

Building successful partnerships between academia and industry

The idea of a "gap" between research done in academia and its translation into marketable products certainly is not new. What is new are the steps some academic institutions and companies are taking to bridge that gap.

The ingredients for successful strategic partnerships were discussed by panelists at an event called "Bridging the Innovation Gap Between Academia and Industry," held last month at the [German Center for Research and Innovation](#) in New York City.

Two representatives from academia provided insights into their institutions' efforts to ensure that promising research has at least some chance of being "translated" into useful products, and an industry representative discussed some of the hurdles and solutions.

Academia: Innovation and incubation

[Dr. Jörn Erselius](#), Managing Director at [Max Planck Innovation](#) (MI) in Munich, Germany, gave an overview of the organization's success in bringing research to market.

Securing industry funding for very early stage projects is difficult, he said, because "industry usually is looking for much riper technologies to support." Therefore, MI undertook several initiatives to bring promising projects to the point that they could be considered for collaborations.

MI, which opened in 1970, now submits about 80 patent applications annually, receives \$20-\$30 million yearly from licensing agreements (most notably from its agreement with [Pfizer](#) for the blockbuster drug sunitinib — [Sutent](#) — and has helped fund 112 spinoff companies (companies built around academic discoveries) since 1990.

More recently, MI opened its Life Science Inkubator, specifically to catalyze startups. Applicants go through a "rigorous evaluation," Dr. Erselius said, and if chosen, team members receive education on business and entrepreneurship, as well as assistance in putting together a business plan and fundraising. Seven projects are underway at the Inkubator, and two startups are getting ready to launch.

MI is also filling a translational gap in drug development with its Lead Discovery Center GmbH, established in 2008 to link "basic research and industrial application in the field of small molecule drug discovery," Dr. Erselius observed. To date, the center has delivered four promising lead compounds and signed licensing agreements with a number of pharmaceutical and biotech companies.

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