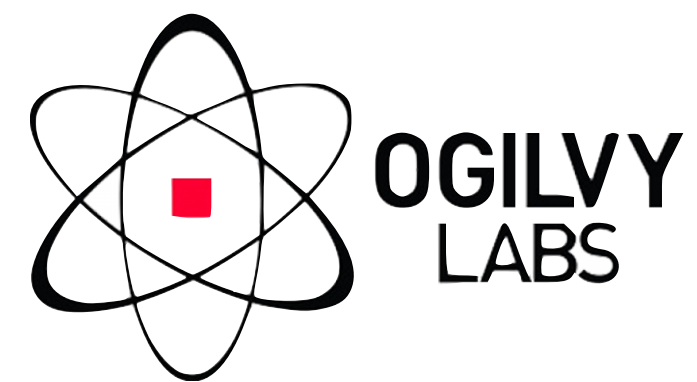


OGILVY LABS: SXSW REPORT

SXSW 2015



The future of problem solving is in AI.

Gemma Milne

Ogilvy Labs Creative Technologist

Big Data can be a pretty scary idea for a lot of people in our industry and AI was put forward as an answer to their queries.

But before we dive into the future, how do we define AI and Big Data? Forget Artificial Intelligence, what does 'Intelligence' even mean; what makes Big Data 'big'? Maher Masri, a consultant from McKinsey went for 'data so large that it requires new technology and techniques to actually make it useful.' Considering how much the term is thrown around in our industry, this was a novel, and thought-provoking way of talking about big data. It raised one main question: do the tools we need to perform the tasks we want actually exist?

For me, it seems there's a huge opportunity for agencies to be building new products to cater for the needs of our clients - we know what they are looking to do, so why aren't we equipped with the tools we need to be solving the problem ourselves? Using third parties can be the best option at times, but we always seem to want to adapt what's already built, so why not create ourselves to suit particular client needs?

For Sparkcognition, the future of AI is building computers which can 'reason about reasoning.' When we want to make sense of complex data, we shouldn't be writing strict rules for a machine to follow, we should be building programs so that the machines themselves can identify, navigate and predict patterns to arrive at the solution. This is where the AI and Big Data merge so perfectly.

Manoj Saxena of The Entrepreneurs Fund argued we should be focusing on big solutions, not Big Data - it shouldn't be man versus machine but man plus machine - and this is where the connection with advertising makes the most sense. AI can be the vehicle to not only improve our current methods of analysing data, but actually solve huge business problems our clients face all over the globe. An example used was that it's not that the Earth is short on resources, it's that we can't feed the world with our current resource management. Utilising AI to solve bigger problems seems to be the way forward, and our world is moving closer and closer towards really taking advantage of these methods.

As agencies, we talk a lot about how we innovate and ensure we're thinking differently, so I would argue that we need to start understanding this revolution in technology much more thoroughly so we're not left behind and create value for clients.





Agencies need to be makers.

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“I’m a hacker in that I take systems apart and I put them back together in ways which serve a different, sometimes better, purpose.”

I was quite disappointed when I turned up to ‘An interview with hacker Josh Klein’ and that was the first thing he said - I was expecting a hour with an ex-criminal, talking about his infiltration of company software and how he was now using his superpower for good - but it didn’t take long for me to become totally engrossed in the conversation with this fascinating guy. Klein’s job is to consult businesses as a ‘hacker’ - he spoke about how big companies have spent years refining their processes, iterating and improving so they are the most efficient only to find that their market, product or target audience has changed.

The interview went on to delve into areas such as cryptocurrencies, the black market and this notion of reputation as a commodity (your data will be your currency) - but I got thinking about how we agencies are possibly in need of some serious hacking, and we need to then offer this hacking ourselves.

It would be so healthy for us to take a step back sometimes - really think about what our clients’ fundamentals are (or educate ourselves more thoroughly if those fundamentals aren’t known) before we dive into creating campaigns, communications or solutions. Sometimes we’re quick to build upon what works, insights we’ve already amassed, and advancements we’ve already embraced. Maybe sometimes we need to take apart the system which we’re trying to solve for our clients and propose ideas which challenge the product or service itself before we get to work communicating it.

The traditional model of agencies selling hours as opposed to products was discussed in various sessions – we need to be ensuring we are providing product solutions in order to stay relevant. Large agencies are being overtaken by small, nimble shops who can work at speed for cut-down prices – we need to focus on what value we can bring to our clients and produce the goods, literally.



Different Media Formats.


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This year there were some brilliant products which I'm sure will be well adopted by the markets they are targeted at, but I couldn't help feeling that the vast majority were more of a gimmick.

The exhibition space this year at SXSW was dominated by niche consumer products – everything from a projector which could bring children's sketches to life to a beautiful fitness tracker for your dog to 'another' iPhone add-on camera lens, was on display. Few solved problems, even less provided true disruption. Disruption in the sense that there weren't many products which made things easier, cheaper or more convenient.

What was more interesting for the world of agencies and marketers were the odd companies which utilised different technologies to create new forms of media. One example was a company called Inmoji which has built software, now being integrated into Facebook messenger and WeChat (and working on the rest...), which creates emojis for brands. For instance, the Starbucks logo becomes an emoji, you can select the branch of Starbucks you want to go to, send it to your friend (so they can open in maps and get directions) and then you both get 20% off when you get there. And it's all fully integrated, so you don't need to download an app – it will be part of the Facebook Messenger keyboard.

There were also various services for interactive video – embedding content within various video platforms – along with Meerkat, the wonder-app of SXSW 2015, which allows you to stream content live over Twitter using the camera of your mobile phone. There was lots of discussion around the need for agencies to both fully understand but also harness correctly and appropriately these emerging media formats if we are to stay relevant. Again, the idea of creativity extending beyond the creative department will be instrumental in ensuring we are ahead of the curve in adopting these different media for our clients.





Human-machine interaction

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SXCreate: the area dedicated to makers, builders, DIY enthusiasts and crazy ideas. It harboured a mad mix of people, organisations, startups and ideas all surrounding the ‘maker movement’

There were various seminars on harnessing this movement, but one in particular – an energetic session from Rohit Thawani from TBWA focussed on haptics: “When your devices decide to touch you back.” The session illustrated the problem with the way our devices are built and how we use them. He spoke passionately about how we need to ‘eliminate the piece of glass between us’ when it comes to the interfaces we are so used to. Touch is the first sense we develop, so it seems strange that we almost ignore it when we design our most used devices.

He took us through the generations of haptics - from vibrating phones to pressure sensitive capabilities and gave us a crash course on actuators. For me, it was a welcome 10 minutes of geeking out – illustrating the point that we as an industry don’t do enough in terms of understanding the mechanics of the technology we so desperately rely on.

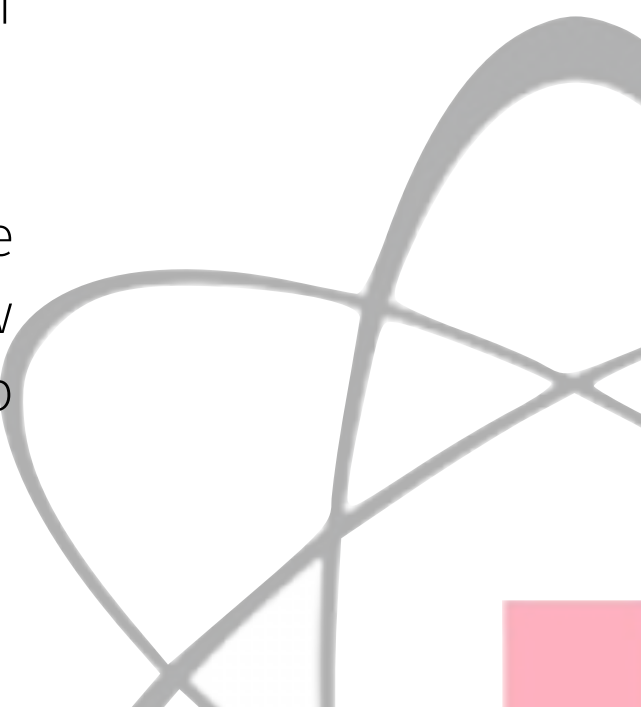
We were also taken through great case studies of using haptic technology in various industries. For example, Haptography (haptic photography) allows users to feel, through the use of a special pen-like object on a configured surface, the texture of clothes you are browsing through online.

Think how you could create that physical experience of running your hand over a dress in a shop from the comfort of your own home!

We were left inspired to think more about interface design - at the end of the day, to touch is to feel, so careful consideration needs to be employed as we continue to design our mass-scale technologies into the future.

We hear lots about the Maker Movement and how we as agencies need to embrace the shift in manufacturing, prototyping and building to be faster, leaner and more relevant. Seeing the quality of products and ideas that have come out of this movement, and how interactive they are, reiterated for me that we need to be joining in, fostering our understanding of consumers and what they want, to create better experiences.

Agencies work with some of the most incredible brands - we could be creating brilliant products at scale if we would allow ourselves to experiment, invent and fail...with it being so cheap and accessible nowadays, we really don’t have an excuse.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

FAIL CONSTRUCTIVELY

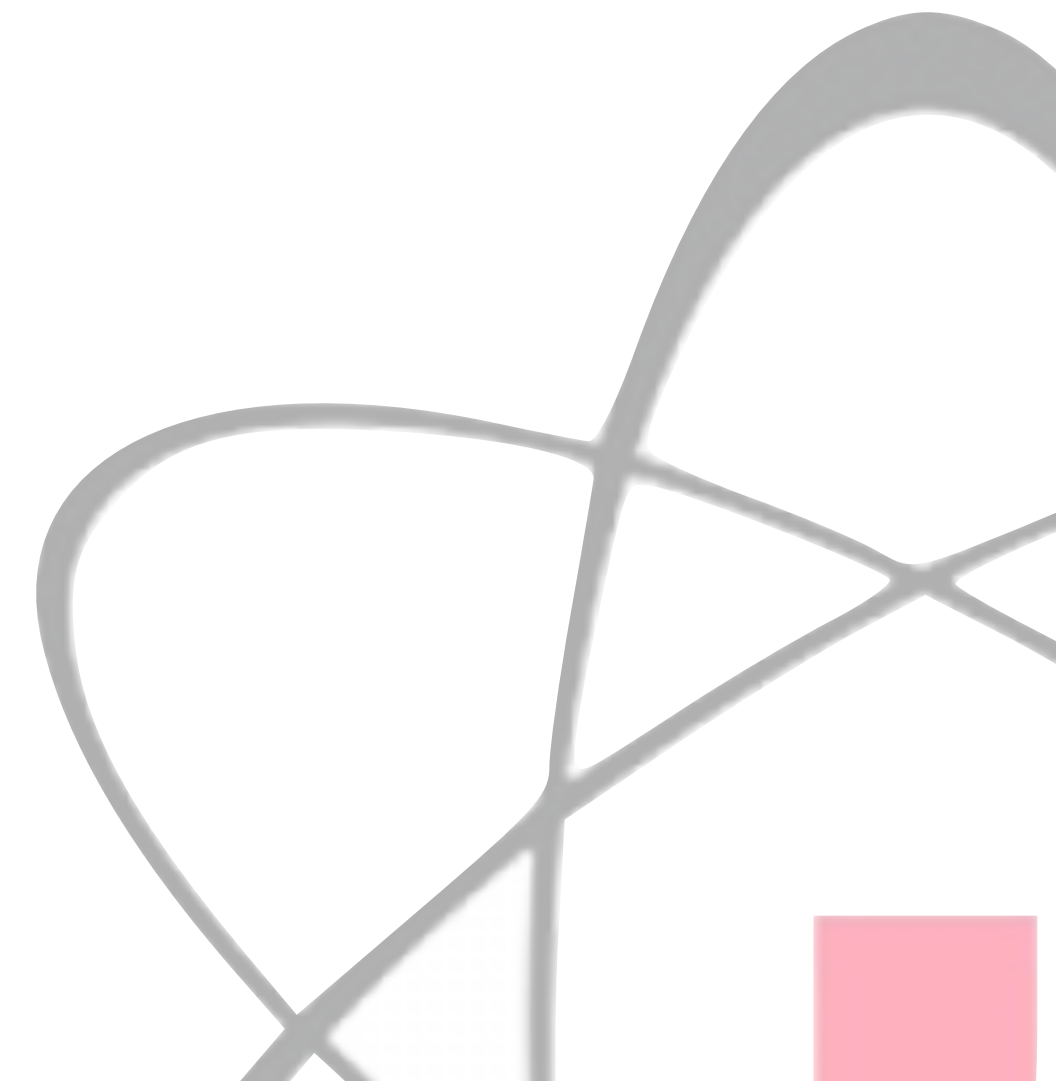
I was really taken by Astro Teller in his final day Keynote. He spoke about how we can't afford to not fail, as failing after a long period of research, discussions, meetings, 'improvements' is just so costly that it has to be done at the start of the creation process. We need to get things out there quicker and learn from the errors we are faced with, instead of spending months planning in conference rooms for what *might* happen.

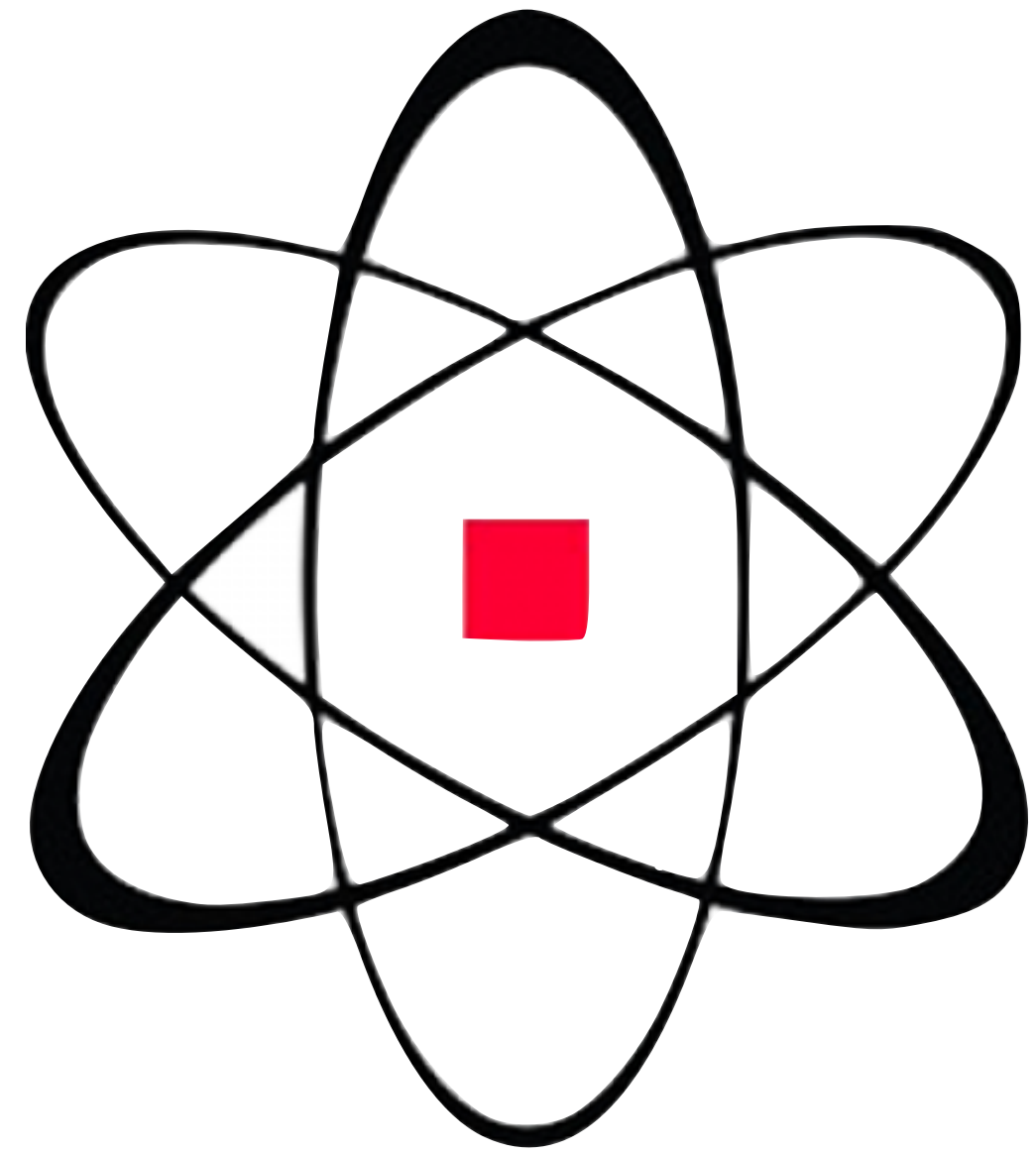
CHALLENGE AUTHORITY

Martine Rothblatt spoke lots around the idea that that if an old expert says it can't happen, it almost certainly can, and it made me wonder how much more productive we could be if we stopped listening to the powers at be when they say something is too hard, too costly or too risky. We need to foster a culture of 'act now apologise later' if we really want to be the most innovative in an ever-changing and ever more crowded industry that is advertising.

LEARN THE FUNDAMENTALS

In order to deconstruct and improve on processes, systems, projects and ideas, we need to be able to completely get to grips with how they are made up in the first place. The theme of learning thoroughly the fundamentals of various topics in order to influence your own niche area was explored in various forms at SXSW. We all need to absorb knowledge in places which may not, on first impression, seem completely relevant for our industry - as it feels like innovation and progression will be so much easier to do when we are comfortable in our knowledge of much more diverse areas.





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