

Latin American Entrepreneurs Find A Hub In South Florida

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Someone finally decided to do it. After only a year of coming on board to head up FIU's Entrepreneurship Center, Irma Becerra-Fernandez is pulling together the Latin American start-up scene. On November 17-18th, Florida International University will be hosting the **Americas VC Conference**, a forum for innovative companies in Latin America and South Florida to network with venture capitalists and strategic partners with an interest in the region.

In my conversation with Irma last week she admitted that the conference had taken over her life. Not surprising considering that in the last couple of months she signed up a number of blue chip sponsors to the conference including Citi, Telemundo and Fedex, as well as a roster of top notch speakers and panelists that will kick off with a keynote by Venezuelan media mogul **Gustavo Cisneros**. The event is being promoted via a number of prominent media partners in Latin America and South Florida such as **America Economia** and the **Miami Herald**, and boasts an impressive list of partner organizations including **Endeavor** and the **Council of the Americas**.

Similar to other successful VC conferences such as **MIT's**, the **Americas VC Conference** will showcase a select group of 15 innovative ventures. The selection panel will choose the top 15 companies on August 15th from a database of applicants that among other **criteria** must have at least \$2M (USD) in revenues and be headquartered in Latin America or South Florida with primary business in the region.

I'm personally invested in this initiative because I recognize the value of having a local network in place when growing a start up. During the founding years of Open English, I spent most of my time working and networking in Silicon Valley and around Southern California. The colleagues, investors and friends I met during those years helped kick-start and grow our company. That's why it was such a tough decision for my wife Nicolette and me to make the jump from California to Florida early in 2009. Our company's focus had concentrated in Latin America and Miami allowed us to be closer to our customers and regional subsidiaries while still keeping our headquarters in the US. And although it was the ideal place to coordinate our regional efforts and recruit folks that understood the region, we knew that moving away from California would bring additional challenges particularly in raising follow on rounds of capital. Since arriving to Miami last year, I've been looking for ways to help bring together the entrepreneurial network in South Florida. So when I heard about Irma's ambitious undertaking, I immediately took interest.

Open English is in the running for one of the 15 companies to be showcased at the conference and our Chairman, **John McIntire** will be one of the General Session panelists. Some of our friends will also be participating including **Lorenzo Lara**, President of Negocios Digitales, who I interviewed last month on this blog; and **Mike Kazma**, President and CEO of Amzak Capital Management.

Finally a much needed hub for the Latin American entrepreneurial community...

See you there.

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