

BioMedbooster: 'One-stop shop' for business development

By Lucia Geurts

The valorisation of research is a hot topic that academics can no longer avoid. Their findings must, wherever possible, be translated into societal, economic or financial value. But commercialisation is not the academic's first priority – and valorisation is something else entirely. This is set to change now that *BioMedbooster* has arrived on the scene. A 'technology transfer office' initially set up for the benefit of the Maastricht Academic Hospital (azM) and the Faculty of Health, Medicine and Life Sciences (FHML), it has since grown into the 'one-stop shop for business development' for the whole university.

In 2003, the seeds for a 'technology transfer office' in Anglo-Saxon style were sown in Maastricht as part of a collaborative initiative of the City of Maastricht, Maastricht University (UM), the azM and the NV Industriebank LIOF. With financial backing from the Province of Limburg and the Ministry of Economic Affairs, the idea soon began to take concrete shape. And in April 2005, *BioMedbooster* became a reality.

Patents

BioMedbooster's work was initially rooted in patent applications by FHML researchers. It quickly demonstrated that it was able to take the time-consuming and specialist work involved in patent applications out of their hands. "Scientists want to do what they're good at: science", says

Hera Lichtenbeld. A graduate of Health Sciences at UM, Lichtenbeld is as Director Technology Transfer involved in the project right from the very start. "Visionary", is how she describes the initiative that led to *BioMedbooster's* establishment. "We were the first company in the Netherlands to get involved in this way with the commercialisation of scientific findings."

So what does *BioMedbooster* do for scientists? Lichtenbeld: "We team up with scientists to see whether it makes sense to apply for a patent for their findings. Does their result fulfil the three requirements: is it new, in other words not published elsewhere by anyone else in the world, is it inventive and is it applicable for the market? Many ideas are great but are

simply not applicable. Take for example the finding of a new cellular mechanism. If you can't demonstrate what you can do with this new mechanism - improve diagnostics, for instance, or help to develop a new medication - then you need to do some more research first." What are the benefits of having a patent? "In the first place, it protects your invention", says Lichtenbeld. "And in the second place, it can pay off in a financial sense; provide an extra source to help finance your research. This is increasingly important now that the usual sources of funding are drying up more than ever. The patent stays with the knowledge institution, and any revenue finds its way back to the inventors, even if the finding is exploited by another company."



Henri Theunissen



Hera Lichtenbeld

From idea to business

According to Henri Theunissen, Managing Director of BioMedbooster since November 2009, BioMedbooster has become “the one-stop shop for business development” for the whole university. “Our core message is ‘from idea to business’. We offer the full package: from applying for the patent to doing a licensing deal or setting up a company to exploit that patent. We set up a business plan. We also make sure you have starting capital, help with your subsidy applications and talk with potential investors. We also provide members of the supervisory board for the new company. When it comes to the development of further technology, we work closely with the business world.”

Nine fixed project leaders and a “whole array of consultants” do the actual work, people, who understand how business works in all kinds of fields. The project leaders are there to guide scientists through the whole process, from start to finish, including legal advising. For example: “Researchers have international networks. When they use one another’s materials, a ‘material transfer agreement’ is brought into play. Our advice: drop by and see us before you sign it. Because before you know it, you’ll have given your results away. That’s what you’ll find in the fine print.”

Output

BioMedbooster already has a decent number of patents and business activities under its belt. Six companies are currently in the pipeline, two of which are primed and ready for start-up. And that number will increase substantially, if it’s up to Theunissen. “Valorisation is of paramount importance, including at UM. In the near future universities will be judged not only on their publication output, but probably also on their commercial successes.”

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Examples of valorisation

ACS Biomarker & FABPulous BV

ACS Biomarker is aiming to discover and develop biomarkers to improve the prognosis and management of cardiovascular disease. Several biomarkers have already been out-licensed to the American biopharmaceutical company, BG Medicine. FABPulous BV emerged from the collaboration between researchers from the UM research school CARIM and the company MeDaVinci Plc. It produces and sells quick diagnostic tests that can identify a heart attack within minutes. BioMedbooster coordinated and supported the setup of both companies.

2stagepromo

The Department of Marketing and Supply Chain Management of the Maastricht School of Business and Economics (SBE) has developed an algorithm for directing marketing strategies of companies. This algorithm can be used to predict a customer’s purchasing behaviour, and to tailor their promotions for the individual customer. A study in a Belgian supermarket chain has shown that this can lead to a considerable increase in sales. BioMedbooster is exploring the commercialisation of this algorithm. 2stagepromo is the temporary name of this project.