

eMerge Americas conference aims to help make Miami tech hub a reality

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With a vision of establishing Miami as the technology hub for Latin America, a local non-profit group is planning to launch a major, annual conference here, beginning next year.

Called “eMerge Americas,” it’s created by the Technology Foundation of the Americas and is expected to bring the leading information technology companies in the world to South Florida to showcase their offerings to thousands of technology industry insiders from across the hemisphere.

Scheduled for May 4-6, 2014 at the Miami Beach Convention Center, the conference will serve as a platform for hundreds of innovative entrepreneurs and startups from throughout the region to network with investors and industry luminaries, according to the Technology Foundation of the Americas, a non-profit firm spearheaded by Manny Medina, who serves as chairman. Medina is also founding and managing partner of Medina Capital, a private equity firm that invests in technology companies.

“Our overall goal is to create Miami as a technology hub ... for Latin America, just as we are the financial and tourism hub for Latin America,” said Medina, who sold the company he founded, Terremark, in 2011, for \$2 billion and founded the Technology Foundation of the Americas to develop the technology ecosystem in South Florida.

Medina plans to formally announce the conference, and the vision it represents, Wednesday evening at an invitation-only soiree in Miami Beach.

Medina is aiming for eMerge Americas to offer attendees a place for the flow of substantive information, plus an opportunity for networking with peers, as well as a social gathering that will be fun, complete with musical performances.

He is hoping to attract more than 5,000 participants from all over the world — particularly from Latin America — to the event, which is projected to cost \$5 million to \$6 million to put on its first year.

Already Medina said he has raised more than \$1 million, including more than \$500,000 from Medina Capital and \$250,000 each from Miami-Dade County and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation.

“The moment that Manny announced that he wanted to do a technology conference based in Miami, we were obviously thrilled,” said Matt Haggman, the Knight Foundation’s Miami program director. “We’ve been involved since the very beginning of this, and this is a key part of our entrepreneurship initiative in Miami.”

The conference will build on the momentum already gained in Miami from such entrepreneurial-focused efforts as Endeavor, Start-up City: Miami and The LAB Miami, Haggman said.

“A big part of a startup community is technology, so having a conference focused on technology is really important,” he said.

The plan for eMerge Americas is that major information technology companies will showcase solutions in the areas of cloud computing, cyber security, big data, mobile applications, and social networking to leaders in the technology sector in the Americas.

“For Knight what is so important about this is it creates opportunities for connections; it creates opportunities for shared learning; it creates opportunities for really focused attention and changed perceptions in showing that in many ways there is much more here than people realize,” Haggman said.

In fact, Medina’s goal is to elevate Miami to be on par with other such tech communities as Silicon Valley, Boston and Austin, Texas, which hosts the annual music/film/interactive conference South by Southwest (SXSW). EMerge Americas will play an important role, just as Art Basel Miami Beach has helped cement Miami’s status in the art world.

To garner support for the conference locally, Medina said he has met with academic institutions like Florida International University and the University of Miami, which have applauded the effort.

“It’s a fabulous idea,” said Tom LeBlanc, the University of Miami’s provost. “It’s an opportunity to put technology on the map in South Florida in a very visible way.”

Likewise, David R. Klock, dean of the College of Business at FIU, called eMerge Americas “an exceptional idea,” and touted Medina’s effort at furthering technology and the Miami community at the same time.

“This should become a must-attend annual conference for people all over the world to know what is the state of the art,” Klock said, “and a place to be to get ideas, to get interactions and also, for recognizing Miami as the gateway to the Americas for technology.”