

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

Not Silicon Valley, not Shenzhen: Switzerland's answer to the AI question has a name, and a winner

At the >>venture>> 2026 final in Lausanne, Noemon won the inaugural Spotlight Award for the boldest use of Apertus, Switzerland's homegrown AI model. EPFL startup, Edwatec took the evening's CHF 150,000 Grand Prize.

Lausanne, Switzerland, June 15, 2026 -- While much of Europe is still debating how to escape its dependence on American and Chinese technology, Switzerland spent tonight answering the question in practice. At the >>venture>> 2026 Award Ceremony in Lausanne, the foundation presented its first ever Spotlight Award to Noemon, recognizing the most innovative company building on Apertus, Switzerland's own openly developed AI model and its answer to reliance on the global platforms. Noemon builds bAI that learns while it runs — applying its continual-learning technology to Apertus to extend context, cut costs, and enable private customization.

The Spotlight Award carries a prize of CHF 50,000. The evening's top honor, the CHF 150,000 Grand Prize and a tailored McKinsey & Company consulting package, went to Edwatec, who develop integrated optical amplifiers that enable compact, energy-efficient photonic systems for next-generation AI infrastructure and communications.

The Spotlight Award: sovereign and open AI

>>venture>> has rewarded Swiss innovation since 1997, but the pace of technological change has reshaped what founders build and how fast they build it. In response, the foundation introduced the Spotlight Award, a recurring lens that each year focuses on an area of major societal and economic impact. Its inaugural theme was sovereign and open AI, recognizing innovation built on Apertus, the open large language model developed by ETH Zurich, EPFL, and CSCS.

The ceremony also featured a panel discussion on Apertus with Antoine Bosselut, Assistant Professor at EPFL, and Isa Müller-Wegner, Chief Strategy Officer at Swisscom.

“A country that runs its hospitals, its banks, and its government on an AI that it cannot inspect or control, is renting the ground it stands on. That is comfortable, until the terms change. Switzerland chose not to be a tenant, and the founders here tonight are what owning it looks like.”

Antoine Bosselut, Assistant Professor at EPFL and co-creator of Apertus

“Across Europe, governments and companies are searching for a path that does not run through Washington or Beijing. With Apertus, Switzerland has shown it can build its own artificial intelligence, openly and on its own terms. The question is no longer whether we can create sovereign AI. It is what we choose to do with it, and how quickly. Tonight, our founders gave the first answers.”

Ulrich Looser, Chairman of the Board, >>venture>> foundation

Looking ahead: Work, Reimagined

“Next year, our Spotlight Award turns to a theme that will define the decade, Work, Reimagined. As companies rush to cut the very roles where young people once learned their trade, we have to ask what the future of work should look like, and who it is for. That is exactly the kind of question >>venture>> exists to put in front of Switzerland's boldest founders.”

Dr. Lea Firmin, Director, >>venture>> foundation

The winners

The 2026 Grand Prize winner, Edwatec, topped a field of category winners:

Business & Finance: Regcheck, uses AI to simulate regulatory audits, helping regulated firms spot compliance gaps before submission and enabling more consistent reviews. (Aargau)

Consumer Solutions: Trulux, uses a visual AI tool to help consumers verify the authenticity of premium physical goods on the spot — using nothing more than a mobile phone. (Zurich)

Industrials & Engineering: EDWATEC, develops integrated optical amplifiers that enable compact, energy-efficient photonic systems for next-generation AI infrastructure and communications. (Vaud)

Medtech & Healthcare: Actival, a spin-off from CSEM, has patented active dental devices for the slow, controlled release of beneficial fluids to improve oral health. (Neuchatel)

Pharma & Biotech: Baxiva, their proprietary platform builds next-generation vaccines to prevent severe infections, starting with UTIs and sepsis to improve health and cut antibiotic use. (Zurich)

Social & Environmental Impact: Botana AI, a farmer-first platform that helps growers manage their land like a financial portfolio, optimizing crop choices for profit and climate resilience. (Zug)

The CHF 10,000 Audience Award, voted live in the room after three 60 second pitches from this year's semifinalists Birds&Co., Cinder, and kwer, went to Cinder, a therapeutic wearables company building a system for pelvic pain designed around the real complexity of the condition and the demands of everyday life.

A record field, evenly split across the country

This year's competition drew a record 451 applicants, the most in >>venture>>'s history, narrowed to 18 finalists across six categories. Notably, the finalists fell into a rare even split between Switzerland's language regions, nine from the Romandie and nine from German speaking Switzerland. The balance was not by design but by merit, and it is an unusual one: a sign of innovation taking root with equal strength on both sides of the country.

About >>venture>>

Founded in 1997, >>venture>> is Switzerland's leading startup competition, supporting the country's most promising early-stage entrepreneurs. The competitions is co-organized by ETH Zurich, McKinsey & Company, Innosuisse, Knecht Holding, and EPFL. >>venture>> has supported over 4,500 Swiss startups that have created over 15,000 jobs.

Examples include Sensirion (IPO, over 1200 employees), Glycart (sold to Roche for 235 million dollars), and Sophia Genetics (IPO in the USA with a valuation of 1.14 billion dollars – considered a "unicorn").

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