

Posted on Tue, Dec. 04, 2012

Innovate MIA puts spotlight on startup community

By Nancy Dahlberg

ndahlberg@miamiherald.com



CARL JUSTE / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

Jose Antonio Hernandez-Solaun, co-founder of TekFight, shows his latest social media game at the pre-HackDay meetup Nov. 27 at Senzari's offices in Miami. About 40 hackers will be selected to participate in the 24-hour HackDay Dec. 8-9.

If you think the next week is all about art, you may be surprised to learn there are also six entrepreneurship events vying for your time.

And that is all by design.

In much the way that Art Basel helped put Miami's arts community on the international map, organizers of the first Innovate MIA hope their weeklong grouping of events will shine a light on the city's growing tech startup community and its position as the gateway to Latin America.

Many of the events — ending with Florida International University's Americas Venture Capital Conference — are after Art Basel. That's also why the third annual AVCC was moved to Dec. 13-14 from its previous mid-November

dates.

"Our message is come for Art Basel, and stay for AVCC," said Juan Pablo Cappello, a lawyer, entrepreneur and investor who is on the steering committee of the venture capital conference and several other Innovate MIA events. And all week, there will be plenty of opportunities for Miami's entrepreneurs, creatives and investors to mingle with their counterparts from all over the Americas and beyond.

In addition to the AVCC, there's Incubate Miami's DemoDay, where its class of startups present their companies, the martial arts-inspired TekFight and HackDay, which dangles a \$50,000 cash prize. Endeavor, the global nonprofit that promotes high-impact entrepreneurship in emerging economies, is bringing its two-day International Selection Panel to Miami, and Wayra, an international accelerator, is holding a one-day event to showcase its promising startups from Latin America and Spain. It's all part of Innovate MIA week: "I don't think anything like it has ever been organized here in South Florida," Cappello said.

[The AVCC](#) will be the big draw, with about 300 people expected to attend the two-day event at the JW Marriott Brickell. The conference, themed "Data, Design & Dollars," will feature thought leaders from all over the world, particularly Latin America, and presentations by 29 selected companies. This year, the format has been overhauled and energized, with lots of short talks and

more time for question-and-answer sessions and networking, said Jerry Haar, associate dean of FIU's College of Business, director of the Pino Global Entrepreneurship Center and AVCC co-chair.

The AVCC's 36 speakers include Martin Varsavsky, Argentine tech entrepreneur, investor and founder of Viatel, Ya.com, Jazztel and FON; Hernan J. Kazah, co-founder and managing partner at Kaszek Ventures and co-founder of Mercadolibre; and Jason L. Baptiste, CEO and co-founder of OnSwipe. There's also Michael Jackson, former COO of Skype and now a venture capitalist; Albert Santalo, founder and CEO of Miami-based CareCloud; and Bedy Yang of 500 Startups.

Chosen from more than 100 applicants, the 29 [presenting companies](#) hailing from all over the Americas will be giving either two-minute or five-minute pitches, fielding questions from a panel of judges and competing for prize packages valued at about \$50,000. Seven of the startups are from South Florida: Kairos, Trapezoid Digital Security, Esenem, LiveNinja, OnTrade and Rokk3r Labs and Zavee.

The presenting companies have "proven innovation, proven management teams and the ability to scale well and be a pan-regional player," said Faquiry Diaz Cala, president of Tres Mares Group and co-chair of AVCC. "The word is out this is a great place to come and pitch to great investors in addition to potentially being one of the prize winners."

For the first time, AVCC is partnering with [Wayra Global](#), Telefonica Digital's accelerator. Since launching the first academy in the summer of 2011, Wayra has grown to 12 academies and has helped launch more than 170 startups around the world. More than half of its startups are already in a commercial stage, said Gonzalo Martín-Villa, CEO of Wayra Global.

Wayra is holding its first international [DemoDay](#) in Wynwood's [LAB Miami](#) the day before the AVCC opens, providing another opportunity for investors and entrepreneurs to meet and mingle.

"Miami is an important place — a hub for Latin America. And we feel this is quite an exciting moment for the city and we want to help foster entrepreneurship," said Martín-Villa, who will be at the DemoDay event and speaking at AVCC.

At Wayra's DemoDay, 17 tech startups will come from 11 countries to pitch their projects, expansion plans and investment opportunities to about 100 venture capitalists, angel investors and representatives of corporate ventures and accelerators from the U.S., Latin America, Spain and other parts of Europe. Telefonica's affiliated fund, Amérigo, and the Silicon Valley-based Telefonica Ventures will also be attending.

"Wayra isn't just its 12 academies. It is a global network," Martín-Villa said. "We are a global network for innovation, for entrepreneurs but more important now we are a global network for investors."

And, just as planned, many of the investors will also be attending AVCC and Endeavor.

Although [Endeavor](#)'s event is not open to the public, it's a key event for the global nonprofit, as a group of panelists will judge and select Endeavor's next class of high-impact entrepreneurs. founded in the late '90s in Argentina and Chile, Endeavor is now in 14 countries, including six in Latin America. "The model is, find the most amazing entrepreneurs, help them grow their

companies through the right amount of mentorship, guidance, support, introductions, and they are the ones that will change their countries,” said Allen Kinsey Taylor, Endeavor’s director of global networks, adding that the nonprofit group supports more than 700 entrepreneurs and has 3,500 active mentors. Both Taylor and Peter Kellner, Endeavor’s co-founder, who now lives in South Florida and runs the Richmond Global fund, will also be speaking at AVCC.

More recently, in April of 2011, Endeavor started an investor network that among other things matches entrepreneurs with venture capitalists or angels to mentor them on how to talk to investors and build a pitch deck, Taylor said. Members of the network meet with the entrepreneurs when they go to their home counties, and there have been organized road trips to Silicon Valley.

“The problem we are trying to solve is accessing smart capital — getting the right investors who will be good partners and help along the way,” said Taylor, in an interview in August. “There are not a lot of people who understand how to invest in early stage and growth companies.” Since launching a pilot program with 12 venture capitalists mainly from Silicon Valley, Endeavor found out there are benefits on both sides. “Investors like leveraging Endeavor’s network to get smart on a country much faster than they could do it on their own.”

Endeavor selects entrepreneurs at International Selection Panels five times each year and its Miami event will be the largest ever, said David Wachtel, Endeavor’s senior vice president of marketing and communications. “We’re bringing 28 candidate companies to Miami — 22 of them from Latin America — and the event will attract a number of major international business leaders from Miami, Silicon Valley and Latin America to serve as judges,” he said.

Also as part of Innovate MIA week, there will be interactive events for local and regional startups, too.

While hackathons are becoming fairly common events in South Florida these days, the HackDay Foundation’s [HackDay](#) event Dec. 8-9 will be raising the bar, with a bigger prize and more emphasis on continued mentorship and company creation.

At the conclusion of the 24-hour HackDay at [LAB Miami](#), five finalists will be chosen. Over the next few days, they will receive coaching as they prepare for their final showdown — pitching to the crowd at the AVCC on Dec. 14. The winning team will receive \$30,000 in cash, plus another \$20,000 if it commits to working full-time to launch the business, and will also be mentored and given co-working space at the LAB Miami in Wynwood. In addition, through a partnership with Wayra, the winning team will be fast-tracked into the final round for a spot in a Wayra accelerator.

“I think we have put all the pieces together now — mentors, funding and a top-notch accelerator program,” said Demian Bellumio, HackDay Foundation’s founder, an investor, and COO of Senzari. “We want to encourage entrepreneurs to stay and build companies in Miami.”

Kicking off Innovate MIA will be [Incubate Miami’s DemoDay](#) Dec. 6, where the Miami accelerator’s [seven startups](#) will present their companies to an expected crowd of more than 150 at Grand Central in downtown Miami. Incubate’s fourth class of startups will be presenting to the investors their solutions in crowdfunding, healthcare and fitness, real estate and entertainment. One of its startups, Regalos y Amigos, even recently relocated its business from Argentina to Miami, said Incubate Miami’s co-founder Marc Billings.

The next day at Miami Dade College it's [TekFight](#), a free, creative tournament-style [entrepreneurship event](#) seeking to link Miami's emerging innovators with top-level decision-makers. Participants can "belt up" by helping others and earn sessions with successful investors and entrepreneurs such as Manny Medina, said Saif Ishaof, who co-founded TekFight with Jose Antonio Hernandez-Solaun. "Martial arts is a fitting setting to place our work, since it is a world that honors those who are committed to helping others achieve while fostering a competitive spirit," Ishaof said.

Matt Haggman, Miami program director for the Knight Foundation, which is a sponsor of AVCC, HackDay and TekFight and is making a huge push to accelerate a startup ecosystem in South Florida, said he hopes Innovate MIA will become a yearly tradition.

"We're super excited about this. Events like these bring people together to begin forging meaningful relationships and provide learning opportunities," said Haggman, adding that providing places to convene is an important building block of the startup infrastructure. "All the elements [of an ecosystem] are here but many are scattered. It's about providing the support where needed and the connections."

© 2012 Miami Herald Media Company. All Rights Reserved.
<http://www.miamiherald.com>