

Basketball legend Shaq talks tech at SXSW

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Shaquille O'Neal is pictured at the Staples Center on February 19, 2011 in Los Angeles, California. O'Neal on Monday credited the "geeks" who introduced him to computers during his troubled teenage years for making him the tech tycoon that he is today.

Basketball legend Shaquille O'Neal on Monday credited the "geeks" who introduced him to computers during his troubled teenage years for making him the tech tycoon that he is today.

The retired [National Basketball Association](#) star with a Ph.D. in human resources who invested in Google before it went public held court at the South by Southwest (SXSW) festival where he found two new startups to support.

In an hour-long talk that repeatedly had an adoring SXSW audience bent over in laughter, the man they call "Shaq" recalled how he had been a "medium-level juvenile delinquent" as a teenager in Texas when technology changed his life.

"My humor was not always appreciated in the school district," he quipped. "I was always in trouble. I didn't have a lot of self-confidence. I was always told by peers that I wouldn't amount to anything, and I started to believe it."

When his future in high school basketball hinged on getting better grades, his family—living on an [army base](#)—got him a computer, and he turned to the class [nerds](#) to show him how it could help him. He was instantly hooked.

"It was the geeks that made me realize that I wasn't as dumb as people thought I was," he said. "When I brought a report card home that was full of Cs, it was a great day at my house."

He said it also taught him the value of collaborating with people who know more about something than he does, offering a key piece of career advice to aspiring tech entrepreneurs in the auditorium.

Just turned 41, O'Neal—not satisfied with his stakes in [Google](#), the Five Guys burger chain, Muscle Milk sports beverages and the video microblogging app Tout, on which in 2011 he announced his retirement from pro sports—said he spent Sunday prowling SXSW's trade floor looking for new places "to park my money."

"I felt I was at Toys 'R' Us," he joked.

On Monday, he announced the two startups he found at SXSW to mentor: Speakerfy, a "social sound" app to play the same song on different devices at the same time, and Beam, a video conferencing service that uses TV screens mounted on robot pedestals.

"I always wanted to be at the forefront of technology, at the forefront of business," said O'Neal—who has also dabbled in rap and acting, and still serves as a reserve police officer—as he set out his investment philosophy.

"A lot of times, when I invest, I never look at the money aspect," he said. "I ask, 'Is this going to help people? Is this going to inspire people? Is this going to change the world?'"

Due diligence is also a core fundamental for O'Neal, whose master's degree—earned online—is in business administration.

On his prolific use of Twitter and other social media, O'Neal said: "The way I use it is 60 percent to make you laugh, 30 percent to inspire you, and 10 percent to sell product and promote myself."

"I'm on my iPad, I'm on my computer every day," said the seven-foot-one (2.1 meter) Renaissance man. "I'm one of the world's tallest geeks."

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