

# STYLE

## More than just music fans flock to South by Southwest



**For** fans who crowded into Austin's streets, clubs and even churches last week, the South by Southwest Festival was about drinking a lot of beer, eating barbecue and hearing some of the world's hottest bands.

But for music executives who flocked to the event on Sunday, the 10-day music, film, and interactive industry networking marathon was a chance to live on the razor's edge of technology and glimpse of the industry's changing face.

By nearly all measures, the festival, now in its 24th year, was bigger than ever with a record 13,022 music industry professionals registered. Acts like Courtney Love's band Hole and the Stone Temple Pilots used the festival as a springboard to end a multi-year hiatus from performing live.

Though some attendance figures dipped in 2009, the ongoing recession has not dimmed interest in live music, said Brent Grulke, the festival's creative director.

"Although the music industry has changed, music itself and those who pursue it remains as healthy as ever," Grulke said.

Nearly 2,000 artists from more than 40 countries played in the music portion of South by Southwest, also dubbed as SXSW, that ran through Sunday, up about 100 from last year. The festival has grown from humble roots in 1987 to become a must-attend event for global music business rainmakers and tastemakers.

At the related film festival, attendees got a sneak preview of the movie *Predators* and other films like *Kick-Ass*.

About 100,000 people were expected to visit Austin last week for the festival that attracts about US\$100 million to the economy of Austin — capital of the Lone Star state. Official figures are still being totaled.

The festival is as much about savvy marketing and technology as it is about

*The Austin, Texas, festival is now a must-attend event for trendsetters in cinema, marketing and technology*

BY CHRIS BALTIMORE  
REUTERS, AUSTIN, TEXAS



South by Southwest co-founder Lewis Black poses following a 2008 interview in New York. PHOTO: BLOOMBERG

music, after the popular social media outlet Twitter launched its service there in 2008. This year's hot technology is locator services like Gowalla and Foursquare that use global positioning software in "smart phones" and other portable devices to point users toward businesses, friends and social events, Grulke said.

### TANGLED DIGITAL WEB

While big record companies like RCA were once the industry's gatekeepers, today's bands must negotiate a tangled web of cultural paths, from digital distribution of songs to utilizing songs in movies and television to video games.

"If you can get tracks into these shows and movies it just opens up a whole new audience," said Phil Patterson, an industry veteran who promotes new bands for UK Trade and Investment, the music promotion

arm of the British government.

For example, the song *Friends* by Band of Skulls was featured on *New Moon*, the latest in the *Twilight* trilogy about teenage vampires.

About one quarter of the bands showcased at this year's SXSW were from the UK, the number two exporter of music behind the US. British music exports are worth about US\$2 billion a year, Patterson said.

"While everything has changed, ultimately the bottom line is you need a good artist, great music and an audience that wants to buy it," said Patterson, who formerly worked for record labels like EMI and RCA and represented musicians like David Bowie and Billy Idol. "That hasn't changed since the day."

For Internet company AOL, the festival was a chance to tout its brand after Time Warner spun it off last year. AOL recently launched a music blog called Spinner, which attempted to profile each of the nearly 2,000 bands at the festival.

AOL sponsored "pop-up" shows in Austin by bands like Broken Bells, which performed in a parking garage. The festival is important because "you're not just getting music industry folks," said company spokesman Kurt Patat. "You're getting a wide array of tastemakers."

The Library of Congress in Washington sent a group of librarians to tout a digital preservation project. The library holds the nation's largest public collection of sound recordings — nearly 3 million in all.

But though old-fashioned formats like records can preserve recordings nearly indefinitely, about 44 percent of sites available on the Internet in 1998 had vanished a year later.

"We're here to make sure that the music that is happening now is preserved for the future," said Matthew Barton, curator of the library's recorded sound section.



► From top: Twitter co-founder Evan Williams and actors Kristen Stewart, Robert Duvall, Sissy Spacek and Bill Murray were among the participants in this year's South by Southwest. PHOTOS: AGENCIES