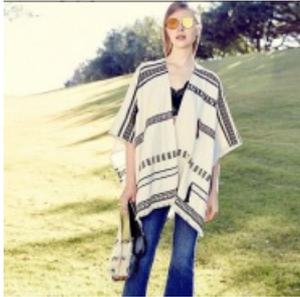


EVENTS/CAUSES

Neiman Marcus takes South by Southwest attendees back to school

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Neiman Marcus School of Self Expression promotional photo

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

Department store chain Neiman Marcus is schooling fashion-forward females in the art of self expression.

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Neiman Marcus and Refinery29 will host the School of Self Expression during South by Southwest in Austin, TX, with workshops and presentations going on throughout the festival. By having a presence at one of America's premiere destination events, Neiman Marcus hopes to endear itself to a younger group cultured and stylish women.

"SXSW allows us to bring our brand to the next generation in a habitat of self-expression," said Wanda Gierhart, chief marketing officer of Neiman Marcus Group. "Neiman Marcus first participated in SXSW Interactive in 2013 with a very feminine respite. We offered refreshments, a beauty bar and yoga classes.

"The response was so strong we have continued our participation amplifying innovation, content and entertainment, bringing numerous incredibly inspiring women to Austin," she said. "We have noticed that the festival attendees have become increasingly more sophisticated and more gender diverse, yet fashion brands were not focused here. We were one of the very first brands to bring both female-focused and fashion content to SXSW.

"Together with Refinery 29, we have created a focal point for women of substance and style with our events."

Express yourself

The School of Self Expression will take place on March 12 and March 13 at the Mexic-Arte Museum in Austin from noon to 6 p.m. The school is open to the public as well as SXSW badge holders, with RSVPs necessary for each individual session.

The school is an element of the Neiman Marcus Make Some Noise platform, which was present at last year's SXSW event as well ([see story](#))

At the school, "students" will be able to explore the Neiman Marcus Dream Closet, make stop-motion gifs, complete life-sized coloring books and other creative work and attend discussion sessions and workshops.



Neiman Marcus School of Self Expression promo banner

Topics include a workshop on poetic expression, tattoos and honesty with Cleo Wade, a workshop on wearable technology, a fireside chat on feminism, storytelling and contemporary photography with Chuck Grant, a songwriting improvisation session and many more.

Ongoing throughout March 12 is a tech show and tell focusing on an in-ear active listening system, while the next day will showcase Devialet's Phantom speaker, which promises an "ultradense sound" allowing listeners to "experience music emotionally."

Having its name attached to a variety of artistic and technological projects positions Neiman Marcus as a brand concerned with helping women enter traditionally male-dominated fields. Being an active partner in important causes will likely create a lasting impression on the School of Self Expression's attendees.

Neiman Marcus Dream Closet, meanwhile, is an opportunity for consumers to interact with designer items through REIFY, an augmented-reality tech company. The opportunity both to experience the brand and new technology further exemplifies the significance technology has for the brand, thereby authenticating the sponsorship.



Neiman Marcus Make Some Noise

"A key component of our brand is mixing fashion, art and technology," Ms. Gierhart said. "This year's event will celebrate the ways in which a new generation of women share their identities with the world through creativity and technology."

Having a clearly defined target market and crafting specific initiatives for that market is apt to result in more impactful marketing that will resonate more deeply with those consumers. For this reason, a focused, female-oriented campaign at SXSW, where fashion brands are not as ubiquitous, will likely help Neiman Marcus stand out.

Lone star

Innovative technology is a staple of the Neiman Marcus brand.

Last year, the department store changed the apparel shopping experience for consumers with a new digital mirror that remembers users.

The Memory Mirror takes a 360-degree video of a client modeling a particular outfit, allowing them to see clothing on themselves from all angles as well as save and share the visual. This interactive digital touchpoint alters the in-

store experience for Neiman Marcus' consumers and further empowers sales associates to provide customer service ([see story](#)).



Neiman Marcus Memory Mirror

While South by Southwest is still not a typical stop for most luxury brands, it has been embraced by other sectors and other brands under the Neiman Marcus umbrella for different purposes.

In 2014, New York department store Bergdorf Goodman asked South by Southwest attendees to spot its social media manager wearing clothing from its new contemporary collections at the conference and share a photo of her on Instagram to enter.

Part of the prize package was a Monsur Gavriel bucket bag, so coveted by consumers that it has gone to wait lists, guaranteeing interest from its target audience. Because the winner of this contest was judged on quality of photo rather than at random, Bergdorf was able to amass user-generated content that has value, since consumers were trying to impress ([see story](#)).

"The Neiman Marcus Make Some Noise brand platform celebrates bold women with bold voices in technology, fashion, music, art and business," Ms. Gierhart said. "Make Some Noise brings inspiration to all of our customers, and for years, we have shone a light on inspiring women at SXSW."

"By creating a focal point for women of substance and style, we are re-enforcing our brand message of mixing fashion, art and technology."