

Ten years of technology transfer

EMBLEM: a look back...and a look forward

When EMBLEM was established in 1999, EMBL hoped it would break even within ten years. In fact, as the company celebrated the end of its first decade on 19 June, there was even more cause to party.

Exceeding all expectations, EMBL Enterprise Management Technology Transfer GmbH – EMBLEM for short – has actually been generating a profit for EMBL and its scientists since as long ago as 2004, less than half the time predicted. Not only that, it has helped 400 EMBL staff become inventors, and has more than 250 granted patents and patent applications and 11 spin-out companies on its portfolio.

But what is technology transfer, anyway, and what does this success story actually mean for EMBL and its scientists? It's a fairly new concept; while research institutes such as MIT, UCSF and Harvard in the US have long benefitted from the services of nearby organisations, the idea of active technology transfer policies only really entered the consciousness of institutes in continental Europe towards the turn of the 21st century.

"Innovation is driven by excellent basic research," explains Gábor Lamm, managing director of EMBLEM. "It's essential to have mechanisms which ensure that scientific results and discoveries can properly and rapidly be translated into practical applications and marketable products to the benefit of society at large."

It's one of EMBL's missions to develop its discoveries to benefit society, but before the existence of EMBLEM the protection and commercialisation of intellectual property and inventions was done on an *ad hoc* basis. Creating EMBLEM allowed the process to be streamlined, ensuring a steady income for EMBL and benefiting the member states and society as a whole by translating basic research results into marketable tools and products. It also builds on the renown of the institute and boosts public trust in it, and the scientist inventors can enjoy the recognition and remuneration that marketing an invention brings.

EMBLEM is run by business professionals who, following their scientific training, gained considerable experience in industry: Gábor completed his PhD at EMBL Heidel-



Party photos: Marietta Schüpp



Photo: Christine Panagiotidis

Top and above right: EMBLEM pushed the boat out with their 10th birthday celebrations on 19 June. Above: EMBLEM's current line-up (back, l-r: Ilka Singer, Jürgen Bauer, Jörg Rauch, Martin Raditsch, Gábor Lamm, Thorsten Schneider; front: Yvonne Powell, Birgit Kerber).



berg before working as a researcher at Vienna's Boehringer Ingelheim Institute of Molecular Pathology (IMP) and entering industry at Wacker Chemie. He joined EMBLEM in 2000 and has systematically built up the company ever since.

In 2001 EMBLEM helped established the €26m EMBL Technology Fund (ETF), managed by EMBL Ventures, to invest in the creation of further start-up companies, and

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after redeeming all past investment by 2004, was selected in 2008 to push forward the technology transfer activities of the University of Heidelberg's Medical Faculty and associated clinics in a consortium with the technology transfer arm of the German Cancer Research Centre (DKFZ).

As an important part of their activities, EMBLEM also offers training in technology transfer. "It's useful for young scientists to

know what sort of ideas and results are commercialisable, what the criteria are for patentability and what the components of a successful start-up company are," says Deputy Managing Director Martin Raditsch. "Some inventors fear that patenting research results could prevent them from being published later in scientific journals, or that patents and copyrights hinder innovation. In fact, academic research is usually unaffected by patent protection."

You can browse EMBLEM's products and spin-out companies on the revamped website, www.embl-em.de, which offers new features such as a fast and easy download area for EMBL-developed software and a list of available technologies for commercial partners interested in licensing. Simply contact the team to find out more, whether you're a potential scientific inventor or industry partner or have an idea for a start-up company.

"Our process provides inventors and founders with all the tools and support required to rapidly develop and deploy their ideas, and we collaborate with more than 250 licensees of EMBL technologies and academic partners worldwide," says Gábor.