



## SXSW 2016 Uses Mobile Wallet to Lower Costs and Extend Digital Experience

### SXSW 2016's Objectives

- Simplify the Guest Pass pick-up process and overall digital experience with mobile wallet
- Reduce operational costs and free up resources during the event
- Reduce environmental footprint by shifting way from printing and distributing wristbands

South by Southwest (SXSW) offers a unique convergence of music, film and technology in its annual conferences and festivals in Austin, TX. Each year, SXSW ups the ante by integrating innovative technology into the attendee experience. For its 2016 event, SXSW catered to the mobile nature of its audience and used Urban Airship Reach to simplify and improve the Guest Pass experience. The result? Lower costs, broader reach and increased mobile engagement while supporting its focus on sustainability.

In this third year of the Guest Pass program, SXSW wanted to simplify the Guest Pass experience by introducing a mobile wallet pass as an alternative to the physical wristband. Previously, users had to obtain credentials via the SXSW website and then pick up their guest wristband at a physical location in Austin prior to attending any free shows or events. This labor-intensive approach required the SXSW team to coordinate with outside vendors and retailers around Austin, print and deliver the wristbands and troubleshoot issues with missing bands on-site – all within days of the event.



*SXSW used Urban Airship Reach to deliver a mobile guest pass program for its 2016 event. This helped extend the digital experience and simplify the pickup experience for attendees.*

### RESULTS

**↑ 25%**

Increase in total credentials distributed in 2016 vs. physical-only guest passes in 2015.

**↓ 54%**

Decrease in overall credential costs vs. physical-only guest passes in 2015.

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**Michael Brown,**  
**Senior Technical Project Manager, SXSW**

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By partnering with Urban Airship, SXSW revamped its Guest Pass program so users could quickly provide their information and register for the event from a web page. Instead of going to a physical location to pick up their wristband, participants simply downloaded the mobile wallet pass to their phone and were ready to go. No printing and no staff coordination around delivery meant less costs and time spent for both SXSW and its attendees. The guest passes were generated and delivered upon registration, freeing up precious time prior to the festival starting.

Given that the pass registration process tied users to a specific registration information (i.e. email), the SXSW team was able to create a better digital experience for attendees since it provided a way to identify the user across different channels, such as its SXSW GO app.

The app, presented by Showtime and built on Eventbase’s platform, with contextual experiences delivered through Gimbal’s location and proximity-technology as well as Urban Airship’s mobile engagement platform, offered an on-the-go companion for attendees, allowing them to browse lineups, see sessions their friends are attending, as well as build and share their personal schedules.

In addition, those with the app could receive specific messaging including Guest Pass event announcements and personalized recommendations based on the user’s location and their custom event schedules created in the app.

Connecting the mobile wallet pass use to the app also helped aid app acquisition efforts and strengthen the mobile experience for attendees. “By tying in the mobile wallet pass with the SXSW GO app, we were able to unite the entire digital experience,” said SXSW Senior Technical Project Manager Michael Brown.

“With Urban Airship Reach, we’ve started to move away from the dependency on physical passes, leading to a smaller footprint in terms of both cost and sustainability, all while gaining more Guest Pass participants,” Brown said. With five guest wallet passes issued for every physical pass, SXSW was also able to reduce credential costs by more than half – 54% less than 2015 costs.

Mobile wallet worked well for the SXSW team because they could customize the pass to fit their needs, as well as easily update passes with new information if needed. For Guest Pass holders, it created a easier, faster and more seamless experience. “We didn’t hear a single complaint from Guest Pass holders –the lack of complaints is always a sign of a good user experience.”

Next year, SXSW aims to dynamically update its mobile Guest Passes and use Reach notifications when the need arises. “Overall, it was very successful and, now that we have this tool, we are starting to think more about other processes we have and how this might fit into those,” Brown said. “We’re looking beyond the Guest Pass program at potential expansions, and where it might make sense in other parts of our event.”