Orlando tech community praises ‘high caliber’ Synapse event, offers ways to improve

Suneera Madhani, founder and CEO of Stax, speaks at Synapse Orlando on Oct. 15.
Alex Soderstrom/OBJ

By Alex Soderstrom - Staff Writer

October 26, 2021, 05:13pm EDT

Long lines at the registration desk at Synapse Orlando 2021 were the show's biggest problem — and proof of its success.

For the first time since the inaugural Synapse Orlando at Ace Cafe in 2019, the innovation expo on Oct. 15 returned to Orlando as a live event.

At least 1,500 people registered for Synapse Orlando's networking, technology panels and exposition areas at the Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts.

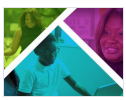
This year's iteration of Synapse, a Florida innovation convention that started in Tampa, drew a bigger crowd than two years ago and, according to many executives and community leaders, was a major success for the region's technology and startup sectors.

Synapse Orlando 2021 featured four floors of technology displays, speaker panels and more.
Alex Soderstrom/OBJ

Recommended

SPONSORED CONTENT
by Enterprise Florida

Enterprise Florida unveils “Built for Opportunity” campaign



TECHNOLOGY
by Orlando Inno

INNO Orlando entrepreneurs list strategies for tech growth

TECHNOLOGY
by Cincy Inno

INNO Miami student-led startup with a flair for TikTok lands investment from local CEO

TECHNOLOGY
by Cincy Inno

INNO Miami student-led startup with a flair for TikTok lands investment from local CEO

MEDIA & MARKETING
by Orlando Business Journal

TBJ Exclusive: Central Florida contractor Advanced IT Concepts turns scrapped cargo plane into NATO medical simulation facility

SPONSORED CONTENT
by Southern Strategy Group

Health care policymaking impacts every type of business in Florida

It was a key opportunity to highlight successes in the region's tech-focused industries and foster connections after 18 months of hardly any in-person tech events in Orlando. Of course, the growth of Central Florida's tech sector is a crucial step to diversify the local economy and create high-wage jobs.

Meanwhile, Central Florida in the future needs to continue to support Synapse Orlando, and other events like it, through sponsorship, participation and word-of-mouth marketing, said Sheena Fowler, senior director of strategic partnerships for augmented reality startup Red 6 Inc.

Fowler helped bring Synapse in 2019 while in her former role as the Orlando Economic Partnership's vice president of innovation. "We need to continue to support events like this that unite our tech ecosystem across key sectors in our region in order to accelerate innovation."

Sheena Fowler
Red 6 Inc.

Here's more from Synapse Orlando's organizers, speakers and attendees on its biggest successes and ways to improve future Synapse Orlando events.

What impressed you the most?
"Synapse Orlando 2021 really brought a much needed energy and sense of connectivity. It was surreal to be meeting people in person for the first time, surrounded by the beautiful Dr. Phillips Center which worked as a venue better than we ever could have imagined. Working with a round stage really brought that intimate feeling of community to everybody involved."

— Brian Kornfeld, CEO and co-founder, Synapse

Brian Kornfeld
Rick Tauceda

"As a large sponsor and long-time supporter, it was inspiring to see how Synapse connected so many community members and businesses together, from fellow founders and speakers to VC firms and private investors... We enjoyed seeing the growing number of young teen innovators participating at Synapse, as they will eventually become our next generation of leaders. Stax definitely looks forward to being involved again and on a bigger scale in the future."

— Suneera Madhani, CEO and founder, Stax

Suneera Madhani
Fattmerchant Inc.

"The turnout was impressive and greater than anticipated — so much so that we had a bottleneck at check-in. It really showed that the combined team — Synapse, Orlando Tech Council and Orlando Economic Partnership — have found the right audience to speak to, and it is a great platform to launch other initiatives off of. Combining with Startup Weekend Orlando, Lean Startup Orlando, Immerse and Synapse to build Innovation Week might have helped, too."

— Rajiv Menon, CEO, Informulate LLC; chair, Orlando Tech Council

Rajiv Menon
Courtesy of Rajiv Menon

"The event was well-organized and merged diverse sectors of tech in one event. Whether you participated in Synapse as a speaker, exhibitor or as an attendee, the event offered something for everyone. Networking in the exhibitors' area, plus the opportunity to make new connections and re-establish existing ones, was the highlight of the event for me."

— Kelda Senior, communications and public relations chair, Black Orlando Tech

Kelda Senior
Kelda Senior

"Meeting in person is a game changer, and you can feel the renewed sense of energy it brings to our network... It felt like we finally reached a turning point in the way we talk about Central Florida and the surrounding region. Instead of comparing ourselves to Miami or Silicon Valley, we were leaning into the unique strengths of this area and celebrating the innovators and the ideas that make our ecosystem great in its own right."

— Paul Sohl, CEO, Florida High Tech Corridor Council

Paul Sohl
Paul Sohl

What were the biggest areas of improvement compared to Synapse Orlando 2019?

"The quality of the speakers over all was elevated. The diversity of exhibitors was greater. The venue was better.... more open and easier to see and find locations. Of course, the Dr. Phillips Center allowed for more people to attend and it not feel like we were all squished in."

— Carol Ann Dykes Logue, director of programs and operations, University of Central Florida Business Incubation Program

Carol Ann Dykes Logue
Julie Fletcher Photography

"There was a higher caliber of programming this year. I saw more regional companies that came into town from the Space Coast, Tampa and even Miami. The level of success stories we've had to share was at a different level than anything we've seen to this date."

— Charlie Lewis, CEO and founder, Blue Wave Resource Partners; chair-elect, Orlando Tech Council

Charlie Lewis
BlueWave Resource Partners

How can Synapse Orlando improve in the future?

"I would say that most of the areas for improvement were issues coming from the success of the event. I know there was very long lines trying to get into register, and the early speaking panels were more sparsely attended."

— Rob Panepinto, director of Innovation Districts strategy and partnerships, University of Central Florida Business Incubation Program

Rob Panepinto
Rob Panepinto

"As Synapse grew in speakers, it also grew in exhibitors. The time to see and interact with everyone was limited. We hope in the future Synapse can grow to a two-day event rather than just one."

— Sal Rehmetullah, co-founder and president, Stax

Sal Rehmetullah
Jim Carchidi

"To be fully inclusive of all the great pieces of our ecosystem, we need a lot more players at the table planning, giving suggestions and involved in programming. If we do it again next year, we need more voices at the table, more people wanting to get involved. We need big enterprise companies present."

— Charlie Lewis, CEO and founder, Blue Wave Resource Partners; chair-elect, Orlando Tech Council

Sign up here for The Beat, Orlando Inno's free newsletter. And be sure to follow us on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter.

Keep Digging

See how local VC funds for women-led startups stack up nationwide

News

This new tech can power AI health assistants and more

News

Developer of golf video game tees up growth

Fundings

New local program to help businesses innovate like a startup

News

How a former UCF athlete turned his injury recovery into a biz

Profiles

SPONSORED CONTENT
by Lowndes

Keep them thinking with your trademark

SPONSORED CONTENT
by Florida Chamber of Commerce

Path to prosperity: Let's transform Florida into a top-10 global economy

Spotlight

More

Orlando Venture-Backed Startups

See More ›

Orlando Innovators

See More ›

Tech + Innovation Ecosystem Directory

See More ›

Deep Dives

See More ›

Upcoming Events

More

1/31: Inno Fire Nomination Deadline

Feb 7 through Mar 28 - GSV Startup Bootcamp [Free RSVP]

the **Beat**

Want to stay ahead of who & what is next? Sent weekly, the Beat is your definitive look at Orlando's innovation economy, offering news, analysis & more on the people, companies & ideas driving your city forward. Follow The Beat

Share the Beat | Sign Up

Orlando Inno Founding Partners

Crummer Graduate School of Business Rollins College

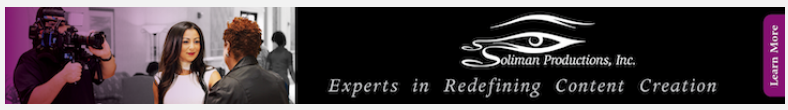
Soliman Productions, Inc.

Lowndes

ORLANDO TECH COUNCIL

THE CORRIDOR

Learn more about Founding Partnerships



© 2022 American City Business Journals. All rights reserved. Use of and/or registration on any portion of this site constitutes acceptance of our User Agreement (updated as of 1/1/21) and Privacy Policy and Cookie Statement (updated as of 1/1/21). The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of American City Business Journals.