

An abstract graphic design featuring a teal background with large, white, geometric shapes. The shapes are composed of parallel lines and angles, creating a sense of depth and movement. The shapes are arranged in a way that they appear to be floating or layered, with some shapes partially overlapping others. The overall effect is modern and minimalist.

**>>venture foundation>>**  
*Annual report 2016*

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## Editorial

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Dear Reader,

“Switzerland occupies a very strong position on the international stage with low levels of unemployment, high productivity, and economic prosperity. And >>venture's>> role in this state of affairs is considerable.”—says Federal Councilor Johann Schneider-Ammann in a fascinating interview on page 6. I am delighted that Switzerland has a Federal Councilor of this caliber, a man who has been able to apply the valuable experience gained as the head of a major internationally active family business to the world of politics.

Wages in many European countries are only half or even a quarter of what they are in Switzerland. Thus, following economic logic, labor here must be much more productive, and the quality and products should be correspondingly higher. The crux of the matter, however, is that this is just not enough. Other countries are always catching up, forcing us to constantly develop new and better products and services in order to maintain our advantage and preserve our prosperity. Innovation, then, is the key to success, which is why our country needs politicians like Johann Schneider-Ammann to champion Switzerland as a business and startup location.

This is what makes >>venture>> so essential. “Our” alumni companies have already created more than 6,000 jobs in Switzerland. And >>venture>> startups are growing at an impressive rate: Sophia Genetics, for example, which combines genomics with artificial intelligence and big data, is trebling in size every year. In no more than five years the company based on Lake Geneva has created 140 top-quality jobs and raised 33 million in venture capital (see the profile on page 30)

The importance of >>venture>> for Switzerland shows just how important your engagement is. All of you, members of the Advisory

Board, the founding board, coaches, and jurors, want to invest your resources wisely. We cannot thank you enough for the work you do for us—and for Switzerland.

I am looking forward to welcoming you at the award ceremony on June 19, 2017, and to celebrating an important anniversary with you. >>venture>> was held for the first time in 1997, exactly twenty years ago. It all began a year earlier when I, then managing director at McKinsey & Company, submitted a proposal for a startup competition to Jakob Nüesch, then president of ETH Zurich. I was criticized for the idea by a number of people. A well-known PR consultant advised me to abandon it, telling me to stop playing the boy scout. Professor Nüesch, however, remained positive and it was thanks to him that >>venture>> succeeded in taking off. Sadly, Jakob Nüesch passed away last year. A biochemist from St. Gallen, he was a Swiss pioneer, a startup backer, and a role model for >>venture>> participants. He bridged the gap between the business world and academia. Among other activities, he headed the research department of the pharmaceutical branch of Ciba-Geigy. There was a tremendous need for >>venture>> from the very start. In its first year, companies such as ESBatech, Sensirion, and



tibits—now renowned and established firms—took part. And as the growing numbers of participants over the years has shown, demand has not diminished.

So it is now my great pleasure to join you in leading Switzerland's leading startup competition into its third decade.

Thomas Knecht,  
founder of >>venture>>

# NEW WS

## **20TH ANNIVERSARY**

The first >>venture>> edition took place in 1997 and this year marks the competition's twentieth anniversary. In the course of the two decades, more than 3,500 teams have participated! The celebrations will take place at the award ceremony on June 19, 2017, at ETH Zurich.

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## **ADVISORY BOARD ROUNDTABLES**

In fall 2017, the >>venture foundation>> will organize an initial roundtable for Advisory Board members to discuss opportunities and challenges in creating value through collaborations with startups. For more information, contact [\*foundation@venture.ch\*](mailto:foundation@venture.ch).

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## **AUDIENCE AWARD**

>>venture>> and its media partners SRF and RTS are launching an audience award in 2017. In the week leading up to the award ceremony, TV audiences can vote online for their favorite team. For more information, visit [\*www.venture.ch\*](http://www.venture.ch).

## CHANGES IN THE FOUNDATION BOARD

There have been a number of changes to the >>venture>> governing body. The new EPFL president, Martin Vetterli, has taken over from Patrick Aebischer. Marco Ziegler, senior partner at McKinsey's Zurich office, has replaced Matthias Winter, who works in a similar capacity at McKinsey & Company. The foundation would like to offer its gratitude to Mr. Aebischer and Mr. Winter and extend a very warm welcome to Mr. Vetterli and Mr. Ziegler.



## RTS NEW MEDIA PARTNER

RTS is supporting >>venture>> as a media partner starting with the 2017 edition. Gilles Marchand, director of Radio Télévision Suisse joins the Advisory Board. Covering the Romandy region, RTS perfectly complements the existing >>venture>> media partners Tamedia and Swiss Radio and Television (SRF).



## HONORARY COUNCIL

At ETH Day 2016, ETH Zurich appointed Thomas Knecht to the honorary council in acknowledgement of his outstanding commitment to promoting innovation transfer from Swiss universities to society and the economy as a whole. Thomas Knecht founded >>venture>> in 1997 together with ETH Zurich. Image: Thomas Knecht, right, receiving the distinction from ETH president Lino Guzzella.

## NEW ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

>>venture>> would like to welcome the new members of the Advisory Board. In 2017, BKW (Suzanne Thoma), EY (Bruno Chiomento), Leister (Christiane Leister), and RTS (Gilles Marchand) will be joining the board. >>venture>> is particularly pleased to have women on its board for the first time.







## The Interview

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# *“Established companies need startup energy”*

Switzerland's remarkable innovational drive owes much to the close collaboration between politics and business. Federal Councilor Johann Schneider-Ammann on the consequences of digitalization and the sharing economy as well as the enormous importance of startups for our country's future.

**Mr. Federal Councilor, >>venture>> is celebrating its twentieth anniversary in 2017...**

I congratulate >>venture>> on two successful decades. It's a fantastic achievement for our country. Switzerland currently occupies a very strong position on the international stage with low levels of unemployment, high productivity, and economic prosperity. And the role >>venture>> has played in this state of affairs is considerable. I wish >>venture>> continued success in the future and look forward to our working together again!

**What role does >>venture>> play for our country?**

Innovational drive in our economy is key to our competitiveness—and this means jobs and prosperity in the long run. Startups and young companies are often highly inno-

vative, bringing new ideas, products, and services to the market. And >>venture>> is playing a key role in helping companies get off the ground and translating ideas into innovations capable of gaining a foothold on the market, because it takes a long time for products and business ideas to reach market maturity. Young people should invest their creativity and resources into their ideas, and >>venture>> helps them to build companies for these ideas, or to find already existing ones.

**Switzerland is in the lead or at least near the top of almost every international innovation ranking. But our presence on the international startup scene is relatively weak. What's going wrong?**

You are touching on what is known as the “innovation paradox,” the gap between

### **Johann Schneider-Ammann**

The Federal Councilor heads the Swiss Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education, and Research (EAER). Before being elected to the Federal Council, Johann Schneider-Ammann (FDP) was president of the Ammann Group, served on the board of directors of the Swatch Group, and was president of the Swiss Association of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Industries (Swissmem). He was also a member of the National Council for the FDP. Die Liberalen. He studied at ETH Zurich and holds an MBA from INSEAD. Schneider-Ammann, 65, is married and has two adult children.

innovation performance and implementation. Or not to put too fine a point on it: we have great ideas but we are less good at translating them into actual businesses. This is why it's so important that as many entrepreneurially driven people as possible have the courage to start their own businesses.

### **How can the situation be improved?**

Venture capital plays a key role. Look at the figures: 909 million francs were invested in Swiss startups in 2016 compared with 3.4 billion dollars in Israel. Our aim is to free up more venture capital in Switzerland or to attract it from abroad.

### **Is Switzerland a victim of its own success? Are there just too many more comfortable job alternatives to the risky process of building a startup?**

Career opportunities in established companies in Switzerland are certainly attractive

options. But another problem is the small domestic market, which forces young companies into rapid expansion abroad. And another key factor is the Swiss mentality, which is very security- and stability-oriented. The courage to fail is less widespread—and someone who does fail often encounters schadenfreude and exclusion instead of praise and encouragement. It's a totally different situation in the United States, and we have to try to develop a like-minded culture.

### **As Federal Councilor you have spent a lot of time traveling abroad, including to Silicon Valley in July 2015. Have you encountered a region where you were particularly impressed by the startup culture and from which >>venture>> and Switzerland could learn?**

Of course Silicon Valley's startup culture and entrepreneurial risk-taking spirit left a big impression. It was something I also experienced when I was in business myself. I was involved in a biotech startup in California. It failed, but the day the company closed down, I went to the rotary club in San Francisco—and was greeted with a round of applause. "Now you're one of us," they said.

### **Women occupied almost half the senior management jobs in your federal department in the past years, but nowhere near as many women are active in the startup world. How do we get more women to start their own businesses?**

The administrative and startup worlds—they are not the same of course, but your example shows that sometimes the issue is simply getting good women into top

*“I congratulate  
>>venture>> on  
two successful  
decades.  
It’s a fantastic  
achievement  
for our country.”*

positions. I do want to emphasize, however, that my department is purely performance-based: there is no quota for women because neither the female staff nor I think it's a good idea.

**How do you explain the low number of women in the startup world?**

It begins with education: there are almost no women studying engineering at ETH Zurich. Successful STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics] promotion programs start much earlier—we have to get girls interested in the natural sciences and technology. And the same goes for boys too, because we generally have too few pupils interested in the STEM fields. But when I see my three-year-old grandson handling an iPhone, I feel very optimistic! With our “Fachkräfteinitiative,” we are promoting STEM systematically.

**To what extent do the difficulties of combining work and family play a role?**

Of course, the situation is still less than optimal when it comes to combining work and family life, and that's a big problem for lots of women. We are working with an initiative founded by Swiss professionals to make it easier for women to continue their careers or get back to work after having children. Specifically, the problems are childcare and taxation. There needs to be more incentive for both parents to work. That would also solve the issue of us being overly dependent on foreign workers.

**From your managerial experience, how can established players best profit**

**from the innovational activities of startups? And could >>venture>> play a role in building bridges?**

Established players like Swatch and Ammann only maintain their market leads if they continue to take risks—in other words, if they live and promote a culture of innovation. This means that even established businesses need startup energy. Thus, we have to increase our engagement for the whole innovation ecosystem. It is hugely important for startups to keep challenging the established players and providing them with fresh impetus. >>venture>> is very well placed to mediate between the two.

**The question of how best to tax startups is currently the subject of a fierce debate.**

**As a former businessman, what do you think would be a fair solution for startups and for established companies?**

As a basic principle, companies should only pay tax when they are making profits. Today we have an absurd situation in which startup entrepreneurs, who are barely getting paid and who are investing all their money into their companies, are paying high taxes based on their companies' theoretical value. This penalizes the entrepreneurial spirit and nips startups in the bud. The Canton of Zurich is setting a good precedent by aligning assets tax to profit.

**Another controversial issue is that of how tech companies like Uber, Booking.com, and Airbnb fit with our existing legislation. Do we need new regulations for these “disruptive” business models?**

The necessary legal basis for the “sharing economy” is essentially already in place, and there is no foreseeable need for new laws. The Federal Council reached the same conclusion in its recently published report on the parameters of the digital economy. The aim is to make it possible for Switzerland to start developing these sorts of innovative services, too. The administration is still conducting a detailed analysis of the issues affecting the labor market, and we should have the results this late autumn.

**Is digitalization an opportunity for Switzerland as a place of innovation?**

It’s definitely an opportunity—but also a challenge. Digitalization is a reality that we cannot avoid.

**Aren’t a huge number of traditional jobs threatened by automation?**

The greatest threat to our jobs is if we hide our heads in the sand. No, in Switzerland we have a highly qualified workforce and our strong innovational drive puts us in a good position. There will be upheavals and some existing jobs will disappear, but new ones will arise to take their place! The state’s role in all of this will be to create the best possible conditions so that we can profit from the structural shift even in the midst of this new wave of technology. Above all, this means making changes in the fields of education and research, so that as many people as possible are able to keep up.

**Your alma mater is ETH Zurich, which also has representatives on the board of the >>venture foundation>> and is considered one of the top breeding**

**grounds for Swiss startups. Was founding your own company a career option when you finished your degree in electrical engineering in 1977?**

The IT solution that I developed for my thesis was later deployed commercially—sadly, without me. But the drive toward self-employment was much less pronounced back then. The costs involved were huge. So, like many of my colleagues, I took the “apprenticeship and journeyman” route. It made me more mature and independent, and I returned as a businessman. “It’s all about people” was the catchphrase in those days, and it’s no different today. Success depends on recognizing market needs at the right time.

**Your father was a veterinarian and wanted you to follow in his footsteps. You yourself wanted to be a mountain guide or a carpenter. In the end you completed your high-school exams and opted to study technology. What criteria should today’s young people use to chose a path of study and work?**

Of course, they need passion for a particular field or type of work. My interest was technology. There are plenty of opportunities for young people to try out different professions, and that’s a good way to find out where your interests lie. And it helps to be a little bit realistic, particularly when it comes to choosing your field of study.

*INTERVIEW Simon Brunner*

*The interview was conducted in written form.*

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*TITION*



*16*



# 2016 Business plan winners

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*Place 1–5*



**1. T3 Pharmaceuticals** is a biopharmaceutical company working to advance innovative therapies for cancer patients. The method is based on live bacteria that specifically grow in solid tumors, where they produce and deliver an active agent using a proprietary technology.

The bacterial preference for replicating at the site of solid tumors allows T3 Pharmaceuticals to employ bacteria as a vehicle for delivering therapeutic proteins into tumor cells. T3 Pharmaceuticals has developed and optimized a proprietary bacterial vehicle that has a strong preference for accumulating in solid tumors when administered from a distal site. At the site of the tumors, the bacteria are able to multiply while being cleared by the immune system

in healthy tissue. The accumulation of bacteria in tumor tissue in combination with the efficient delivery of therapeutic proteins forms the basis for the next generation of cancer therapy.

Why did the jury choose T3 Pharmaceuticals? Kaspar Binz, co-founder of Molecular Partners and jury committee member, says: “Despite recent progress in the field of immuno-oncology, cancer therapy remains challenging. Using a live bacteria tumor localization and protein delivery approach, T3 Pharmaceuticals is on the way to offering an innovative new treatment option that will benefit the patient. This young team impressed me with its strong platform technology and its clear business plan for establishing cancer therapeutics.”

T3 Pharmaceuticals was founded in May 2015 by Simon Ittig, Christoph Kasper, Marlise Amstutz, and Helmut Kessmann as a University of Basel spin-off. In addition to raising significant non-dilutive capital from the Swiss Commission for Technology and Innovation and various research foundations, T3 Pharmaceuticals closed a financing round in November 2016.

Developing new medicines is a time-consuming and cost-intensive procedure. T3 Pharmaceuticals is therefore happy to be supported by leading foundations and to have committed investors to share its vision of bringing the T3 Pharmaceuticals platform technology for bacterial-based cancer therapy into clinical practice.

**Industry** **Pharmaceuticals, biotechnology & life sciences**

**Location** **Basel** **Affiliation** **University of Basel**

**Mail** **info@t3pharma.com**

**2. TreatED** is developing an implantable medical device based on a neuroprosthetics principle that will offer a better treatment to erectile dysfunction patients unresponsive to oral drug therapy, who currently resort to problematic and outdated therapies. The jury emphasizes “the team’s thorough and convincing business.”

*Affiliation* [EPFL](#)

*Mail* [rodrigo.fragasilva@epfl.ch](mailto:rodrigo.fragasilva@epfl.ch)

**3. Lymphatica** has designed and patented the first implantable solution for treating lymphedema, one of the most common side effects of cancer treatment. The startup intends to produce and market the implant. The jury emphasizes the significant market size (15 million people in Europe and the USA suffer from lymphedema), the lack of any satisfactory treatment, and the quality of the proposed solution.

*Affiliation* [EPFL/CHUV](#)

*Mail* [contact@lymphatica.ch](mailto:contact@lymphatica.ch)

**4. ComfyLight** is dedicated to generating novel in-home security products and services. The first product, ComfyLight, is a simple and instant security solution built into a sensor-packed light bulb and connected to a smart-phone app. The jury says, “Its simplicity, combined with the market need, the convincing business plan, and the founders’ experience in industry, gives it a good chance of success.”

*Affiliation* [University of St. Gallen/ETH Zurich](#)

*Mail* [founders@comfyliight.com](mailto:founders@comfyliight.com)

**5. Peripal** has developed a device to perform dialysis at home more easily and safely. The device allows more patients to dialyze at home instead of the hospital and thus increase their quality of life and at the same time lower healthcare costs. The jury says, “Peripal is a lifeline for the increasing number of diabetes patients.”

*Affiliation* [ETH Zurich](#)

*Mail* [info@peripal.com](mailto:info@peripal.com)

# 2016 Business idea winners

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Place 1–5



**1. novoMOF<sup>1</sup>** is the market pioneer in providing a unique, customer-oriented production service for chemicals known as Metal-Organic Frameworks (MOFs), which are set to revolutionize industrial processes.

Since the first papers on MOFs, also known as porous coordination polymers (PCPs), were published in the early 1990s, the interest of the scientific community has grown rapidly. MOFs are a new generation of porous crystalline materials. These materials can be imagined as very fine sponges, perforated with pores that create a hollow framework. Like a sponge, MOFs are able to adsorb gases and molecules in their pore cavities. Metal-organic

<sup>1</sup>name changed from TheMOFCompany

frameworks boast the largest surface areas ever observed. One gram of this material can have a surface area as large as 6,400 m<sup>2</sup>, about the size of an American football field.

Additionally, these “nano-sponges” can be constructed in multiple ways, meaning their properties (pore diameter, surface area, chemical behavior, structural nature) can be selectively tuned by using different kinds of metals and organic linkers as reagents. The choice of reagents dictates the resulting structure and its properties, offering enormous chemical and structural versatility—the MOFs’ greatest advantage. They can be tuned in such a way that specific molecules will fit into the pores and can therefore be used for volume-specific applications such as gas sorption and separation, catalysis, drug delivery, and sensing, where high surface areas are required.

The mission of novoMOF is to facilitate and accelerate the research and development of MOFs and their future applications. It achieves this by providing all types of MOF in short response times, flexible quantities, and at very competitive prices.

What does the >>>venture>>> jury say about novoMOF? Jury committee member Claus Niedermann notes, “For the first time, novoMOF’s technology allows flexible and scalable production of MOFs, giving the entrepreneur a huge opportunity to take a leading position in the market.”

**Industry Materials**

**Location** [Villigen, Aargau](#) **Affiliation** [Paul Scherrer Institut](#)

**Mail** [daniel.steitz@novoMOF.com](mailto:daniel.steitz@novoMOF.com)

**2. hemotune** is developing a new therapeutic blood purification platform. Functionalized magnetic nanoparticles applied in a dialysis-like circuit allow direct removal of specific disease-related compounds from a patient's blood in an efficient and gentle way. The jury says, "Their approach is brilliant in terms of efficient removal and blood compatibility. It seems to be verified and is patented."

*Affiliation* [ETH Zurich](#)

*Mail* [lukas.langenegger@hemotune.ch](mailto:lukas.langenegger@hemotune.ch)

### 3. Daphne Technology

developed a patented solution that will help commercial ship owners to comply with international marine SO<sub>x</sub> and NO<sub>x</sub> air emission regulations for a lower cost than current solutions and without the need for large infrastructure investment. According to the jury, Daphne Technology meets a strong need of ship operators, who will have to comply with new international regulations.

*Affiliation* [EPFL](#)

*Mail* [mario.michan@daphnetechology.com](mailto:mario.michan@daphnetechology.com)

**4. Insolight** sets out to cut solar electricity costs by doubling the efficiency of solar panels. The company's optical technology allows sunlight to be concentrated on high-efficiency solar cells in a flat-panel assembly. The jury notes that Insolight is a clear-cut business case that shows how to reduce the number of solar cells needed by a three-digit factor.

*Affiliation* [EPFL](#)

*Mail* [info@insolight.ch](mailto:info@insolight.ch)

**5. SUINCoL** is developing a unique technology that gives a long-term benefit for patients with stress urinary incontinence via a simple procedure at the doctor's office. SUINCoL's patented injectable therapy regenerates lacking muscle at the bladder sphincter. More than 100 million women worldwide are suffering from stress urinary incontinence. The jury was convinced by the team and their focused solution.

*Affiliation* [EPFL/CHUV](#)

*Mail* [h.m.larsson@gmail.com](mailto:h.m.larsson@gmail.com)

>>venture>> 2016 in numbers

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>>venture>> 2016  
*supported...*

114

business ideas  
submitted

116

business plans  
submitted

295

teams registered



*... and delivered*

228

coach—team relationships

23

events with more than ...

1900

attendees

678

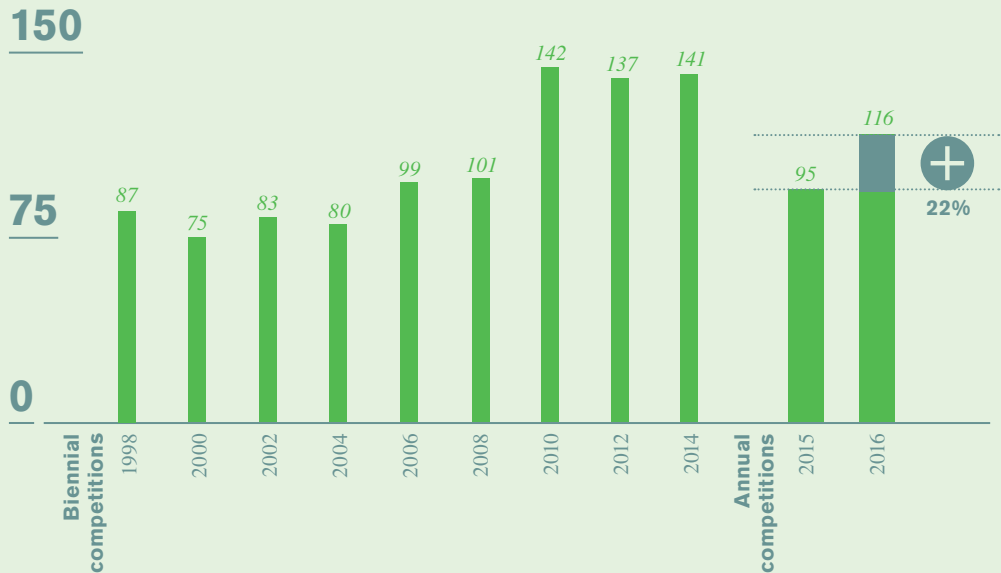
jury feedbacks to  
participating teams  
for their submitted  
projects

~35

potential new teammates  
for participating startups

**Business plans >>venture>> 2016**  
*had a 22% increase in business plan submission compared to 2015.*

Number of submitted business plans per >>venture>> edition

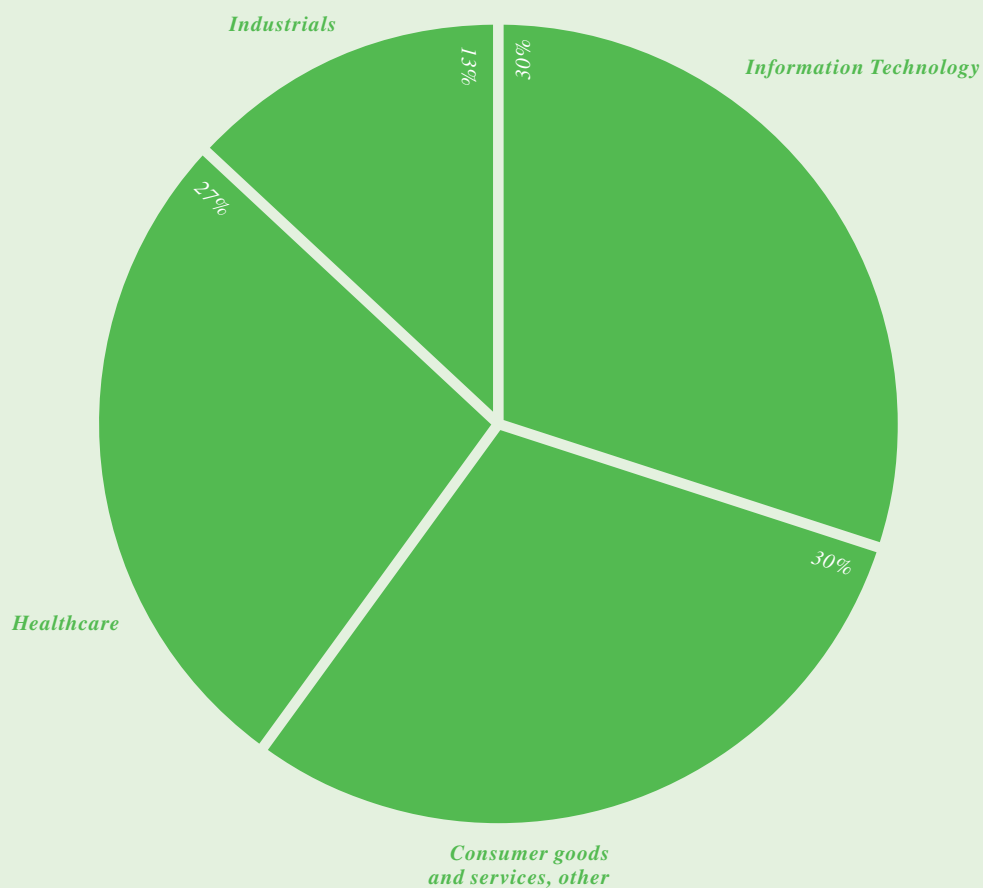


**Business ideas** *Compared to the previous edition, >>venture>> 2016 had a 7% increase in business idea submissions.*

## Industry mix *Teams are active in four major fields.*

### Project submissions

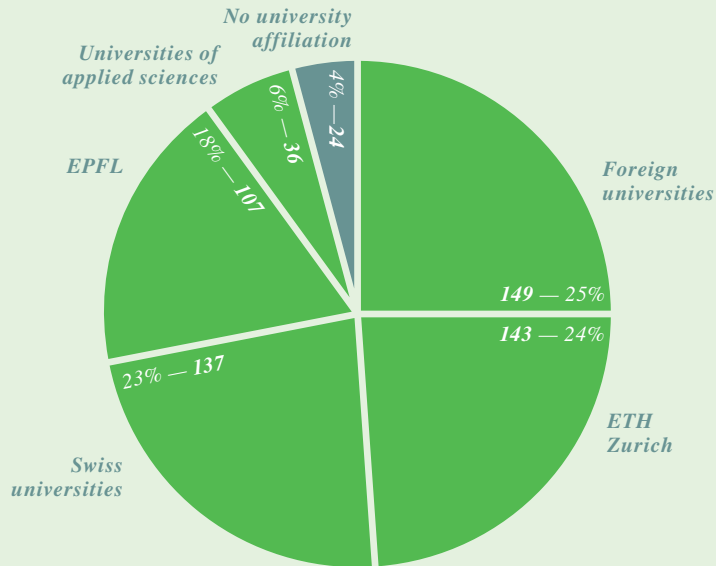
100% = 230



## University background *96% of the participants have a university background.*

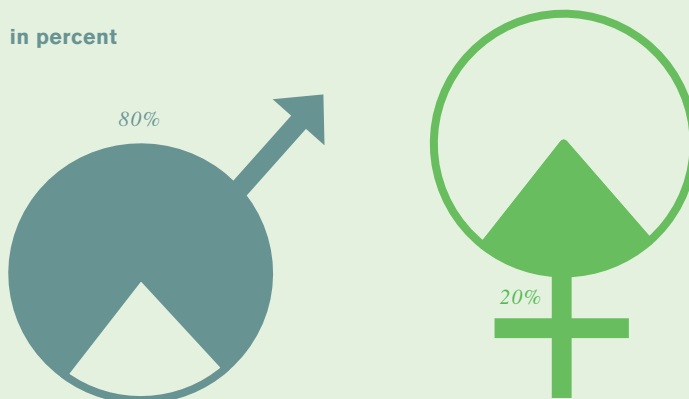
Number of individuals

596 = 100%



## Gender *One out of five participants is female.*

in percent



*Geography >>venture>> is a truly Swiss competition with participating teams from all parts of the country.*

Number of submitted projects



<sup>1</sup>Projects submitted from abroad by teams planning to incorporate a company in Switzerland

*M*

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## EASTERN SWISS TEAM AMONG THE WINNERS

“One of the winners of this year’s >>venture>> competition, which claims to be ‘Switzerland’s leading startup competition,’ was a team from eastern Switzerland: Comfy-Light, a startup from the University of St. Gallen and ETH Zurich.”

01.07.2016



## IMPORTANT AWARDS

“The >>venture>> prizes have established themselves as important startup awards.”

01.07.2016



LIMMATTALER  
ZEITUNG

## FEWER SIDE EFFECTS, LESS EMISSIONS

“From cancer treatment with fewer side effects to ship engines with less emissions, strong business ideas and business plans by young people won awards yesterday evening at ETH Zurich.”

01.07.2016

## Neue Zürcher Zeitung

### OVER 150,000 FRANCS IN PRIZE MONEY

“From proposals entered by some 230 teams in the >>venture>> startup competition, T3 Pharmaceuticals and theMOFcompany shared the first prize. [...] The competition, which awards a total of 150,000 francs in prize money, was held for the eleventh time.”

01.07.2016

## Basler Zeitung

### BASEL COMPANY TRIUMPHS

“The young Basel company T3 Pharmaceuticals has won first place in the >>venture>> startup competition in the category of “Best Business Plan.” A total of 116 business plans were entered. The competition has a strong reputation: previous winners include the restaurant chain tibits, the sensor group Sensirion, which employs some 250 people in Stäfa, and the biotech company Glycart, which was bought by Roche in 2005 for 235 million dollars.”

02.07.2016



## Events



- 1 After the 2016 award ceremony, the >>venture>> community gathers on the stage of the Audi Max at ETH Zurich.
- 2 Thomas Knecht (Knecht Holding) and Lino Guzzella (ETH) after the launch of >>venture>> 2016 at ETH Zurich.
- 3 Mauro Saladini (CFO Kudelski Group), Adrienne Corboud Fumagalli (EPFL), and Patrick Aebischer (EPFL) after the launch of >>venture>> 2016 at the EPFL.
- 4 McKinsey & Company's Marco Ziegler in conversation at the Advisory Board meeting.
- 5 Francisco Fernandez (Group CEO Avaloq) giving his keynote speech at the award ceremony of >>venture>> 2016.

Captions read from left to right



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4



5



1





**Jurgi Camblong, 39, Co-founder and CEO of Sophia Genetics**



## Success story — Sophia Genetics

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*2012 — Second place business plan competition*

# HIGH-FLYER AT A CROSSROADS

—— Sophia Genetics must rank as one of the most successful Swiss startups of these past years. Founded in 2011 by Jurgi Camblong, Pierre Hutter, and Lars Steinmetz at the EPFL Innovation Park, the young health-tech company has registered a 300 percent year-on-year growth rate since going into business in 2014 and is the world's leader in Data-Driven Medicine. A similar growth spurt is also on the cards for 2017. According to the acclaimed blog TechCrunch, “Sophia Genetics could be Switzerland's next unicorn”—a unicorn being a startup with a market value of over a billion dollars.

The Vaud-based company, which had to move to larger headquarters at St. Sulpice on Lake Geneva in 2015, now works with 257 hospitals and other healthcare institutions in forty-five countries. These include Bern's Inselspital and the Oxford University Hospitals, which trust Sophia Genetics for analyzing their patients' genomic profiles. Those analyses are actionable information helping clinicians take informed decisions to provide the best care for patients suffering from congenital cancers. The collected information is processed by SOPHiA collective artificial intelligence, for the benefit of



the hospitals that are member of its clinical genomics community. The secure centralized data storage and administration means the outcome of patients' genomic profile analysis can be compared on a global level, which translates into better diagnostics and care, as Sophia Genetics' CEO Jurgi Camblong explains. The data is anonymized to ensure privacy protection and confidentiality.

A look at the numbers of genomic profiles analyzed by the company—100,000 by the end of Q1 2017—shows just how rapidly Sophia Genetics has grown in the past few years. Numbers are increasing every month. While 115 patient analyses were performed in the month of January 2014, 522 were done in January 2015 and 2,832 in January 2016. The Vaud firm expects to reach 1 million patients by the end of 2020. The rapid growth is largely due to a convincing business concept—the company came in second in the >>venture>> business plan competition back in 2015—as well as the organizational and analytical skills of the CEO, a position Jurgi Camblong has held since the company went into business. The >>venture>> award was very important for the company, Jurgi Camblong says, because it confirmed that, both in terms of concept and strategy, Sophia Genetics was heading in the right direction to realize its full potential. The 39-year-old French Basque earned a PhD in Life Sciences from the University of Geneva and an EMBA in Management of Technology at the EPFL. After working as a molecular biologist, he became CEO of Gene Predictis, another genetic startup, before founding Sophia Genetics in 2011. With a staff of 130, however, Sophia hardly qualifies for startup status any longer. The impressive success of this

## **SOPHIA GENETICS TIMELINE**

### **2011**

Founding of Sophia Genetics by Jurgi Camblong, Pierre Hutter, and Lars Steinmetz

### **2012**

Commencement of activities at the EPFL Innovation Park, FIT Fund invests \$100,000, raises \$1m in a first seed round, wins second place in the >>venture>> business plan competition

### **2013**

Series A investment round (\$3 m), 10 employees

### **2014**

Commercial activities begin, Series B round (\$14 m), Mike Lynch takes a stake in Sophia Genetics, new headquarters in St. Sulpice

### **2015**

Series C round (\$15 m), Marc Coucke invests, first contracts outside Europe

### **2016**

New R&D facility at Campus Biotech in Geneva, strategic partnerships with numerous players from the field, 130 employees.







young company also rests on its excellent track record of finding powerful backers right when they are needed. Over the past five years Sophia Genetics has raised roughly \$33 million worth of funding from a list of investors that includes some of Europe's most successful entrepreneurs: founder of Omega Pharma, Marc Coucke, as well as founder of Autonomy, Mike Lynch. The sourced venture capital on top of the reserves generated by the company itself—a sum it declined to divulge—should allow Sophia Genetics to achieve its ambition of 300 percent growth this year too.

To expand market leadership and capitalize on its existing technological advantage, Sophia Genetics can continue to count on this ability to access financial resources. One current rival is IBM Watson, which is developing its personalized medicine capabilities. Other competitors will include tech companies such as SAP, Oracle, and Microsoft, all of whom want a slice of the rapidly growing market in personalized medicine.

While there is no shortage of venture capital for Swiss startups taking their first steps, the next steps might be to source eight-figure sums to boost growth further down the line. Sophia Genetics, Camblong believes, has the potential to become a major-league player that can help “democratize” Data-Driven Medicine. The development and commercialization of genomic sequencing, he says, is set to improve the personalization of care and make relevant and affordable treatment options available to all. All the incentive he needs to fight for a way to make his company grow fast and thrive. \_\_\_\_\_

*TEXT Jean-Pierre Kapp*

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