

Learn to attract venture funds

BY NANCY DAHLBERG

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Is your startup ready to attract investment?

Although venture funding is more difficult to attain now, it's not hopeless. Just last week, for instance, CapitalSouth Partners of Charlotte, N.C., and partner firm Florida Mezzanine Fund of Orlando announced plans to invest at least \$77 million in high-growth Florida businesses, the Orlando Sentinel reported. Their first deal as part of the state expansion is with Great Healthworks of Coral Springs, though terms were not disclosed.

Whatever stage your company is in, this roundup of upcoming events and tools may help you learn more about equity financing.

- Florida International University's Pino Global Entrepreneurship Center is offering a webinar called *Shameless Self Promotion: Pitching your Business*. Alex Acosta, an analyst with the Miami-based private equity firm Trivest, will lead the webinar. Trivest invests in Florida, nationally and in Canada.

The webinar from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Tuesday will help you determine if your firm is ready to seek seed financing and will introduce you to the decision-making process that private equity and venture-capital firms use when evaluating investment opportunities. There will be a one-hour presentation and 30 minutes devoted to questions.

The webinar is open to all and costs \$25. Click on the Entrepreneur's "How To" Webinar Series link on www.entrepreneurship.fiu.edu to register and to find out about other upcoming topics.

- The South Florida Venture Connection is hosting its first networking event from 5:30 to 8 p.m., March 31 at the Sugarcane Raw Bar and Grill, 3250 NE 1st Ave., Miami.

Entrepreneurs, institutional investors, angel investors and related service providers throughout South Florida are encouraged to attend, says the organizer, Seth Elliott, who moved to South Florida from New York several years ago. SFVC aims to provide an interactive forum to exchange ideas and practical expertise about growing and financing early and mid-stage ventures, he said. Future networking events will be held around the tri-county area.

E-mail him at selliott@apheleon.com so he'll know how many to expect.

- If you would like to learn more about equity financing on your own -- or if terms like option pool and post-money valuation are a bit foreign to you -- there are interesting resources online.

Check out the Equity Simulator, for instance. Developed by Bo Fishback, vice president of entrepreneurship at the Kauffman Foundation, the tool can help you understand the basic principles of equity funding and dilution -- how much you give up of your company in return for the capital you need to grow it. This tool also explains the lingo at each round of financing.

Find the tool at www.ownyourventure.com . You can also find a link to it on Kauffman's www.entrepreneurship.org , a site full of articles, blogs and studies about launching and growing your business.

Here's another informative site: www.seriesseed.com. This enterprising Silicon Valley lawyer open-sourced key legal documents for equity financing agreements. The idea is that with early-stage seed funding now often smaller than in the past, entrepreneurs and their lawyers may be able to save money and time using these simplified and streamlined templates. They are free for anybody to use, and they are also a good learning tool, providing a peek at what entrepreneurs can expect.

Closer to home, The Launch Pad, the University of Miami's entrepreneurial career center, offers an excellent resource list available to everyone on its website.

You will find a dozen or so resources on funding, for instance. There are also links on marketing, operations, business plans, demographic research, legal issues and more, grouped by topic -- more than 100 in all.

Click on Resources on www.thelaunchpad.org, and while you are there check out other events and services offered by The Launch Pad.