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## Lewinsky, Pitbull share lessons of fame at eMerge Americas conference

### HIGHLIGHTS

“My parents feared I would be humiliated to death, literally,” said Monica Lewinsky in keynote address

Ray Kurzweil presented a dizzying look into the innovation of the future

Startups took the stage in contests throughout the day



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On closing day of eMerge Americas, speakers including former White House intern Monica Lewinsky, futurist Ray Kurzweil and Armando Christian Pérez — better known as Pitbull — entertained and inspired packed ballrooms, while large corporations, organizations and startups enticed crowds to visit their booths.

“I think it has been phenomenal. The energy level has never been higher,” said Manny Medina, founder of eMerge Americas, late Tuesday as Miami’s homegrown technology conference wrapped up at Miami Beach Convention Center.

What impressed him the most in this third year was the amount of business being transacted. “So many people stopped me to say they launched their companies or to tell me who they met at eMerge. That is exactly what we want.”

The headliners attracted standing room crowds to the Miami Beach Convention Center. An overflow room was quickly put into action for Monica Lewinsky, [who spoke out about cyberbullying](#).

“At the age of 22 I fell in love with my boss. By 24, I learned the devastating consequences of my mistake,” she told the crowd. Of course her boss was the president of the United States – an affair she said she regrets every day of her life. In the aftermath, she said, “I lost my dignity, my self-respect, I almost lost my life. ... my parents feared I would be humiliated to death, literally.”

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She was inspired to begin speaking out about her experiences with cyberbullying, she said, after the tragic suicide of Tyler Clementi, the Rutgers University student who jumped to his death from the George Washington Bridge in 2010

after his roommate secretly filmed and posted him kissing another man. “Some people can’t imagine living to the next day and that’s not right.”

She said a recent global survey showed that one in five young people have experienced cyberbullying; 18 percent of those had had suicidal thoughts. Lewinsky encouraged the audience to fight back by resisting the temptation to click on such postings. One person’s shame has become another’s profit, she noted. A marketplace has emerged – “the more shame, the more clicks.” People seeing others cyberbullied can also respond with a compassionate comment (sometimes that can change the conversation) or report the bullying, she said.

Speaking to victims, she said, “You can survive ... Insist on a different ending to your story. We all deserve compassion – to live in a more compassionate world.”

Earlier in the day, futurist Ray Kurzweil took the audience on a mind-bending spin into the not-so-distant future. Innovation is about being in the “right place with the right idea at the right time,” said the inventor and author. Fortunately, technological advances grow at an exponential pace, not linearly, so what one can’t even imagine now may be just 10 or 15 years away.



Much of the medical innovation is already starting – reprogramming a heart with stem cells, for instance. Kurzweil, who co-founded Singularity, a Silicon Valley technology education center and think tank, and is now employed by Google, said he is involved with a company that is 3D printing hearts, lungs and kidneys and transplanting them in primates. He believes by the 2020s and 2030s, people will be able to print out their own organs.

How about non-biological T-cells that can download software and finish the job of the immune system? Another Kurzweil prediction: Bigger brains by the 2030s, thanks to a synthetic neocortex that will be augmented by cloud technology downloads. Already, some Parkinson’s patients have computers connected right into the brain, he said. “We invent technology to expand our reach.”

With all the coming innovation in genetic sequencing, stem cell research, 3D printing and nanotechnology medical applications, people will be living longer, too. Within a decade, said Kurzweil, humans will be adding a year every year to life expectancy. “If you can hang in there, you’ll get to see the revolutionary century ahead.”

For the media panelists, the future is well under way. Pitbull was joined by CNBC Chairman Mark Hoffman, NBCUniversal International Group, NBCUniversal Telemundo Enterprises Chairman Cesar Conde and CNBC journalist Melissa Lee for a discussion of the fast-changing media landscape and the importance of the Hispanic audience, at 60 million and growing.



Conde talked about his company focus on the “three Ms” of his audience: millennial, mobile and multicultural. “If you look at the Hispanic community as a freestanding economy, it’s the 14th or 15th largest in the world,” he said, with a \$1 trillion spending power.

The increase in media platforms requires news and entertainment companies to be everywhere, said all three. “Facebook and Twitter, social media is the word of mouth of today,” said Hoffman. “We have to be where people want us to be with the right content.”

Whether it’s music, telenovelas, webisodes or news, the content is key, said Pitbull, who said his company’s total social media reach is about 80 million. “The No. 1 thing for consumers is a great product. If the product is great, [people] will find a way to see it, hear it, listen to it, be a part of it.”

But for Pitbull, entrepreneurship is about controlling his own destiny. “I don’t want to be part of a billion dollar business if I’m going to have trillion dollar headaches. For me and my team, it’s not about the money, it’s about the journey.”

Throughout the day, startups took over the center stage, with pitch competitions for university, early stage and later stage companies as well as the [pre-eMerge Hackathon](#) and the Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship, which teaches young people in low-income communities how to start and run their own businesses.

The biggest prize, \$100,000 in investment plus in-kind prizes, went to Mediconecta. The Miami company provides telemedicine in Latin America and is expanding quickly.

“There were several very strong contenders,” said Jose Antonio Hernandez-Solaun, one of the judges for the later-stage track. “We selected a company we think can take it to the next level in Latin America.”

Miami port logistics software maker Cetus Labs and Tinker.build were winners in other tracks. (see box for all winners)

Carolina Rendeiro, an eMerge Americas vice president who oversaw the Startup Showcase and eMerge Hackathon, said several winners and competitors in previous years returned as judges, including founders from Modernizing Medicine and Tesser Health. Facebook, Microsoft, Visa, Nasdaq and Venture Hive were among the companies that mentored the startups to prepare them for the showcase. “We have turned the ecosystem into what it is supposed to be – Miami as a tech scene,” she said, after the later stage companies pitched their businesses.

The eMerge team was also setting the stage for next year, when the convention center’s renovation schedule will push the conference until June 12-13. With 13,000 attendees this year, the bar is high.

“This is about quality, not quantity,” said Medina. “We are learning more every year, gathering the feedback and refining it. But the formula is set.”

*Miami Herald Business Editor Jane Wooldridge contributed to this report.*

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## COMPETITION WINNERS

**Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship:** Khareem Oliver, founder of Find or Found, a pet finding app, and Gabriel Martinez, founder of GAM-V, a school supplies vending system each won \$3,000; Stephanie Diaz of Lux Candles won \$1,500; Justin Rivas, of Top Level Athletics, a youth basketball program, and Kevin Diniz, of Easy Scholar, each won \$1,000.

**eMerge Hackathon:** Grand prize winner, \$10,000: Team Two Brothers and an Oscar, for a financial literacy app for kids

### Startup Showcase:

- University track, \$25,000 prize: Tinker.build, FIU, a platform for novices to build tech hardware
- Early Stage track, \$50,000 prize: Cetus Labs, creates software to streamline port terminal operations
- Later Stage track, \$100,000 prize: Mediconecta, a telemedicine provider for Latin America

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