POST CON

One Big Show Floor at SXSW

MEETING: SXSW Trade Show: The Exhibition for Creative Industries, held at the Austin Convention Center on March 14–17 as part of the South by Southwest (SXSW) Music, Film, and Interactive festivals.

CHALLENGES: This year, SXSW for the first time combined its two separate trade shows — for Film/Interactive and for Music — into the single SXSW Trade Show. The ramifications of that for scheduling and other logistics were the primary challenges facing SXSW organizers. (Read our Pre Con profile of the SXSW Trade Show at **www.pcma.org/Convene/Issue-Archives/February-2011/Plenary.htm**. For our report from SXSW Interactive, visit **www.pcma.org/Convene/Issue-Archives/May-2011/Plenary.htm**.) Previously, the two trade shows bookended the 10-day series of festivals, with Film/Interactive running from Sunday to Tuesday, and Music running from Thursday to Saturday. This year, the combined Trade Show bridged the three festivals, running from Monday to Thursday. So people who in years past had come for the Music trade show, for example, had to figure out if they needed to show up a day or two earlier than usual. "We had a lot of regulars who knew things were changing," said SXSW Sales Manager Ron Suman, "but didn't quite grasp how things were changing."

Another challenge came from the overwhelming popularity of the festivals themselves. "Whenever you have 2,000-some bands generating buzz coming to town, it's kind of hard to cut through the buzz," Suman said. "And then the films — they have so many premieres."

* BUZZWORTHY: The SXSW Trade Show drew about 10,000 more attendees than last year.

INITIATIVES: Logistics ended up not being too much of a problem — probably because SXSW's organizers have been traffic-copping multiple events and tens of thousands of attendees for years. And some of the challenges generated by the new schedule weren't entirely negative, such as the Film/Interactive attendees who for the first time wanted to stick around for the Music festival. "All of our problems are challenging," Suman said, "but they're the result of doing something right."

As for giving the Trade Show its own buzz, organizers made it so that attendees at all of the festivals could get into the show — and peppered the exhibit hall with fun, service-oriented features, including the Next Stage, which offered interviews, music, comedy, and other performances; the SXSW Hiring Hub, powered by Monster.com; and the Meet Up Pavilion, where "different groups of registrants" could get together and network.

All told, this year's combined Trade Show drew about 10,000 more attendees than last year's two separate shows. "I think for the first year, it went over pretty well," Suman said. "The Trade Show business doesn't always get the attention, but there are more and more people who are starting to recognize there's something magic here." ■

— Christopher Durso

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
http://sxsw.com/business_at_sxsw/exhibitionrsna.org

SXSW Trade Show

2010 Austin

Film/Interactive

33,200
Attendees

296
Exhibitors

Music

19,400
Attendees

181
Exhibitors

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2011 Austin

65,200
Attendees

566
Exhibitors