China takes on SXSW

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Cutting-edge technologies and music from China will make an appearance at this year's South by Southwest (SXSW) in Austin, Texas, on March 9-18.  
With more than 30 years of history, SXSW has grown from a musical festival to a multi-themed conference and festival attended by creative people from around the world.  
Former President Obama and tech titans like Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg have spoken at SXSW in the past. Music, film and emerging and cutting-edge technologies are now the major themes of SXSW.  
The event, usually lasting about 10 days, attracted more than 421,000 attendants last year, about 22 percent of whom were from foreign countries, including China.  
There had been a trickle of Chinese artists and companies coming to SXSW in recent years, most arriving individually.  
"With so many programs and attendants, they were like sand lost in the vast ocean and got very little notice" said Vivian Forrest, founder and CEO of China Gathering at SXSW. "SXSW wants to explore the China market and we started the China Gathering program last year."  
"China Gathering's goal is to slowly bring China's quality companies, music and films into the official program and help to connect them with American companies," said Forrest.  
About 40 people from 15 mostly hi-tech Chinese companies, including WeChat, Mobike, DataMesh and Zhihu, attended SXSW last year.  
This year, China Gathering at SXSW will continue to focus on high-tech while additionally introducing music components. Participating companies include Alibaba, Ehang, Mobike and Ant Financial.  
"We aim to bring technologies with China characteristics to SXSW," Forrest said. "Ehang is a leading Chinese company in drones. Their automated pilotless small plane can take you from one place to another. They have made some sales in affluent Dubai where Ehang 184 is being test used as a drone taxi."  
SXSW's interactive program is ideally suited for emerging and cutting-edge technologies. China has been leading in technologies for the cashless and sharing economics, which will also be introduced by China Gathering.  
"China can seize the newest trends in technology by attending SXSW. The event also functions as a big incubator — data show that about 10 percent of the companies at SXSW were acquired after the event. Many startups go to SXSW to look for opportunities while others go there for inspiration and ideas," Forrest said.  
Several Chinese musicians will make an appearance at "China Night" on March 15. The program, organized by the MTA Music Festival of China, will include Second Hand Rose, Re-Tros, Moxizishi, Higher Brothers, XiaoXia and more.  
"SXSW is a great place for networking. Every registrant can directly access other registrants," said Forrest. "It's a vast international network where opportunities for collaboration are endless."  
SXSW is a great platform but not that well-known in China, yet. Forrest has the ambition to change that and to grow China Gathering at SXSW. To raise awareness, she held a reception in Beijing last year and plans to hold another one in Shenzhen this year.

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