

That Was Then: A Sundance Moment That Defined Innovation

By Joel McKay Smith

Adrift in the swirling Sundance 2000 crowd on Park City's Main Street, aging pro skier Bill Kerig ascends the snow-covered steps of the legendary Harry O's nightclub and finds the future.

Walking into the kind of energy that only comes from creative collisions, Kerig encounters film enthusiasts, tech pioneers, and industry visionaries; all gathered to explore the transfixing glow of a burgeoning technological era. The Interactive Lounge buzzes with activity, packed with 160 devices showcasing cutting-edge streaming media. At the time, streaming media was merely a promise...

...something you read about in *Wired* or heard whispered about in Silicon Valley. But here, in the high country of Utah, it was happening.

And on 160 screens! The pull was magnetic; Kerig had stumbled upon not only the seeds of the world's future but his own.

And then came the music. Night after night, arena bands—Sammy Hagar, The Cult, Third Eye Blind (scan the QR to watch the concert), Edwin McCain, and others took the stage, creating a pulsating backdrop of live performances that drew crowds into the throbbing tech-topia art-fueled technology and technology-fueled art.

Adding their own irreverent flair to the festivities, *South Park* creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone hosted their infamous Lapdance Party imagine it, and you're probably not far off making Sundance 2000 unforgettable. Their energy matched the moment's zeitgeist: brash, innovative, and boundary-pushing. This perfect storm of creativity in snowy Utah set the stage for what was to come in media and technology.

The Interactive Lounge didn't just connect people with devices; it connected people with possibilities. It laid the groundwork for how streaming media, live events, and technology could converge to create something larger than life.

Kerig was so inspired that he entered the event's Pitch Fest, a groundbreaking contest inviting writers, directors, and aspiring filmmakers to break through traditional Hollywood gatekeeping and pitch their film concepts directly to industry professionals.

Swept up in the techno-future vibe, Kerig pitched a mash-up of technology and tradition: a group of tech nerds launch a satirical website that accidentally gets taken seriously, plunging them into a chaotic web of organized crime and FBI entanglements. The zany movie idea was called *Mafia.com*. And it won, changing his life.

Kerig retired from professional skiing and dove headfirst into a film and tech career.

A quarter of a century later, Kerig, who has since made five movies, helmed five tech companies, written three books, and started two Utah magazines (one about technology and another about Utah's extraordinary lifestyle) now helps other creatives fast-track their dreams at TractionBusinessAccelerator.com.

He feels incredibly lucky to have grown alongside the state he calls home all because of a creative tech explosion that took place in Utah's high country twenty-five years ago.