

BUSINESS

Tech Trail: A growing tech firm has set up shop in Miami-Dade. You might be surprised where

It's not likely that Country Walk, near Kendall in West Dade, comes to mind when one thinks of where Miami's startup founders congregate.

But as real estate costs in the area soar in the county's urban core, a pair of engineering visionaries have set up shop in a 1,400-square-foot facility in that most suburban part of town.

[VAC Coffee](#) founders Eduardo Umaña and Otto Becker created a coffee machine that makes your coffee sweeter through an innovative vacuum-powered brewing process. VACs are already sold in Panther and Uncommon Ground – not to mention Williams Sonoma – and the company has been featured in Wired, Tech Crunch and Mashable.

"We love that you can add Panther Coffee to your VAC and get a delicious cold brew in just four minutes," said Panther co-founder Leticia Pollock in an email. "Having known the team from VAC for years, we enjoy their continuous dedication and passion for coffee and innovation."

In addition to selling their machine, VAC is now also offering subscription coffee roasts brewed in originating countries. Sales have been brisk, Umaña said.

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VAC is another example of how geography is becoming less of a factor for businesses, thanks to the ability to work remotely – something that has led many in tech to choose Miami over other established tech centers.

In an interview, Umaña disavowed any attempt to call him a trendsetter, saying he is not aware of any other tech startup companies based in Kendall or West Dade, parts of which [saw significant population growth over the past decade](#).

"All of our neighbors here are industrial firms," he said.

Still, Umaña recommends the Kendall area to any firm looking to save on rent: They pay as much for their floor space – about \$13 per square foot – as they did for a 9-by-9 cubicle at a co-working space in Wynwood.

“It wasn’t very difficult to find at all – I definitely think there’s an opportunity for founders out here,” Umaña said. “Being in an office building is a hassle, you have the fob, security, rules. And I park my car right in front of our space.”

And if you don’t mind the drive, there’s no traffic, since the rest of the city is fighting to get to downtown. “Traffic is going the opposite direction – I have freeway empty all the way,” he said.

A local SPAC boom

New data from NASDAQ provided to the Miami Herald shows at least 29 South Florida-based entities – including ones based in Palm Beach County – have gone public this year, an unheard of number for the area.

Yet 21 of these were special purpose acquisition companies (SPACs) that are effectively shell companies designed to merge with real ones.

Many have yet to find a merger target. And it’s not clear if they will anytime soon.

“The SPAC market is very saturated and highly competitive given that there are nearly 600 SPACs in the market, with over 400 still looking for an acquisition,” said Julian Klymochko, an expert on SPACs and founder and CEO at Accelerate Financial Technologies Inc.

In fact, Miami has seen some target companies successfully merge with SPACs, minting billions in the process. These include Manny Medina’s two tech companies, Cyxtera and AppGate, and rivals Cano Health and CareMax, both primary care providers.

The local SPAC boom demonstrates that whenever there is froth in the economy, South Florida will be part of it.

Health-tracking iPhone case-maker plans holiday rollout

A [finalist](#) in the Miami Herald Business Plan Challenge/Startup Pitch Competition says it plans to roll out its unique charging case in time for the holiday season.

Moscasa, whose iPhone cases track users’ health, will be on the shelves by the holiday season of 2021. In an email, Moscasa founder and CEO Akos Balogh said the company is currently seeking office space, and that it had secured \$40,750 in potential incentives from the Miami Downtown Development Authority should it reach its hiring goal of 70 employees.

“This will allow us to hire people in sales, marketing, logistic, software, and hardware development,” Balogh said. He added that Moscasa is also working on a strategic partnership with Equinox to get the cases in the hands of trainers and their guests.

“Hopefully, this will be long-term cooperation,” Balogh said.



Moscase co-founders Chanteva Schoch, center, and Akos Balogh pose with Miami Commissioner Manolo Reyes. Moscase hopes to create dozens of jobs in downtown Miami to build out its unique iPhone cases.