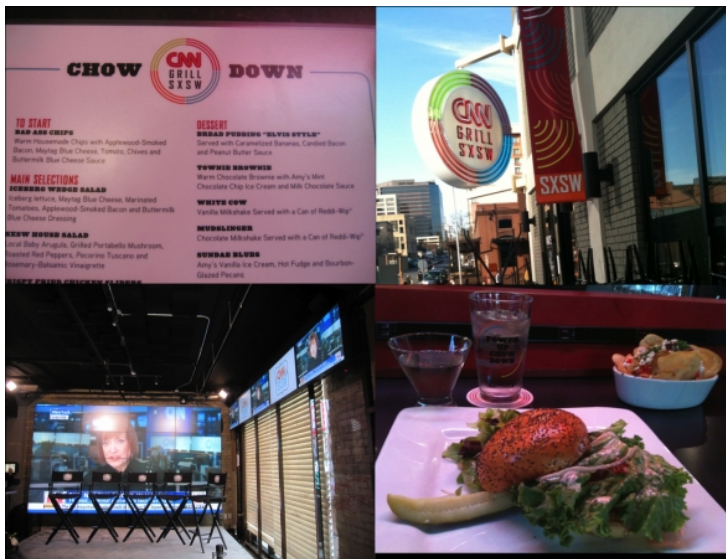


## Best Things I Saw (or Learned) at SXSWi



### 1. CNN Grill takes over local funky southern & wine spot Max's Wine Dive for media hub

I have never seen such a creative and well executed marketing project. From the rotating sign attached to the building, to the menus, glasses, and t-shirts dressing the staff, they fooled many people into thinking the CNN Grill is a permanent downtown Austin establishment. Inside, the news-projecting digital screens lined the ceiling and covered walls, while interview and music showcase set ups with directors chairs and CNN video cameras generated live SXSW news and featured visiting celebrities that then aired inside the Grill. And the food. The delicious and complimentary food for media on the private list (to this day, I truly appreciate that blogging is considered a credible form of media) helped fuel visitors in between their jam packed schedules. The CNN Grill's motto "Chow Down, Charge Up" accurately represented the goal: to provide media with a place to charge their electronics, fuel up with delicious food, drink, and sustenance, to then allow them to be on their way to continue covering the incredible mega-event. And, to network with other influential members of the media inside this hot hot spot that I still can't get over (in a great way!).

[Click here for more>.](#)



## 2. You can still stumble across great live music acts at SXSW Interactive (versus wristband it up for the music portion of the conference).

The down-to-earth folky male quartet with a huge following from Wisconsin, Locksley, is now on my musical radar (and playing from my computer speakers) thanks to the CNN Grill and CNN's coverage of everything happening at SXSWi from food, to music, to branding, to technology.



## 2 Continued: Brett Dennen musical showcase on the Whole Foods Rooftop

Thanks to Guayaki Yerba Mate, a canned or bottled tea drink known to have lots of health benefits (and lots of mojo, aka caffeine), I got to wind down on the last day of SXSWi on the top of Whole Foods while enjoying the sweet acoustic solo sounds of Brett Dennen while he previewed his upcoming album, *Loverboy*, set to release April 12th.



### 3. Quick Response (QR) Codes ARE gaining momentum- they're even topping cupcakes!

(Enter nerdiness) I've been in a debate with both of my sisters over the past several months about whether or not these barcodes will take off in the marketing world. At SXSWi, these digital squares were everywhere-- on t-shirts, posters, business cards, and even on cupcakes! At one interactive session, I even ended up sitting next to Nick, the Managing Director of a UK company called QRky, which designs custom mobile displays that can show everything from your Twitter stream to your LinkedIn profile in addition to your contact info when someone scans your QR code. I, of course, was starstruck when I met him. Watch for these curious QR codes-- I still stand by my prediction that the world will begin to embrace them as a way to connect tangible marketing materials to the digital world with the click of a button.



### 4. At SXSWi, you're not in Kansas (or the US) anymore

During this interactive festival, Austin is transformed into what seems to be an creative international city. With the mega-signs draping downtown buildings highlighted by imported lights, the unique sights, sounds, and promotions radiating from every pole, sign, corner, or person, I felt like a tourist in my own town! But, I kept my eyes peeled so that I could take in as much as possible-- I was afraid I'd miss something if I blinked!





## 5. Experiential Conference Exhibits

For the modern marketing team that works trade shows, exhibit halls, or conferences, take a trendy tip from the exhibitors at SXSWi. (Clockwise from top left) The UK's popular news outlet, The Guardian's pop up tea shop, complete with electronic charge up stations, tables, unique teacups and teapots gave conferencers a place to take a load off, sip a warm beverage, brewed on the spot courtesy of The Guardian. MyCube, a social exchange I am still trying to understand (mostly because they haven't launched yet), had a huge presence at SXSWi, but most notable was their rest stop exhibit booth with cushy cube chairs and squishy stress "ball" cubes with their QR code on them. The Austin Chronicle set up a living room adorned by a newspaper-covered wall where interactivites could recline on a couch, catch up with a new connection or conference buddy, and browse the Chronicle, probably for the week's most happenin' events. And, the Goog. Google had an interactive booth that allowed exhibit browsers to try some new products on their computer kiosks, or watch the tv screens mounted on the wall while a Googler led demos according to a daily schedule that was also visible to passersby.



## 6. Blogging isn't dead and people still love a free t-shirt

I think the busiest booth in the whole SXSWi exhibit hall (which was huge, by the way), was the Wordpress booth. Probably most widely known as a blogging platform (and what I'm using to enter this very blog post), Wordpress is gaining popularity in the website building arena, because its features allow anyone to easily modify their website any time (instead of paying a web designer every time you want to make an adjustment). They set up a "Genius Bar" where you could ask a question about Wordpress, take an online survey, and receive a free t-shirt. Did I do it? Yes. Don't judge, I liked their t-shirt.