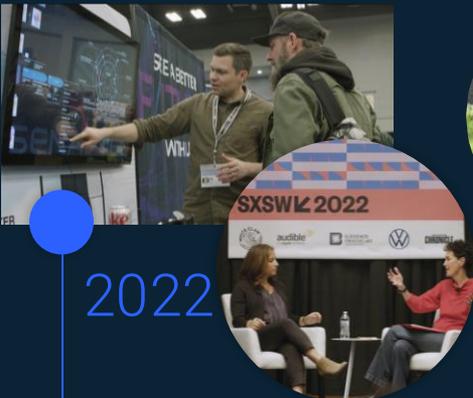




5 Trends from SXSW 2025

Bringing Vision Innovation to **SXSW**

The VSP® Vision's **Global Innovation Center** is proud to return to the world's largest innovation conference



2022

In our inaugural year, the VSP Global Innovation Center led two official SXSW panels – “Using an Innovation Mindset to Create Belonging” and another on “The Future of Vision Training” which were accompanied by an interactive performance vision experience. Watch the 2022 recap [here](#).



2023

We returned to SXSW, moderating a panel in the Health Track on “Scaling Access to Care in Healthcare Deserts” as well as lending our voice to the Female Quotient Equality Lounge. In the expo hall attendees could take a personalized eye health quiz and demo devices. VSP also sponsored a networking hike. Watch the 2023 recap [here](#).



2024

Back for a third year, the Global Innovation Center participated in a panel on 10 key vision trends transforming healthcare and hosted a fireside chat and happy hour for the healthcare innovation community at Capital Factory, Texas' largest startup incubator. Watch the the 2024 recap [here](#).



2025

VSP emerged itself in the SXSW 2025 program and community, participating in various roundtables and dinners from industry leaders such as Social Innovation Summit, Silicon Foundry, and KITE Scouting. VSP also led panels hosted by Techonomy and Female Quotient and organized an ‘AI as a Benefit’ discussion and happy hour.

5 Trends from SXSW 2025

South by Southwest (SXSW), one of the world's largest tech and innovation conferences, attracts a diverse audience of entrepreneurs, influencers, policymakers, creatives, and business leaders, offering a first-look at the concepts and companies shaping the future.

The [VSP Global Innovation Center](#) (GIC) was on-the-ground at SXSW 2025 to source next-gen perspectives and capabilities.

Participants from VSP generated 50+ insights over the week -- attending sessions, canvassing the show floor, and connecting with technologists from around the globe.

The GIC brought vision innovation to the conference, participating in panels hosted by [Worth Media](#) and [Female Quotient](#), curating an '[AI as a Benefit](#)' discussion and happy hour, and embedding our brand in various roundtables and dinners from industry leaders such as the [Silicon Foundry](#), the [Social Innovation Summit](#), and [KITE Scouting](#).

View the GIC's SXSW 2025 highlight reel [here](#) and read on to dive into the conference's top trends.

Trend 1:

The Influencer Economy Reaches Healthcare

Insight: The influencer economy, a digital ecosystem where individuals monetize their personal brands and content directly with their audience, originally emerged in the arts and entertainment space. SXSW 2025 showcased how this ecosystem is now operating within and impacting healthcare. In fact, seven in ten Americans either follow or seek out health-related content on social media or learn about health issues from these platforms.

Why It Matters: The influencer economy often circumvents traditional gatekeepers, creating an alternative for patients who may rely more on individual provider or patient advocates than trusted networks for information, referrals, or care.



Promo for the SXSW 'Creator Track' at Heywood Hotel

Notable Number: An estimated 1 in 4 people worldwide contribute to the influencer economy, the fastest growing category of small business today.

SXSW Panel Recording to Check Out: [Creators for Mental Health: Building Wellness in the Digital Age](#)

Sample SXSW Conversation: Ogilvy Health hosted the HealthFluence Creator Meetup, connecting pharmaceutical, healthcare, and wellness brands with provider influencers. In addition, the 'Creator Economy' had its own track at SXSW for the fifth year in a row.

Trend 2:

“Phygital Care” Signals Integrated is the Standard

Insight: The pandemic catalyzed a rise in hybrid care, models affording patients access to both virtual and in-person care. Today, hybrid approaches has evolved into “phygital care,” where both touchpoints not only co-exist, but seamlessly integrate with and enhance one another. At SXSW, Pfizer's CTO Lidia Fonseca emphasized the importance of “phygital,” outlining the growth of its “Digital Companion” platform, a suite of digital tools and solutions designed to support patients throughout their treatment journey.

Why It Matters: Patients no longer view virtual and in-person care as a binary. It’s now expected that in-person care is seamlessly integrated with and complemented by virtual components and vice versa.

Notable Number: A recent [survey](#) from the CDC found that 70% of patients prefer healthcare providers who offer both digital and physical care options.

SXSW Panel Recording to Check Out: [How To Leverage Digital Tools to Become An Empowered Patient](#) (Panel will appear as an episode in Pfizer’s [‘Science Will Win’](#) podcast)

Sample SXSW Conversation: After a lull in metaverse buzz, SXSW reframed the category with realism, focusing on the practical uses of AR and VR. For example, one panel - [The Metaverse 2025: Revival and Reinvention](#) - explored how various industries, including healthcare and retail, are leveraging the metaverse to create “phygital” experiences for both patients and consumers.



Leaders from Pfizer, Noom, and Thrive Global discussing “phygital” care.

Trend 3:

Gen Z's Spending Power Shapes Future Markets

Insight: Gen Z are known as digital natives that prioritize value and sustainability and look to social media and influencers for product discovery. The generation is emerging as a largely untapped lever of growth, with its spending power expected to reach \$12T by 2030.

Why It Matters: Purpose-driven brands that can meet their consumers where and how they want to will be best positioned to optimize this elusive demographic.

Notable Number: Today, 40% of Gen Z's wardrobes are second hand, pushing resale from the fringes to the mainstream.

SXSW Panel Recording to Check Out: [The Gen Z Boomer Millennial Showdown](#)

Sample SXSW Conversation: SXSW featured 17 panels focused on understanding, engaging, and activating Gen Z, spanning various tracks including Fashion & Beauty, Government & Civic Engagement, Workplace.



Shot from SXSW 2025 panel on Gen Z and how the demographic will shape future markets

Trend 4:

Consumers Respond to New 'Premium' User Journeys

Insight: At a conference with platinum badges, express entry, and VIP-only houses and lounges, it's no surprise that the premium access trend was on full display at SXSW.

Today, consumers, especially younger generations, value unique and memorable experiences, driving demand for premium services that offer something beyond the ordinary. In fact, consumers spent nearly four times the average order value for access to premium experiences in 2024. This trend also extends beyond entertainment, with leading airline, healthcare, and retail brands investing in net new premium products and services in recent years.

Why It Matters: According to Gartner, 70% of businesses in 2025 are projected to offer premium customer experiences as part of their strategy to enhance consumer satisfaction and loyalty. Offering enhanced, paid-for services will no longer be a nice-to-have, but a requirement for brands across all industries, including healthcare.

Notable Number: The concierge medicine market is projected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 10.2% from 2023 to 2028, reflecting an increased consumer demand for personalized and premium healthcare services.

SXSW Panel Recording to Check Out: [The Future of Brand Experience Design: How Brands Will Be Lived, Felt and Shared](#)

SXSW Indicator: The SXSW "Sxxpress Pass" program let registrants request priority access to up to 5 conference sessions and film screenings per day, allowing higher-tier pass holders to skip long lines..



Packed house for a panel the Global Innovation Center participated in at the Female Quotient's invite-only FQ-lounge, hosted at the Waller Creek Boathouse

Trend 5:

AI Agents Bring Meaning to Biometrics

Insight: Wearables have been a mainstay at SXSW for over a decade, with smart bands, watches, rings, ear buds, and glasses positioned as tools for collecting and monitoring personal health data. Today, as AI Agents are integrated into these devices, wearables are not just helping consumers monitor their data but activate it.

Why It Matters: As AI Agents integrate into these devices and transform them into wearable health coaches, researchers and industry experts expect this development could serve as a true category accelerant, including within smart eyewear.



Futurist Amy Webb discusses the evolution of wearables during her *Emerging Tech Trends* keynote

Notable Partnership: Thrive Global, a leading behavior change technology company founded by Arianna Huffington, has partnered with OpenAI to create Thrive AI Health, a hyper-personalized AI health coach that can integrate with most wearables, including smart eyewear.

SXSW Panel Recording to Check Out: [The Promise of AI and Wearable Tech: Will it Lead to our Collective Wellbeing?](#)

SXSW Indicator: Wearables were one of the more well-represented product categories at the SXSW Expo Hall, a carefully curated collection of 400+ cutting-edge brands and technologies across all industries.

Amplifying Vision Innovation at SXSW 2025

Who Benefits? The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Employers and Employees

March 10th, 4-6 PM CT, Worth Magazine Panel & Happy Hour



RUTH YOMTOUBIAN

Head of the VSP Global
Innovation Center



DAN COSTA

Editorial Director,
Worth Media Group



MEISHA-ANN MARTIN

VP, People Research,
Workhuman



ANN FUNAI

CIO, Vice President Business
Platform Transformation, IBM

Driving Innovation through Curiosity

March 9th, 1.30-2 PM CT, Female Quotient Lounge



AVRA GOLDSTONE LORRIMER

Chief Communications Officer,
Omnicom PR Group (OPRG)



MATTHIEU MASSELIN

Co-Founder and CEO,
Wandercraft



RUTH YOMTOUBIAN

Head of the VSP Global
Innovation Center



STERLENA TAYLOR

PhD, MBA, Executive Director,
Head Innovation Lab, Novartis

Deep Dive into our Panel:

AI Emerges as an Employee Benefit

Panel Insight: Due to AI's ability to personalize learning and development, enhance health and wellness programs, and contribute to fostering a healthy work-life balance by automating routine tasks, the technology is behaving not just as a productivity tool, but as an employee benefit.

Why It Matters: While 92% of companies plan to invest more in AI over the next 3 years, according to [research](#) from McKinsey, employees are not getting the AI training and support they need; in fact, more than a fifth report that they have received minimal to no support. To capture true AI value, businesses will need to develop robust training programs and frameworks to upskill their workforces.

Fast Fact: 64% of employees have [admitted](#) to passing off AI as their own work and 55% [said](#) they use unapproved Gen AI apps at work, highlighting growing, often covert, adoption of AI in the workplace.

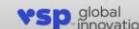
SXSW Panel Recording to Check Out: Who Benefits? The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Employers and Employees. [Read the recap and watch the panel recording here.](#)

Soundbite: Worth Magazine hosted a standing room-only event on 'AI as a Benefit' at SXSW 2025, which the VSP Global Innovation Center participated on, underscoring the increased interest in this topic. "The efficiency-only framing of AI misses on its opportunity to serve as a holistic benefit to employees and employees," explained panelist and Workman VP of People Research Meisha-ann.

Worth Presents

Who Benefits? The Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Employers and Employees

In Partnership With





Our Call to Innovators

At VSP Vision™, we are constantly reimagining the way eye care and eyewear are delivered to the world.

To fulfill this promise, the VSP Global Innovation Center is actively seeking new startups and technologies to collaborate with on forward-looking innovations, especially around access to eye care.

Interested in connecting? Let's talk.

GET IN TOUCH WITH US AT: globalinnovationcenter@vsp.com

About VSP Global Innovation Center

At VSP Vision, our purpose is to empower human potential through sight. As the first and only national not-for-profit vision benefits company, VSP has been the leader in health-focused vision care, providing affordable access to eye care and eyewear for more than 85 million members through a network of more than 41,000 providers.

The VSP Global Innovation Center (GIC) is VSP's lens into the future.

Through emerging technologies, new business exploration, and strategic connections within the innovation ecosystem, the GIC is a hub for reimagining the way eye care and eyewear are delivered to the world.

To learn more, please visit www.vspglobal.com/innovation