

The Miami Herald

My view: Time to seal the deal: Let's put South Florida's Tech Community on the map

*by Jacques Hart, special to the Miami Herald
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With South Florida's emerging tech scene enjoying strong winds at its sails, it's time to work together more closely to institutionalize our brand and strengthen our national leadership positioning as a tech hub. Capitalizing on this momentum now is particularly important considering our region is often a victim of economic cycles.

Indeed, the region has amassed big wins in the past few years, including building a world-class wireless engineering community and establishing robust life sciences and biotech communities. Academia, nonprofits and private organizations are making significant impacts with their mentorship, investments and research. Incubators, accelerators and shared working spaces are meeting growing demand from start-ups. Middle-market technology companies are solidifying their leadership positions. Fundable start-ups are proliferating quickly, finding the region abound with commercial concepts, strong talent and good infrastructure.



Jacques Hart, CEO of Roar Media.

Although we have positioned ourselves well within our three-county region, it's time to showcase our region on a broader stage. Some ways we may achieve this:

'COOPETITION'

The tech community could learn from our local travel and tourism industry and take a strategy from its playbook: "coopetition." Groups could compete locally for resources but cooperate nationally to attract investors and brand the region. Much like our friends in travel and tourism who leverage visitors and conventions bureaus to market South Florida, we could form a unified consortium asking the region's top players to establish common agendas and pool dollars and resources. A consortium can give us the resources and runway to unite our institutions, build a website portal showcasing the region, quantify our tech sector's economic impact and attract the investment needed for our underfunded start-up community.

BRANDING 'MIAMI'

Let's accept reality: most of the country thinks of South Florida as "Miami." While Broward and Palm Beach have tremendous tech momentum, it is in everyone's best interest to back Miami as the brand. Let's leverage rather than fragment our brand equity. This is a tall order to ask our friends to the north, so our Miami representatives should highlight the amazing work done across the entire region and share the spoils of the branding campaign..

NATIONAL MARKETING

The consortium could pool resources to launch compelling marketing campaigns targeted to investors, industry leaders and technology companies nationally. The "show me, don't tell me" campaign would highlight successes and showcase characteristics making South Florida ripe with opportunity.

FAMILIARIZATION TRIPS

Like the "familiarization trips" commonly used within the hospitality industry, the consortium could invite reporters, investors and other thought-leaders to tour the region. A welcoming committee could

introduce them to regional start-ups, research facilities and incubators.

ROAD SHOWS

Delegations of ambassadors could take our product on the road, meeting with venture capital groups, attending tech conferences, and lobbying Washington for support.

CULTIVATING FUNDING SOURCES

Beyond venture capitalists and private equity investors, we should attract more angels. Increasingly, financial institutions, law firms and other service providers with access to potential angels are educating their clients so they don't miss out on this opportunity. Angel investing here today is where philanthropy was years ago, when folks weren't as sophisticated and were hesitant. Now, philanthropy is taken for granted. We must do the same with angel investing.

LEVERAGING EMERGE AMERICAS

The inaugural eMerge Americas technology conference in May is shining a spotlight on Miami, but we must not let the luster fade after the summit ends. Let's leverage eMerge to build coalitions, establish an all-inclusive consortium, and launch a comprehensive agenda.

Jacques Hart is CEO and co-founder of Roar Media.