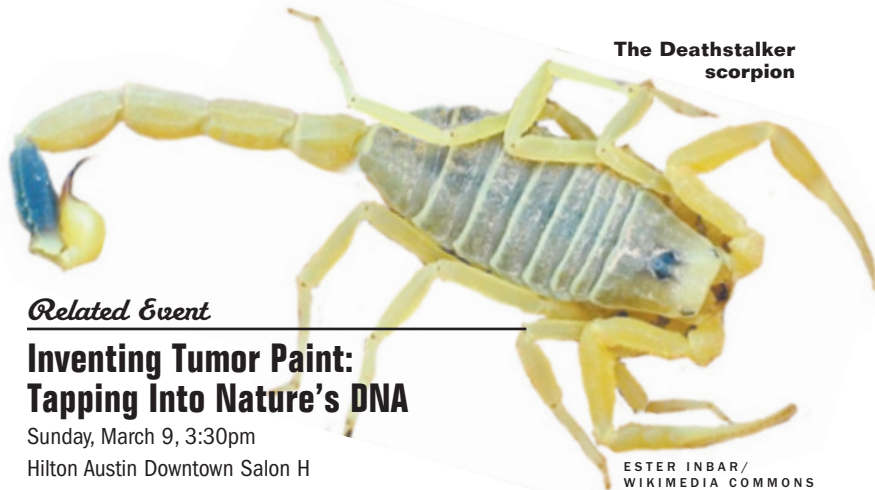


Jim Olson (center) and his team

decade's worth of human-based chemical fine-tuning to evolution's busy millennia, Olson calls the de-weaponized, cancer-targeting result Tumor Paint; and the stuff's been doing that whole with-flying-colors thing in clinical trials. It's also proving effective in "painting" prostate, breast, colon, skin, and other cancers.

How is this accomplished? And how is all this fierce industry being paid for? Olson, co-founder of the crowd-funded research initiative Project Violet, will be at SXSW Interactive this year to explain the technological processes and the Internet-enabled promise of what he calls "citizen science."

Note: We're not certain, at press time, if the good doctor will be bringing any actual Deathstalkers with him for demonstration, but we wouldn't rule that out entirely. Because, hey, it's South by Southwest. ■



The Deathstalker scorpion

Related Event

Inventing Tumor Paint: Tapping Into Nature's DNA

Sunday, March 9, 3:30pm
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NASA Wants You to Help Save the World

SPACE RETURNS AS THE FINAL FRONTIER OF INTERACTIVE PROGRAMMING

BY MICHAEL AGRESTA

Fans of late-Nineties Hollywood blockbusters have long harbored fantasies of saving humanity from killer asteroids, but these have historically involved getting launched into space with Ben Affleck or Bruce Willis and blasting the Earth-threatening rock to smithereens. Now, for those of us too busy to undergo astronaut training, NASA is offering a new, 21st century opportunity to help avert Armageddon: the Asteroid Grand Challenge. A useful contribution to the effort may even pay big money.

NASA representatives Jenn Gustetic and Jason Kessler are here at SXSW Interactive to recruit and encourage potential collaborators in this worldwide effort. Gustetic and Kessler have targeted the SXSW Interactive community because they'll especially need contributions from coders and developers. "We know we can't do it alone," says Gustetic. "We're using the Grand Challenge to say, 'Hey world, we're seeking your help.'"

As part of a Space Act Agreement with private space exploration firm Planetary Resources

announced last November, NASA will conduct the first online crowdsourcing activity associated with the Asteroid Grand Challenge in 2014. This first challenge in the series will invite competitors to write algorithms to analyze Catalina Sky Survey data and identify the most near-Earth asteroids possible in that dataset while minimizing false positives. Competitor algorithms will be tested against the professional astronomers and observatories who are currently surveying this data. Since competitors will use existing data and not be expected to make new observations themselves, "It creates a pretty low barrier to entry for folks to contribute to solving this higher-level problem of protecting the planet from asteroid threats," Gustetic says.

Though official details for this challenge have not been released yet, NASA expects to engage the computer-science community through websites like TopCoder and InnoCentive. "There may be really interesting ways to bring in a coder or computer-science perspective, bring their experience and worldview to approach this in a different way," Kessler says.

Looking forward, the opportunities to contribute will be wide-ranging. Information professionals could potentially pitch in by developing programs to better network telescopes together, or even just by helping

with basic Web accessibility and user-friendliness. "We could use help with a more elegant graphic user interface, all the way up to hardcore algorithm development," Kessler says.

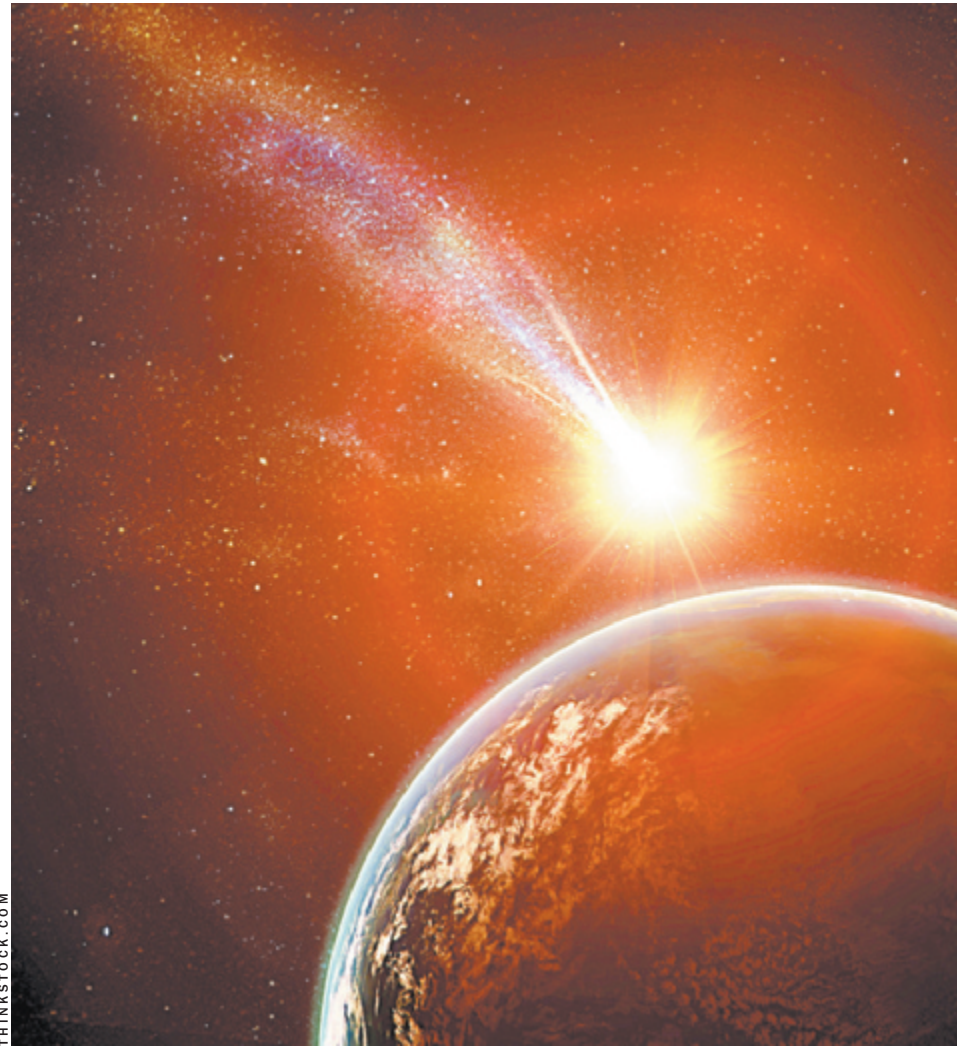
"We haven't prebaked this thing," Kessler adds. "We've just put out the challenge and invited people. We're totally open to people coming in and coming up with a solution that we haven't even considered yet."

No prize purses have yet been announced, but they will be part of the mix. NASA has been crowdsourcing an increasing share of its science for a decade now, though the Asteroid Grand Challenge will be the most sustained effort so far around a specific subject area. Success stories of past crowdsourcing initiatives include the 2011 Green Flight Challenge, which was won by a group that managed to fly an aircraft 200 miles on about a half-gallon of gas per passenger. Gustetic calls it "a Lindbergh moment for green aviation." The winners took home \$1.35 million.

Gustetic and Kessler's SXSW Interactive Panel "Are We Smarter Than the Dinosaurs?" will introduce the Grand Challenge paradigm and the specific hazards and opportunities presented by asteroids. In addition to working to avert a catastrophic collision, NASA also has an eye on asteroids as potential avenues for exploration. In a recent press release touting their partnership in the Asteroid Grand Challenge, Planetary Resources expressed a hope that asteroids would provide the basis for a "sustainable, even indefinite presence in space" both for research and commerce.

Gustetic and Kessler won't be the only panelists at SXSW Interactive talking about the future of space exploration. In addition to Saturday keynote speaker Neil deGrasse Tyson, space programming includes Astrotech's Thomas Pickens on space tech start-ups, Jason Kalirai from the Space Telescope Science Institute talking about the James Webb Space Telescope and life on other planets, Earth Space's Ruben Nunez on collaborative public-private partnerships for "the new space economy," and a live Q&A with astronauts in orbit, coordinated by NASA social media manager John Yembrick.

Gustetic and Kessler's panel addresses perhaps the most immediately vital concern: the preservation of our species. But it's also about the potential of humans to come together to solve our biggest, most threatening problems – the sort of thing



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"We know we can't do it alone. We're using the Grand Challenge to say, 'Hey world, we're seeking your help.'" – Jenn Gustetic of NASA

that separates us from the Earth's previous inhabitants, or so we'd like to think.

"Survival is its own reward," Gustetic says. "The importance of the Grand Challenge is self-evident in avoiding the fate of the dinosaurs. But the power of engaging a passionate citizenry in the space program, democratizing space, is such an incredible message. I believe we're going to unlock so much innovation and increase the power of individuals to impact the future of humanity in really meaningful ways." ■

Related Events

Taking the Collaborative Economy to Space

Friday, March 7, 3:30pm
Omni Downtown Lone Star

Space Tech Startups That Will Change Everything

Friday, March 7, 5pm
Omni Downtown Lone Star

Live From Space! Talk With Astronauts in Orbit

Saturday, March 8, 11am
Omni Downtown Capital Ballroom

First Signs: Finding Life on Other Planets

Sunday, March 9, 12:30pm
Omni Downtown Lone Star

Are We Smarter Than the Dinosaurs?

Monday, March 10, 9:30am
Omni Downtown Capital Ballroom

Picture This

HOW IS OUR OBSESSION WITH PHOTOGRAPHY CHANGING AN ENTIRE INDUSTRY?

BY JOE O'CONNELL

I will snap a photo today; I bet you will, too.

By Instagram's last estimate, users post 55 million photos each day. Instagram owner Facebook has that beat with an estimated daily haul of 350 million pics. Daily photo takers like me congregate on sites like Blipfoto and Yahoo's acquisition, the dinosaur Flickr (it was founded in 2004; Instagram in 2010). It's all digital and largely coming from iPhones, Androids, and iPads.

"People are communicating through images," says Kira Pollack, *Time* magazine's director of photography. "That's different. This is what technology has allowed to happen. I think photography is bringing people together."

Consider the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. Pollack was with *The New York Times Magazine* then, and she remembers pro photographers shot on film and had to hand rolls across the barricades. By the time troops arrived in Afghanistan, photographers were shooting with newfangled digital cameras. "They had to learn that on the fly while photographing a really tough story," Pollack says.

Pollack joins Associated Press chief photographer David Guttenfelder and Instagram community manager Dan Toffey for the panel "Instagramming the News," something that Pollack and *Time* did indeed choose to do in 2012 when Hurricane Sandy battered the East Coast. She gave five shooters direct access to the magazine's Instagram feed and the assignment to shoot away with their iPhones. It wasn't about following a trend, Pollack insists; it was about the reality of a potential power outage and the need for speed in an era where fusty print magazines are turning more and more to the Internet. Michael Christopher Brown was up to his waist in water, the inky night around him, and took a low-light shot that *Time* used in print. Another iPhone pic by Benjamin Lowy made the cover. "Everything is getting faster and faster," Pollack says. "It's exciting that it's happening so quickly. It's all about the immediacy of getting a story to an audience."

But Pollack doesn't believe the simple-to-use iPhone technology is yet at a point where it can replace bulky DSLR cameras. Nor does taking a lot of photos qualify you as a photojournalist. "It's brought more people to photography," she says. "That's great, but it's hard to be a professional photojournalist. It takes experience and a lot of blood, sweat, and tears."

In "How Visual Life Logging Is Changing Photography," David McNamara of Iris Worldwide will discuss digital photography taken to an extreme. Since November, an Autographer camera attached to his shirt has been clicking two photos every minute

Related Events

How Visual Life Logging Is Changing Photography

Saturday, March 8, 5:30pm
Austin Convention Center
Ballroom E

Instagramming the News

Sunday, March 9, 5pm
Austin Convention Center Room
18ABCD

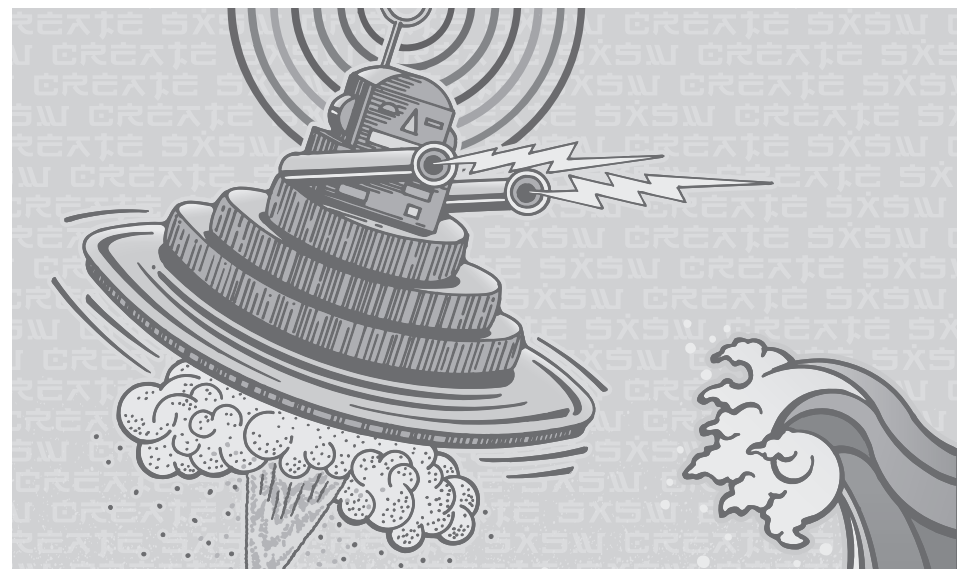
Shelves to Space: What Images Say About Our World

Tuesday, March 11, 12:30pm
Omni Downtown Longhorn

with an expectation of 500,000 photos taken in six months. "People always ask what and why I am doing it," McNamara says. "There is always a look of curiosity and slight apprehension. A market stall trader was visibly upset I was logging my interaction with her. A colleague pointedly turned away from me in a meeting. Tube commuters eyed me suspiciously. And family and friends laughed nervously about my nerdy project. Generally, my visual life logging was slightly divisive and parked in the 'weird' box when discussed."

What does it actually mean to photograph your life? "Photos are like sponges, taking on new data as they travel through the Web, tags, likes, comments," McNamara says. "This additional data can shape a new meta narrative beyond the original photo. I guess at a simple level, as someone who takes a lot of photos anyway, I wanted to search for the boundaries of understanding and capturing the reality of what 'capturing every moment of your life' actually means."

Consider Abraham Zapruder's home movie of the Kennedy assassination 50 years ago. It took days for *Life* magazine to buy it, and the photos didn't appear until a week after the event. Pollack recently got a call out of the blue from the daughter of a man who had taken photos of the Kennedy motorcade in Dallas. The pictures sat in a box for decades until after the amateur photographer's death. One ended up on *Time*'s cover. "It was amazing," Pollack says. "There was Jackie in her pink suit. There were happy photos shot right before the fateful moment. They were valuable because there were so few of them. It's such a different world." ■



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#TheWorstPeopleInTheWorld

MILLENNIALS HAVE GOTTEN A PRETTY BAD RAP, BUT DO THEY DESERVE IT?

BY MELANIE HAUPT

Millennials: How do they work? While we wring our hands about how the kids these days have departed Facebook, leaving it overrun by The Olds in favor of Snapchat and Tumblr and God knows what else, other folks are looking at the professional and cultural implications of this particular generation's emergence into the workplace. Beyond deciphering how teens and young adults use social media or working the next marketing angle to separate them from their precious dollars, some of the most interesting conversations about Generation Y (people born between about 1980 and 2000) center on how well-positioned they are to change the world of work – or just plain change the world.

Clearly, social media is the obvious starting point. Yes, social media is where teens blow off steam via a series of weirdly complicated social codes and interpersonal Gordian knots, which youth expert danah boyd will explain in her talk, "It's Complicated: Teens' Social Media Practices." But for many, technology is the proving ground for organizing and developing leadership skills.

Simone Bernstein, a student at St. Bonaventure University and co-founder of VolunTEEN Nation, argues that teens and

young adults can use social media and technology for something more meaningful than sharing inappropriate selfies. "The tools needed in the global society of the 21st century involve taking initiative, solving problems, and generating new ideas," she writes via email. "Characteristics of the millennial generation include a greater familiarity with communication and digital technologies, which are strengthening relationships and allowing communities to grow and develop. Millennials are using these skills to make a difference in their communities and defy conventional wisdom."

Bernstein will participate in the panel, "The Kids Are All Right: Youth Activists Online," which is concerned with the ways in which young adults can harness the power of their communities via social media to effect change. Her organization, VolunTEEN Nation, helps connect teenagers across the country with volunteer opportunities that will help them "address societal challenges, solve problems, and heal divisions in the world."

"When youth solve problems," she explains, "they feel empowered, and communities cultivate future generations of individuals committed to unraveling global challenges."



Simone
Bernstein



Jennifer
Selke

Such skills are also portable into the work context, which is what interests Jennifer Selke, who will present "Millennials as Supervisors: Strategies for Success." Selke, an educational psychologist and summer camp director, is also interested in how teens and young adults use social media and technology, but within the context of their overall portfolio as future functioning adults.

"Millennials are eager to do well and make an impact," says Selke. Digital natives who have been shaped not only by the instant gratification of the Internet but also

by a culture that gave them trophies just for showing up, millennials don't go in for hierarchies or paying dues: They want to jump in and take charge on day one. "They care deeply about doing work that is meaningful, but few workplaces know how to manage workers for optimal engagement," Selke warns. "Where I think millennials will make the biggest impact is in their intolerance of being unhappy at work. Companies that have been able to get by with a workforce waiting for that gold watch and pension are going to have to pay more attention to workers' well-being."

Brain Busters

ADAM SAVAGE ON THE HUMAN CAPACITY FOR KNOWLEDGE

BY CHASE HOFFBERGER

How does the most witty and reputable problem-solver on TV stay focused while filming three storylines and sorting through a thousand different details each week? Evernote. That's right, the unconscionably intelligent Adam Savage uses an iOS organizational app just like you and me, and writes down every menial chore from "Get the eggs" to "Debunk that myth that's been riddling society since 1759."

"The fact that I can access it on my iPad, iPhone, or any computer I have access to radically increases my ability to update and keep current with the information I've been updating," he says.

Call it a second brain.

Much of Savage's need for such a tool derives entirely from his affinity for sorting out a series of suppositions at once. As co-host of the Discovery Channel's *MythBusters*, he's acutely aware of the human race's capacity for knowledge and the necessity to incorporate external resources for added

judiciousness where necessary. We spoke with Savage about what we as humans are completely capable of – and where we need some help.

Austin Chronicle: How much can the human brain carefully consider at once?

Adam Savage: Only one thing at a time. The trick is being able to switch gears. As I get older – I'm breathing down the neck of 50 years old – I need more infrastructure to help me shift gears. That means I do a lot more writing now than I used to, simply because I'm working on more projects and telling more elaborate stories. I need to review my notes a lot more often in order to make sure that I'm telling the stories the way I want.

AC: Is it safe to assume that you are regularly considering a truly awesome amount of things?

AS: That is commensurate with always thinking about how to tell a story about each thing through science. We're filming



three stories this week, which is semi-common. The real challenge is always to finish by the end of the day, make sure you've told a reasonable story, make sure you've got all the clarity so that the audience knows what's going on, and make sure to keep it fresh. I've started to go out on set with a list of things I want to get from myself in terms of pieces to go on camera and bits of the story. At the end of the day, it's never what I'd planned for at the beginning of the day, but it's roughly analogous.

Related Event

The Maker Age: Enlightened Views on Science & Art

Monday, March 10, 2pm
Austin Convention Center Exhibit Hall 5

AC: If I'm sitting on my couch and a curiosity pops into my head and I go to my phone to try to sort the curiosity out, is that a sufficient method for retaining information?

AS: I think it changes as you get older. I've been looking at studies that point out how the trope of older people forgetting things more often is actually just that their brains are packed with way more information. I took that to heart to start to write stuff down. If what you're asking is the difference between research and trying something out, Jamie [Hyneman, Savage's co-host on *MythBusters*] and I are massive adherents to the Get Your Hands Dirty school. You can read about the hardness of metals all you want, but until you've turned a hacksaw into a lock spring, you really don't understand it.

AC: Your show is based on the fact that humans are prone to certain superstitions, or at the very least, to accepting facts based on little to no evidence. Have we grown too gullible? Is gullibility even that bad a trait?

Just as engagement is key when it comes to attracting millennial eyeballs, energy, and dollars, the workplace or nonprofit that wants to retain, motivate, and mentor high-quality millennial leaders will find itself adapting to a generation of workers looking to make meaning out of both their work and leisure time.

Related Events

Millennials as Supervisors: Strategies for Success

Friday, March 7, 3:30pm
 Courtyard Austin Downtown Rio Grande Ballroom

It's Complicated: Teens' Social Media Practices

Saturday, March 8, 12:30pm
 Sheraton Austin Capitol ABCD

Why Your Non-Profit Needs Millennials

Monday, March 10, 11am
 Austin Convention Center Ballroom F

Generation Mash-Up: Y Bother?

Monday, March 10, 12:30pm
 Austin Convention Center Exhibit Hall 5

The Kids Are All Right: Youth Activists Online

Tuesday, March 11, 5pm
 Austin Convention Center Room 10AB

AS: One of the reasons that theories and facts get propagated is because humans are natural storytellers and story receivers. It is absolutely inherent in our genetics to tell stories and parse the world with stories. Saying "that rock is hard" isn't as visceral as getting hit in the head with that rock. When we encounter a story that's counterintuitive in an entertaining way, it tends to stick with us. Or if it helps to parse the world in a way we already expect it, biases kick in and we don't necessarily end up looking for evidence. But I think the proclivity isn't necessarily a need to believe in stuff without evidence. It's a need to have a good story to go with the intuition.

The second part of that is believing in stories despite evidence to the contrary. That's the problem. I still think it's a relatively small faction of humans who believe ridiculous things despite evidence to the contrary, but they can be very dangerous. You can't go around believing the world is 6,000 years old and then go get into an airplane and fly. The same types of investigation that have allowed us to understand that the age of the world is 4.5 billion years is exactly the line of investigation that allows us to inflate an aluminum bubble and fly it across the sky. These things are not mutually exclusive, and you cannot cherry-pick your science.

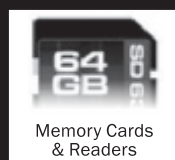
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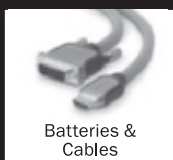
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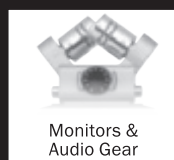
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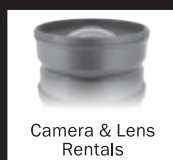
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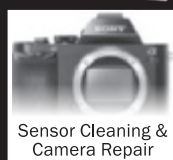
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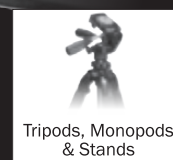
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The Future of Food Is Now

FROM DRONES TO CRICKET FLOUR TO APPS DESIGNED TO MAKE FOOD DESERTS EXTINCT, SOCIAL JUSTICE IS AT THE INTERSECTION OF FOOD AND TECHNOLOGY

BY MELANIE HAUPT

Foams are cute. A dish featuring antelope served nine ways is innovative. But while many of us are getting fat off of what emerges from the imaginations of our favorite chefs, we are increasingly outnumbered by those who not only don't have access to haute cuisine, but have little access to much cuisine at all. Even as you read this, no matter where you are, there is someone not far from you who won't get enough to eat today. This is a problem many members of the tech industry want to rectify, starting at the farm and ending at the plate.

The first step, argues Dr. Dev Shrestha, associate professor of agriculture at the University of Idaho, is to incorporate robotics into the work of farming. Shrestha, along with a panel of agriculture journalists and digital technology experts, will pose the question "Can Robots Feed the World?" in their panel. The answer may be yes: Through the use of drones, farmers can apply fungicides and pesticides with more precision to their crops, as well as use wearable technology to collect and analyze data related to weather and soil conditions. In addition to added benefits to the environment by precision-applied chemicals and increased crop yields through the use of robotically sourced data, Shrestha believes that this technology will attract younger generations to farming. "The average age of a farmer today is 56," he says. "The new kids view agriculture as labor-intensive, not lucrative, and mundane. With these new technologies, there is a much higher interest in agriculture among the younger generations." Incorporating robotic technology into agriculture not only helps generate more food for hungry people, it also ensures the longevity of the small-farm industry.

Moving from the Midwest to Silicon Valley, another kind of small farm comes into focus: cricket farms. Entomophagy (eating bugs) is a hot topic these days, especially as we face the harsh reality of a global popula-



tion of 9 billion people by 2050. That many people requires a lot of grub, and according to the panelists of "Hacking Meat: Why Insects Are the Future of Food," the answer lies in grubs. And ants. And crickets.

"Basically, what we are talking about is disrupting the food system," says panelist Megan Miller. The former pastry chef, organic farmer, and digital editor now runs Bitty Foods, a start-up dedicated to developing baking mixes made with cricket flour. "This is an area of disruption where we can use some of the same innovation principles that we've been using for software to solve a much larger problem, which is how to feed people. We're using some of the principles of rapid prototyping and iterative development that we used in software to be able to iterate quickly and solve some of the logistical problems of bringing insects into the food system."

You might think that, given the high ick factor, Americans wouldn't be interested in eating bugs apart from taking high-stakes dares or being Andrew Zimmern. But you'd be wrong, especially when chocolate-chip

cookies are involved. "When I started this company a year and a half ago, I thought I was going to have to make a huge investment in marketing and branding," says Miller. "But so far, anecdotally, I'm pushing off demand more than I'm trying to create it." Be on the lookout for opportunities to taste bug-based foods – which, by the way, are gluten-free and fit quite nicely into the paleo diet – during SXSXW Interactive.

But what about those folks who aren't so much concerned with cricket-flour muffins or the paleo diet and are instead faced with the daily challenge of access to food that doesn't come in a wrapper or isn't dusted with nuclear-orange cheese powder? That's where Kel Smith comes in. He founded Anikto, a company dedicated to finding ways to use technology to remove barriers separating people from basic needs.

Smith, who will talk on "Pixels, Plows & Personas: The UX of Food Deserts," developed the Aisle Won app, which is designed to connect people in food deserts with fresh,

Related Events

Pixels, Plows & Personas: The UX of Food Deserts

Saturday, March 8, 11am
Austin Convention Center Ballroom E

Hacking Meat: Why Insects Are the Future of Food

Tuesday, March 11, 12:30pm
Radisson Town Lake Riverside Ballroom

The Future Farm Is Now: Can Robots Feed the World?

Tuesday, March 11, 3:30pm
Radisson Town Lake Riverside Ballroom

healthy food. The app, which was unveiled at SXSXW Interactive last year, emerged from Smith's research into the demographics of mobile technology adaptation, but not without a few false starts.

"I thought, 'There must be some way to develop a smartphone app specific to those populations and connect them [to] sources of healthy, affordable food and that might solve the problem, join the social trend with the technology

trend, and get a good result,'" he explains. "I tried that. It failed miserably because I did not take into account that how people acquire and consume food in Baltimore is very different than how they consume food in New Orleans, San Francisco, and Austin.

"We think we're just going to drop a grocery store into the middle of a food desert and that's going to solve all the problems, but it's not necessarily all it's going to take. You have to take into account the social and cultural attitudes of a community. Listening and asking a lot of questions is a better way to approach this innovation space, rather than thinking of technology as a big blanket that will fix everything by itself."

Lack of access to food takes many different forms, as the sheer number of panels dedicated to this very problem can attest. The answers are varied and, it seems, solutions are nigh. ■



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Queens of Comedy

TWITTER OPENS DOORS FOR SOME TRADITIONALLY MARGINALIZED GROUPS

BY ASHLEY MORENO

Brevity is the soul of wit, so it's no wonder many comedians adopt Twitter as a main social network. But can 140-character quips launch a career? Does it really contribute to the comedy landscape? At their SXSW panels, Jane Pratt, Jenny Johnson, and Josh Hara will tell all.

Online platforms as a whole afford emerging voices opportunities they did not have in the past; just about anyone can now self-publish in any medium. But as Jane Pratt, editor-in-chief of xoJane and speaker on the panel "Fearlessly Funny: The Women Changing Digital Humor," points out, this uniquely benefits traditionally marginalized voices. "The Internet provides a stage, a platform for anyone – people who aren't who the comedy clubs have necessarily been looking for in the past, which would be more men and particularly white men," says Pratt. And while different comedians adopt different platforms, Twitter can provide women a particular advantage. "Twitter is great for female comedians because it's a much more level playing field," says Pratt. "It doesn't have to do with how you look or how you present yourself while you're expressing the joke. It's very straightforward."

The entertainment industry places so much emphasis on appearance, perhaps unduly on women. A platform that takes appearance out of the equation means more jokes from ladies – even if they don't meet traditional expectations. It also means a comedian can decide whether sex (or any other physical attribute) comes up at all. That's great for comedians today, and, in a very small way, could set an example for how we talk to girls about comedy in the future.

Comedian Jenny Johnson, known on Twitter as @JennyJohnsonHi5, has more than 423,000 followers. She's also a co-speaker alongside fellow Twitter comedian Josh Hara (@yoyoha) on the panel "How

Twitter Humorists Landed Sweet Real World Gigs." When asked in an email interview about the role of women in comedy and how it's changing, she had this to say:

"Sarah Silverman said it best in her last HBO special. [Silverman] said, 'We should stop telling little girls they can be anything they want to be.' I loved that. She said it because if you keep mentioning it to girls, the seed that they're female is planted in their heads. Don't mention it, and it won't be a thing."

Twitter's format provides a level of anonymity, at least early on, that mitigates stereotypes about comedians and frees them to experiment. In an email interview, Hara explained another benefit: Twitter's 140-character limit inspires sharper and tighter writing. "It takes a lot of work to achieve simplicity," says Hara. "But that simplicity carries so much more impact than something that is perfectly described. All the work it took to get there is invisible, making it appear effortless. And when a person sees it, it strikes them immediately. Great tweets do the same thing." Twitter requires concision – a decided advantage in comedy. Hara explains: "Twitter is a perfect place to create comedy ... to create moments that look effortless, but have taken tons of practice to perfect."

Pratt's panel showcases women comedians who have strong online presences through an improv discussion on everything taboo. (She says to feel free to come drunk!) Johnson and Hara's panel focuses specifically on Twitter, and how they launched successful careers in comedy through the medium. In this way both panels highlight how online platforms (even Twitter) contribute to making comedy more accessible to both fans and budding comedians. Which is important, because as Johnson says, "Comedy is for everyone. Except people who call frozen yogurt 'fro-yo.' Those people can go fuck themselves." ■



Jane Pratt



Josh Hara



Jenny Johnson

Related Events

How Twitter Humorists Landed Sweet Real World Gigs

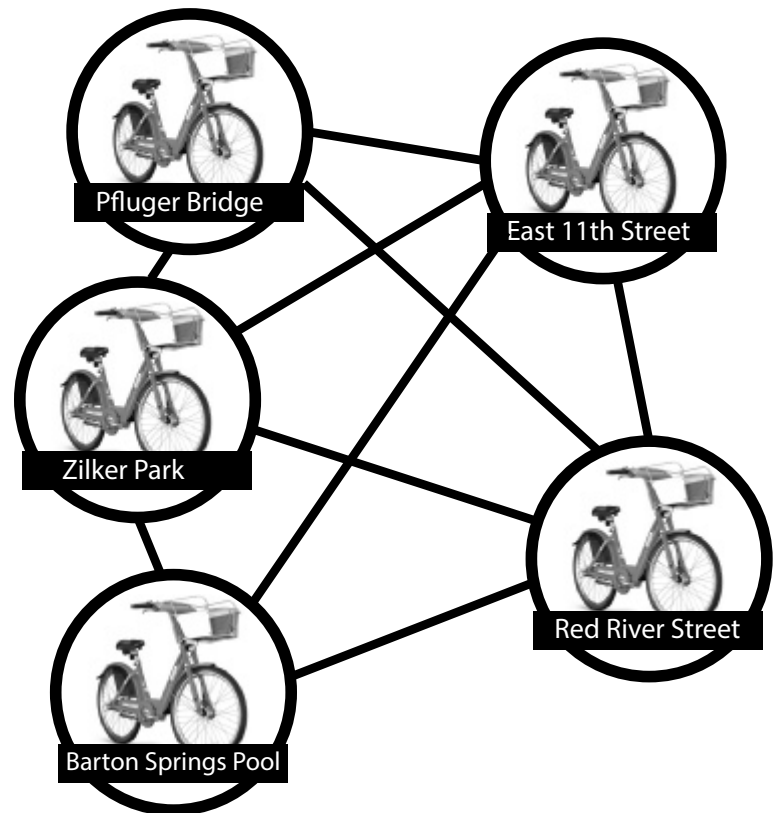
Friday, March 7, 5pm
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Room 12AB

Fearlessly Funny: The Women Changing Digital Humor

Saturday, March 8, 5pm
Austin Convention Center,
Room 18ABCD



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Sunday Bedlam 2p
Kevin & Dustin Welch 4p,
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The Brew Birds 8p w/ Warren Hood, Emily Gimble & Willie Pipkin

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David Hamburger 6p
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Tuesday March 4th

Grouchy Like Riley 4p
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Apostles of Manchaca 8p,

Nate Rodriguez 10p

Wednesday March 5th

Jon Inmon 4p
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The Singularity Is Clear

GETTING DOWN TO BRASS TACKS ABOUT ONE OF INTERACTIVE'S FAVORITE BUZZWORDS

BY ALEX DUNBAR

As human beings move into an age when we can keep our elderly alive into their hundreds, fresh fruit readily available year-round in regions where once folks were eating salted fish all winter, and infant mortality rates so low you'd think the Geico lizard was working the maternity ward, we've lost touch with one another and with our own humanity.

Technology and innovation are making miracles literally biblical in origin and scale seem a little flat. Think of the Internet. Now think of the Tower of Babel. Now think, what was so great about the Tower of Babel? The Internet is the library of Alexandria, the Tower of Babel, and every useful aspect of telephony combined. Just think of all the people who go around thanking "the Universe" instead of "God" for good fortune, or praying to that same endless celestial void for the manager's position at the food co-op. Folks today thank the Universe because it makes tangible and scientific the idea of infinity and the unknown. As I type on my slender rectangle capable of computing millions of times faster than I ever could, I sit in a silver cylinder, flying across the country while connected - midair, mind you - to a decentralized repository of all the world's knowledge. Looking at miracles like that, it's no wonder that technologists have developed a religiosity in their field. This year at SXSW, some of these modern prophets will come to share their robot gospel.

The high prophet of that faith is a vitamin-guzzling synthesizer magnate named Ray Kurzweil. His highly influential book *The Age of Spiritual Machines* posits that in the next few decades, artificial intelligence will radically outpace human intellect. More importantly, computers with this type of intelligence - called artificial general intel-

ligence or strong AI - will be able to learn and problem solve independent of programmers, utilizing the full spectrum of human cognitive abilities. What gets Kurzweil's buns so toasty about the prospect of strong AI isn't how humans will use it, but how machines will. See, the very moment a computer

of the past. Every resource will be easily fabricated using molecular nanotechnology and the consciousnesses of humans everywhere will be mapped and uploaded to computers. And why not? With an all-knowing strong AI system running the show, there will be no problem unsolvable.

What's being lost in the static among singularity devotees is just how irresponsibly we're priming ourselves for the moment of our electronic ascension. At panels like "Unmanned Government: The Autonomous Future" and "From Rosie to Siri: Shifting Robotic Perceptions," SXSW attendees can expect to get slathered with a nice glossy coat of pro-tech exculpation. "Unmanned Government: The Autonomous Future," especially, takes this tack just a short stumble away from the real state of robot affairs: More than anything else, we're building and using autonomous bots on the battlefield or as literal vehicles of commerce, in the case of the Amazon drone delivery system. Google's driverless cars might save lives on the highway, but if we're still using Predator drones to kill people from a computer monitor, we've only displaced the body count. This is because many of the people at the forefront of robot and artificial general intelligence design walk to work with *Jetsons* daydreams and bank accounts loaded up with DARPA dollars.

As debate about the use of drone aircraft continues to boil, one thing is entirely evident: Without a computer god to tell us how to run things, autonomous killing robots are in the wrong hands. In Spike Jonze's *Her*, we like to think that sentient computers will be excited to hang out with us, fall in love, and eventually leave us because life is suffering. In all likelihood, a computer with ever-unfolding intelligence and insight would have hardly any interest at all in our goings-on. Why would it? I don't follow my three cats' skirmishes; they're cute, but I couldn't care less about their pointless territory wars. Moreover, when I don't feel like springing for Fancy Feast, they eat Meow Mix - so why would a godlike computer treat us any differently? ■



(theoretically) learns to think for itself, it will (hypothetically) be able to improve on its own cognitive abilities instantaneously and rapidly. That's where the "singularity" part of the equation comes in: The moment strong AI gets a foothold, it will be like dropping the bass on the world's longest, most confusing dubstep track ever. (I am, of course, referring to the history of humankind.) Everything after that moment is up for debate. If Kurzweil's vision comes to fruition, we will see the dawn of a new age where scarcity and mortality will be things

Related Events

Unmanned Government: The Autonomous Future

Saturday, March 8, 5pm, Hyatt Regency Austin Hill Country ABCD

How to Build the Post-Human Brain

Sunday, March 9, 11am, Radisson Town Lake Riverside Ballroom

From Rosie to Siri: Shifting Robotic Perceptions

Tuesday, March 11, 3:30pm, Hyatt Regency Austin Texas Ballroom 5-7

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