

USA: A hitchhiker's guide to technology, media and cultural innovation in the new frontier states of the American West

More than Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, social media as a concept covers applications, techniques and issues as diverse as online gaming, mobility, bandwidth-intensive applications, deep-packet inspection and personally identifiable information. Ultimately "social media" is about redefining the nature of all dimensions of relationships, narrow and broad – sometimes for the better, sometimes not. Here, we take a brief trip across the American West to explore the frontiers of social media and tech innovation.

Our journey starts at the farthest western edge of the continental United States, in California.



California no longer has the lock it once had on innovation



Leaders of the world's tech economy, such as Apple, Google, HP and a stable of tech companies that are not global household-names, were founded in dorm rooms and garages at and around Stanford University. Just a short drive south of San Francisco, and an even shorter drive over the mountains from the Pacific shore, you cannot get much farther west in the lower 48 than Stanford and its greatest progeny, the Silicon Valley.

Hollywood – the film capital of the world – is 350 miles south of Stanford and Palo Alto, and is itself only 12 miles from the Pacific Ocean. (So, to be technical about it, Hollywood actually *is* farther west than Silicon Valley).

But while California contributes to the world more than its share of tech innovation and content, California no longer has the lock it once had on innovation, or on announcing those innovations to the world. Companies generating the news and buzz and innovation that drive investment, policy initiatives, regulatory reactions and legal developments on a global basis increasingly have their coming out parties a bit further East – although not *that* far.

If your business depends on understanding what tomorrow's technology and content drivers will be, remember these four places from the American West: Las Vegas, Nevada; Park City, Utah; Aspen, Colorado; Boulder, Colorado; and Austin, Texas.

These are not just places to gamble and ski or wash down smoked brisket with cold Lone Star beer. These are places where the future is being made. Now.

Nevada

Consumers Electronics Show, Las Vegas, Nevada.

South and east from Palo Alto, and north and east from Hollywood lies our first stop in the big square states: Las Vegas, Nevada.

Las Vegas is home to more than gambling, neon and memories to be taken to the grave. It is also home to the Consumer Electronics Show. Held in early January before full recovery from the indulgences of Christmas and New Year's, CES, as it is known, spills out of almost every patch of convention and floor space along the Strip. This year at CES the world saw self-driving cars; desktop (and larger) 3D printers that allow us to mass produce high-quality machine parts, jewelry, toys and a host of other objects (one 3D printer on display even produced a house) and ultra HD (or 4K) televisions, the next era in picture quality.



This year at CES the world saw self-driving cars



If you are interested in the hottest electronics products and services (aside from Apple), including those that use massive amounts of wireless network capacity, as well as those that strike fear into the hearts of consumer protection and privacy advocates and regulators, then CES should be on your list.

<http://www.cesweb.org/>

Utah

Sundance Film Festival, Park City, Utah

We move next to the north and east of Las Vegas to Park City, Utah (about 100 miles from the spot where in 1869 Leland Stanford presided over the driving of the "golden spike" completing the transcontinental railroad) and the Sundance Film Festival. Founded 35 years ago, and lovingly and meticulously developed by Robert Redford and his dedicated crew at the non-profit Sundance Institute, Sundance has become one of the world's great artistic and cultural events – and not just because it flashes the

greatest concentration of celebrities, wannabes and paparazzi on the planet during the festival's 10-day run.

Sundance has grown from a smallish film show case to a leading global power in international cinema and premium content attracting tens of thousands to Utah's alpine paradise. Though not having an interactive or "social" media focus *per se*, with the introduction of approximately 150 films on screens in Park City and beyond, Sundance films have become staples in the theatrical release, premium video-channel and the video after-markets.

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Sundance itself has become a major forum for exploring complex and controversial political and cultural issues, such as poverty, racism, the Bosnian war and the US invasion of Iraq. Sundance also is a success story of the public-private partnership model that would not be possible without major support from the state of

Utah and a host of major philanthropic benefactors and corporate sponsors as diverse as video content companies including Time Warner, YouTube and DirecTV, as well as Chase Bank, Southwest Airlines and Acura.

At Sundance, deals get done, films get funded and buzz abounds.

<http://www.sundance.org/>

Colorado

The Technology Policy Institute of the Aspen Institute, Aspen, Colorado

Continuing our trek eastward, the next stop is Aspen Colorado – specifically the Aspen Institute's Technology Policy Institute. One of the great technology think tanks, and set in one of the world's great destinations, the Technology Policy Institute is a source of ideas, research and wisdom on some of the most pressing economic and technology policy questions of the day. Every August, Aspen hosts its Technology Policy Forum, and hosts a handful of other technology events throughout the year. Recent forums have explored the economics of spectrum auctions, the economics of file sharing, online film and music sales and efforts to combat online piracy.

<https://techpolicyinstitute.org>



Silicon Flatirons Center for Law, Technology, and Entrepreneurship, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado

For those who can't get to Aspen in August, consider heading a little farther east, to Boulder, Colorado – home of the main campus of the University of Colorado (and *alma* mater of Sundance founder Robert Redford) and the Silicon Flatirons Center for Law, Technology, and Entrepreneurship.

The Center's mission is "to elevate the debate surrounding technology policy issues; support and enable entrepreneurship in the technology community; inspire, prepare, and place students in these important areas [and to serve] as a source for new ideas [regarding technology policy]." Hosting a dozen or more seminars and conferences with thought leaders in media, technology, policy, law and entrepreneurship, the Center grapples with the real problems of translating the promise of technology into reality – and confronts the multifaceted consequences (intended and otherwise) that result once technology is loosed. Topics throughout the year are broad and deep, ranging from start-up financing, monetization of content on the web, challenges in patent law and policy in the software and applications sectors and cybersecurity. Hogan Lovells partners are regularly invited to speak at Silicon Flatiron events.

<http://www.siliconflatirons.com/index.php>

South by Southwest ("SXSW"), Austin, Texas

Farther to the south lies the last leg on our Western state journey, Austin, Texas. Austin is the home of the University of Texas Longhorns, Stevie Ray Vaughan, Dell Computer and the South by Southwest Festival (SXSW).

Texas is large and diverse (and a Texan might note it is bigger – geographically speaking of course – than France). But Austin, the only state capital in today's road trip, is different from the rest of Texas – and SXSW, which started as "just" a music festival, has grown into one of **the** global events in electronic media, making SXSW different too.



SXSW is the edgiest stop on our Western state journey



A cross between a smaller CES and an interactive Sundance (complete with the smell of mesquite smoke and a roots-blues and country-music soundtrack), SXSW is a required stop for those who earn their livings anywhere in the content or interactive media ecosystem. Stretching for 10 days (this year from March 8-17) with different tracks for film, music and interactive media, SXSW, like Sundance and CES, is a place where deals get done and buzz is everywhere. SXSW is the edgiest stop on our Western state journey, but what you see at SXSW today will be downloaded to your tablet or smartphone tomorrow.

<http://sxsw.com/>

Conclusion

Things are happening out West, on the new frontier for social media and high tech innovation. It might be too late *this year* for CES, Sundance, or SXSW, but it is not too early to plan for next year. And it's certainly not too late to get to Silicon Flatirons for one of its high-quality programs.



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