

TED shedding elite conference image

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TED later this year will open its online talks platform to developers who will be free to dream up new applications for channeling TED.com content to smartphones, tablet computers or other Internet-linked gadgets.

"If we want to spread ideas, one of the most important things we can do is reach people on different platforms around the world," TED media director June Cohen told technology trendsetters at the South By Southwest festival that ends Tuesday in Texas.

Renowned scientists, political leaders, artists, entrepreneurs and

musicians have taken to the stage at the technology-focused gatherings where they are urged to give the "talk of their lives" in 18 minutes.

The annual Technology, Entertainment, Design conferences started 27 years ago in California as annual enclaves where elite thinkers got together to explore life from challenging or unusual perspectives.

The nonprofit Sapling Foundation began making recordings of talks available online as podcasts in 2006, then began streaming videos free at a TED.com website the following year to reach a global audience.

TED talks have legions of followers on the Internet and have spread to television stations around the world.

"It completely flipped from an elite gathering, expensive and closed to an ecosystem that was free and open," Cohen said.

Late last year, TED released an application that lets the popular videos be viewed on Apple's iPad.

Volunteers have been translating TED Talks into myriad languages, and next month the website will begin posting presentations originating in tongues other than English.

"Even we at TED found these steps pretty frightening," Cohen said of the decision to go against traditional business wisdom of hiking a commodity's value by keeping it exclusive and scarce.

"But what we have actually learned is that all the unintended consequences of this openness have been explosively positive."

While making the talks available free, TED raised the conference fee to \$6,000 and sold out faster than ever, she noted.

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