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Roth Spotlight on Emerging Growth Companies

■ By ANDREW SIMONS

Last week's wet weather didn't dampen Newport Beach-based Roth Capital Partners LLC's investment conference.

The investment bank's 17th annual conference was held Monday through Wednesday at the St. Regis Monarch Beach Resort & Spa in Dana Point.

About 2,200 people made their way to the St. Regis, up from 1,600 attendees last year.

In all, about 230 publicly traded growth companies—Roth Capital's specialty—showed up to talk about their prospects.

As usual, technology companies dominated this year's roster. Orange County tech companies making appearances included Epicor Software Corp., Lantronix Inc. and Autobytel Inc., all of Irvine.

Roth Capital also invited many non-tech companies such as Boca Raton, Fla.-based Hollywood Media Corp., Yonkers, N.Y.-based EVCI Career Colleges Holding Corp. and Carlsbad-based Rubio's Restaurants Inc., among others.

The conference could be outgrowing its

space. With the rain keeping attendees indoors early on, some mumbled about how packed the hotel's meeting hallways were.

"We're really going to try to cut off registration at about 2,000," said Byron Roth, chief executive of Roth Capital. "I want to make these shows harder and harder to go to."

Two companies that drew big crowds were Laguna Hills-based Interchange Corp. and Newport Beach-based Collectors Universe Inc. Roth Capital has underwritten stock offerings for both of the companies.

Interchange offers paid search services that link online advertisers to Internet surfers. The company drew eyes when its shares shot up 340% in the weeks following its initial public offering in October.

Collectors Universe earns fees for authenticating coins, stamps, baseball cards and



Roth: considered Snoop Dogg, went with Black Eyed Peas

other collectibles. At \$18, Collectors' shares are more than double their 52-week low.

The conference is one of two that Roth Capital holds annually. The other is in New York.

A signature of the Roth Capital event is the nightly entertainment. This year, the after-hours party was headlined by the Black Eyed Peas, a hip-hop band with a funk vibe.

Roth Capital has a history of luring top musical acts to entertain investors. Shaggy performed last year and Sugar Ray performed in 2003.

Like in previous years, scantily clad dancers gyrated in cages bound in razor wire in front of tipsy stock fund managers and investors.

"These guys go to a conference every other week and it's the same ol', same ol'," Roth said. "And people go just because it's different."

Roth considered inviting rap star Snoop Doggy Dogg to perform this year.

"My investor relations person was kind enough to hand out some of his lyrics to my executives," Roth said. "So we got Black Eyed Peas." ■