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Ascenion Information Letter
February 2010

Hamburg Makes Translation Work

'Translational research' – almost like an incantation, this phrase pops up whenever the discussion comes to research, innovation and the future of our society. But what exactly does it mean? In a truly collaborative approach, the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine (BNI), a member of the Leibniz Association, the European ScreeningPort, the City of Hamburg, Norgenta and Ascenion have supplied a prime example.




Step 1: New insights and strong motivation

The starting point was the well-known malaria pathogen *Plasmodium falciparum*, and in particular one of its enzymes that Carsten Wrenger and his team at the BNI identified as a promising therapeutic target: it is essential for *Plasmodium*, but has no equivalent in humans. 'Given the strong medical need in the field, we were fascinated by these findings', Wrenger says. 'They could provide an entirely novel approach to combating the disease.' Every 30 seconds a child dies of the infection, and resistance against available therapies is on the rise.

Step 2: Translational partners

About two years later, Ascenion initiated 'translational workshops' at the BNI, putting scientists in direct contact with representatives of the European ScreeningPort, a public–private partnership offering screening services to academic institutions. In this context, Wrenger presented his malaria project. 'The approach really appealed to us: highly innovative and scientifically sound', Carsten Claussen, CEO of the European ScreeningPort comments. With Ascenion's support, a pilot collaboration contract was swiftly agreed.

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Step 3: Initial proof-of-concept

In the following months, Wrenger spent about two days a week at the ScreeningPort. 'Sure, it was challenging, but extremely productive and a great working spirit', he says. And with a smile he tells how one day he found a ScreeningPort lab coat with his name on it on the coat rack. It was just a detail, but still a meaningful gesture to him. 'We open our doors to scientists,' Claussen confirms, 'because it takes both the specific scientific expertise *and* industrial screening know-how to get an academic project off the ground.' Together, the partners rapidly managed to adapt the malaria assay to high throughput screening (HTS) compatible formats. A pilot screen of an initial 2,500 compounds has already delivered first hits, and most of these showed strong efficacy when tested against malaria pathogens at the BNI.

Step 4: Seed funding

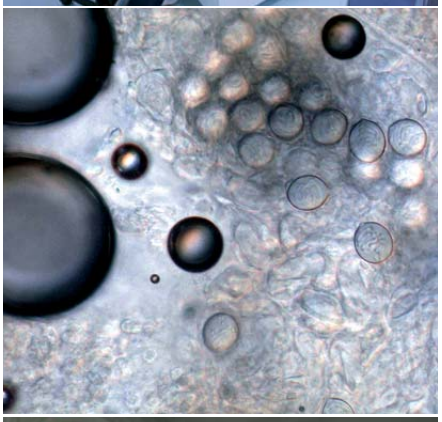
'With these results on hand, we were able to attract EUR 400,000 of funding from the City of Hamburg,' Katrin Adlkofer, Managing Director of the Hamburg-based life-science agency Norgenta explains. The proceeds enable the partners to advance their project up to a stage where big foundations or philanthropic funding programs typically get involved. 'The big challenge in translational research is managing the very early steps – the more advanced a project is, the better its prospects of gaining support for further development', Hinrich Habeck, technology manager with Ascenion explains. 'The grant from the City of Hamburg can thus be seen as a kind of seed crystal for the malaria drug.'

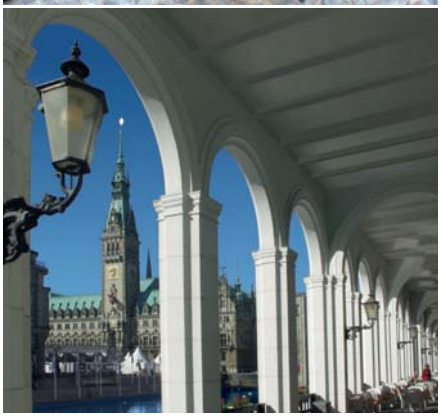
Step 5: Follow-on financing

While the project partners use the proceeds to screen some further two to three hundred thousand compounds, Ascenion is already in contact with potential follow-on sponsors. The objective is to secure at least funding up to the next milestone – preclinical development. From then on, it should be easier to attract high-profile partners with deep pockets – assuming that the data confirm the project's potential.

Learning from Hamburg

'Although there remains a long way to go, the achievements so far are very impressive', Peter Ruile, COO of Ascenion emphasizes. Hamburg demonstrates that translational development is possible with the players, expertise and tools already in place. 'This should also work in other regions across Germany', Ruile continues. 'For some projects, it may be a challenge to find and coordinate appropriate partners and sponsors. But this is exactly the contribution that we as technology transfer professionals can make.' A further lesson from the Hamburg example is that translational research requires extraordinary commitment from the scientists themselves and their project partners. 'Without the passionate support from the ScreeningPort, the BNI and particularly Carsten Wrenger, who invested countless weekends, the project would never have taken off', Ruile concludes.





Inventor Profile

Michael Bader: Not a job, but a passion

Inventor:	Prof. Michael Bader, Head of Group, Molecular Biology of Peptide Hormones at the Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine (MDC) Berlin-Buch, Member of the Helmholtz Association
Research focus:	Cardiovascular hormones, such as angiotensin, bradykinin and serotonin
Potential:	Potential impact on therapy development in a broad range of human diseases
Industry collaborations:	– Undisclosed collaborations on cardiovascular drug development – Transfer of research models

Q: You have been working on cardiovascular hormones for more than 20 years now. What is so exciting about them?
First of all, these hormones are incredibly complex. They play important roles in regulating not only the cardiovascular system, but also the central nervous system and immune system. And we still haven't grasped the full picture. There are many open questions regarding their detailed mechanisms of action and how they interact on a systemic level. However, each component we elucidate helps in understanding the corresponding diseases and can ultimately support the development of novel therapies.

Q: But some of these hormones, e.g. angiotensin or serotonin, are well-established therapeutic targets. How does that fit with such an 'incomplete' understanding of the way they work?
True, anti-hypertension drugs targeting the angiotensin pathway or antidepressants that alter serotonin levels are among the most widely used drugs of all. And although they have some limitations, they basically work. But that does not mean that we have fully understood what they do in the human body. If we did, we could certainly further improve today's treatment options.

Q: Is that a key motivation for you to continue your research in this field?
Yes – partly. It is definitely important for me to work in a field that has practical implications. But what drives me most is the very fundamental question of how 'life works'. I'm fascinated by the complexity of life and would love to unravel some of its key biological mechanisms.

Q: But how can you tackle such complexity in a laboratory setting?
This is indeed one of the key challenges in our field – and the reason why we work with animal models. There is no other way of investigating the systemic and multifaceted effects of hormones. And although it remains impossible to mimic the full complexity of the human body, we have succeeded in developing some very useful models that allow us to gain new insights.

Q: Can you provide an example?
One of our most important findings is that there are two different enzymes producing serotonin, one inside and the other one outside the brain. Previously, serotonin was primarily thought to be associated with the regulation of mood and some further functions of the brain. Meanwhile, we know that the vast majority of serotonin is located outside the brain where its main functions are to regulate intestinal movement and blood clotting.

Q: What are the practical implications?
These and further findings forced us to completely rethink our understanding of cardiovascular hormones and their roles in the human body. Over the long term, this may pave the way for novel therapeutic strategies. Moreover, our animal models are not only used by researchers around the world, but also by international biopharmaceutical companies, primarily in the field of preclinical research.

Q: What are your goals for the future?
It's difficult to name explicit goals. We don't know what we are going to discover tomorrow – and tomorrow's results will guide our research thereafter. However, we will continue to explore the serotonin system and strengthen our research on bradykinin, one of the less prominent cardiovascular hormones. I believe both hormones still hold significant therapeutic potential. In terms of research tools, we are currently intensifying our efforts in stem cell research to evaluate a potential application of the technology to our projects.

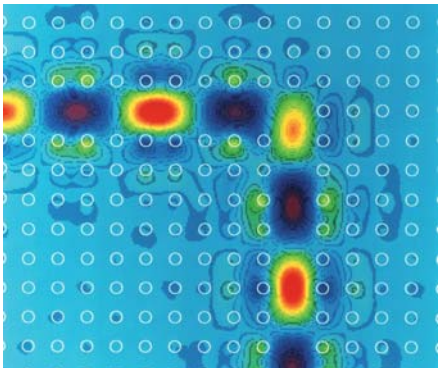
Q: What about personal goals and hobbies?
Well, I have turned my hobby into my profession! I love my work and, apart from that, I spend my time with my family. With three children aged 12, 15 and 17, I have no need or space for further hobbies. I do research 11 to 12 hours a day, frequently work at weekends, and my bedtime reading consists of *Nature* and *Science*. For me, research is not a job, but a passion.

Q: What is your recommendation for fellow scientists?
Well, sometimes I miss this kind of passion in my younger coworkers. It helps you survive the many disappointments and tedious lab work that are part of every scientific career. And it provides the ground from which discoveries and inventions spring that can ultimately change our lives.

Michael Bader gained his PhD in biology from Freiburg University in 1989, before moving to Prof. Ganten's team at Heidelberg University. In 1994, he became group leader at the MDC. He is 51 years old.

Spinning Innovation

Ascenion's portfolio companies are currently enjoying considerable success. Established players such as Genomatix and Activaero have secured new funds, preclinical research specialist Encepharm initiated the building of new facilities and newcomers such as Photonion have established excellent starting positions. Common success factors include close connections to industry from the start, and a growth strategy that is not exclusively based on venture capital. Below is a portrait of the newly founded venture.



Photonion GmbH at a Glance

Approach:	Mass spectrometry using a novel soft photoionization source (vacuum UV light)
Advantage:	Reduced fragmentation of the compounds to be analyzed Directly applicable to complex organic mixtures, mostly without prior purification or separation steps
Application:	Direct analysis of complex organic gases or materials Online control of manifold industrial processes Online analysis of patients' breath and other medical applications
Development Status:	First products marketed
Originating Institution:	Helmholtz Zentrum München
Main Inventor:	Professor Ralf Zimmermann

Photonion: Online analysis of cigarette smoke, polymers, coffee roasting and more

Photonion is different. Not only because it has a unique, patent-protected technology that impacts countless industrial processes – from coffee roasting and crude oil processing to plastics production – but also because its scientific founder, Professor Ralf Zimmermann, has been collaborating with industry for years. Once he recognized the commercial potential of know-how and technology, he initiated a professional exchange with some of the most innovative players in the mass spectrometry and on-line analysis market as well as with leading academic partners. Resulting collaborations enabled him and his team to explore different applications, improve and validate the technology and, last but not least, to learn about the industry's mentality and needs.

Over time, and in close coordination with Ascenion and two mid-sized companies, Zimmermann's long-standing vision of founding a new company has gradually assumed shape. Photonion was set up as a joint venture by Airsense Analytics GmbH, Schwerin, Germany; Tofwerk AG, Thun, Switzerland, and the Helmholtz Association, each of them providing partial seed funding. Andreas Walte and Wolf Münchmeyer, both CEOs of Airsense, initially serve as Photonion's CEOs, while Zimmermann continues his excellent mass spectrometry research, partly in Munich at the Helmholtz Zentrum München and partly in Rostock at the University and the Joint Mass Spectrometry Centre. However, as consultant he will co-operate closely with Photonion and provide the team with continued access to his expertise and new insights from the academic world.

A further outcome from previous industry co-operations is the signing of two collaboration agreements by Photonion for the development of dedicated mass spectrometry systems to be produced and commercialized by the partners. 'These deals provide for a running start,' Christian Stein, CEO of Ascenion comments. They allow Photonion to generate income, right from the beginning, and to build its reputation in the sector. In a second step, the company will build and market mass spectrometry systems on its own. 'Photonion is a remarkable example of true teamwork between research, technology transfer and industry, where each side brings in its core competence and takes over a significant portion of workload and risks. It is a role model for putting research results into practice without risk capital,' Stein concludes.

Client Portfolio Expanded

In 2009, Ascenion signed partnership agreements with two further institutes from the Leibniz Association: the Leibniz Institute for Agricultural Engineering Potsdam Bornim (ATB) and the German Rheumatism Research Center Berlin (DRFZ). Altogether, Ascenion now supports 15 research institutes in the Helmholtz and Leibniz Associations, together with the Hanover Medical School and the research institute Twincore. Ascenion's clients now have a total scientific staff of over 4,000 and a cumulative annual budget of about EUR 650 million, including third-party funding.

ATB: First partner from the Leibniz Environmental Science Section

With its unique combination of basic science and engineering expertise, the ATB is a leading innovator in the fields of agricultural production, (bio-) energy and the quality and safety of food and feed. ATB scientists and engineers significantly contribute to a deeper understanding of the underlying mechanisms and develop ingenious solutions for improving the environmental compatibility, efficiency and sustainability of relevant processes. Most recent examples include a new energy-saving technology for drying crops or a highly efficient process for the production of biogas. The ATB's infrastructure not only comprises dedicated chemical, microbiological and biotechnological laboratories, but also test beds, experimental facilities and pilot plants. 'Most projects are therefore pretty advanced,' Peter Ruile, COO of Ascenion, comments. 'This provides a fertile ground for technology transfer. We look very much forward to working with the ATB and extending our IP portfolio into the socially relevant field of environmental sciences.' Ascenion will focus its support on life and environmental sciences. The patent agency Brainshell will continue to serve the ATB in the area of engineering. 'We believe that technology transfer in both fields – life and environmental sciences as well as engineering – will benefit from the particular expertise each partner brings in,' Jürgen Wilda of the ATB comments. 'With its dedicated experience and its profound understanding of corresponding markets, Ascenion will help us further improve the quality of IP valuation, protection and commercialization in the life and environmental sciences sector.'

DRFZ: New partner of Leibniz Life-Science Section

The DRFZ is internationally renowned for excellence in rheumatology research, with a particular focus on immunology and epidemiology. In Germany alone, rheumatic diseases affect about 1.5 million people – not only the elderly, but also younger people and even children. In collaboration with haematologists and rheumatologists of the Charité, DRFZ researchers have elucidated some of the key biochemical and immunological mechanisms involved in the development of the disease. 'Our vision is to employ the body's own strategies in order to restore the patients' immune systems and ultimately cure rheumatic diseases,' Prof. Dr Andreas Radbruch, Scientific Director of the DRFZ comments. 'By teaming up with Ascenion, we hope to further improve the translation of our findings into medical application. Various new concepts for cell-based therapies are currently being explored. 'Excellent science is the nucleus of innovation,' Peter Ruile, COO of Ascenion comments. 'Results from the DRFZ will significantly shape how we treat rheumatic diseases on a long-term basis, and we are excited to support that process.' Moreover, the DRFZ already has a strong track record in technology transfer, with successful spin-offs such as BioRetis and Miltenyi and a range of projects having entered explorative clinical studies.

Noteworthy

Owner by default

On 1 October 2009, the German Act on the Simplification and Modernisation of the Patent Law (Gesetz zur Vereinfachung und Modernisierung des Patentrechts) came into force. Most important to German public research organizations and universities is a modification to the Employees' Invention Law (Arbeitnehmererfindungsgesetz). Under the previous law, the employer had to formally CLAIM an invention by written notice to the employee if he wanted to receive all the rights associated with the invention, e.g. for its commercial exploitation. If he failed to do so within four months from the receipt of an invention disclosure statement, the inventor remained the owner of his or her invention. According to the new law, the employer will automatically become the owner of an invention made by an employee if he does not formally RELEASE it within four months. However, what remains unchanged is that ownership comes with a duty for the employer: he has to file for patent protection, at least in Germany, and let the inventor participate in future returns from commercialization.

Fostering Networks

Coming events

For entrepreneurs: Investment and football strategies

4th Biotech-NetWorkshop, 24-26 February 2010, Tegernsee

Creating viable growth strategies is not easy these days, in particular for life-science entrepreneurs seeking funding for early-stage projects. The upcoming Biotech-NetWorkshop will therefore discuss various corporate development strategies with a particular focus on financing and mergers and acquisitions. In the familiar and inspiring atmosphere of Schloss Ringberg, life-science entrepreneurs will have the unique opportunity to exchange experience and learn from seasoned investment managers, business angels and life-science executives. In addition, Dr Markus Merck, former FIFA referee, will provide some insights into decision making gained from his experience as a football professional. Last but not least, the program leaves ample space for networking and individual discussions during breaks, social and sporting activities. The workshop is jointly organized by Max Planck Innovation and Ascenion and exclusively addresses entrepreneurs from Ascenion's partner institutions or Max Planck Institutes.

Are you interested? Please download the full program from Ascenion's homepage www.ascenion.de or contact Susanne Letzelter letzelter@ascenion.de for further information.

BioVaria goes Europe

3rd BioVaria, 20 April 2010, Munich

Though still young, BioVaria has earned its place as one of the few 'must join' events for many technology scouts and investors from the international biopharmaceutical sector: primarily, because it is the only life-science event that provides a comprehensive overview of licensing opportunities emanating from publicly funded research. Originally, presenting institutions and universities came from all over Germany. In the future, however, they will come from all over Europe: for the upcoming 3rd BioVaria, patent agencies from Norway, Austria and France will join the German technology transfer organizations as event partners. 'BioVaria attracts an audience that is truly interested in licensing or funding innovative early-stage projects', Stéphane Mottola from the French technology transfer specialist FIST comments. 'For us, this is a unique chance to gain visibility for our technologies and establish relevant contacts. Moreover, we strongly endorse BioVaria's approach to working together across organizational, regional and national borders in order to improve the transfer of research results into application.'

For further information see www.biovaria.org

BioVaria Munich 2010

Meet us at these forthcoming events:

Biotech-NetWorkshop , 24-26 February 2010, Schloss Ringberg (Tegernsee), Germany
www.ascenion.de

BioVaria, 20 April 2010, Munich, Germany
www.BioVaria.org

BIO International Convention, 3-6 May 2010, Chicago, USA
http://convention.bio.org

ASTP 10th anniversary, 27-28 May 2010, Paris, France
www.astp.net

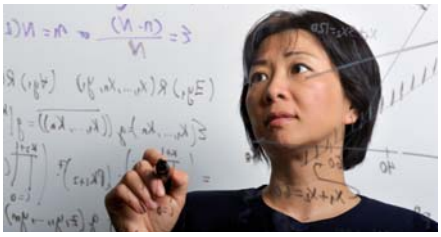
Looking back

From blue skies to pots of gold at the end of the rainbow

With this lyrical theme, the Helmholtz Association invited opinion leaders from research, industry and technology transfer for an evening in Brussels to discuss the challenges and opportunities of collaborations between research and industry.
During his welcoming address, Prof. Dr Jürgen Mlynek, President of the Helmholtz Association, made the Association's strategic vision very clear: 'To secure our future by doing cutting-edge research.' Or, in more catchy words: 'To spot and find the big challenges.' The strategy in the health research area is threefold: focusing on research that is consistently disease oriented, translational and collaborative.
How to make this approach work was then illustrated by case studies and further elaborated in a panel discussion moderated by Clive Cookson from the *Financial Times*. Although some participants challenged a too rosy view of today's cooperation between science and business, there was a consensus that the times of 'academic ivory towers' are mostly gone.
Finally, the facts speak for themselves: within the last four years, three novel medicines originating from Helmholtz research have reached the market, and all of them have been developed in collaboration with industry. Two of these, Removab® and Ixempra® come from partner institutes of Ascenion, one from the Helmholtz Zentrum München and the other one from the Helmholtz Center for Infection Research.

STS Forum Japan: The future of mankind

Like the World Economic Forum at Davos, the STS forum aims to foster an open dialogue between opinion leaders of various disciplines. The goals are similarly ambitious: finding new ways of addressing the key challenges of mankind, including global warming, food and energy supply, education, communication, etc.



What differentiates the STS forum from Davos is not only its focus on the Asia-Pacific region, but also the deliberate integration of scientists. Many Nobel laureates were present. 'In 2009, the overall tenor of discussions was "gently radical"', comments Christian Stein, CEO of Ascenion, who joined the event as a member of the German federal delegation and an invited speaker on the harmonization issues in international patent law. The final demands of the STS forum included more stringent political intervention against global warming and serious economic deficits; the reclamation of new farmland and the maintenance of existing farmland with the help of genetic engineering, and a basic right to education.

Crossing borders: 13th Health Industry Forum (HIF) in Beijing

For the first time, Ascenion was not only an invited speaker but also a co-organizer of the International Health Care Forum, one of China's largest biopharmaceutical conferences. The technology transfer workshop that was jointly held by Ascenion and the BPBC met with strong response from research and industry. Moreover, it triggered several ideas of how to continue and intensify the collaboration between the partners in order to further promote the exchange of experience between Europe and Asia, improve technology transfer standards and, last but not least, join forces for the development of early-stage projects that could positively impact the lives of millions of people worldwide. 'We are very pleased with the positive spirit of our interaction', Christian Stein comments. 'Chinese companies, researchers and technology transfer organizations have become important players in the worldwide IP landscape. We just cannot afford to ignore their potential – as licensors, licensees or partners in translational development.'

News in Brief

Helmholtz Zentrum München renews alliance with Ascenion

Ascenion and the Helmholtz Zentrum München have recently agreed to continue their long-term collaboration. Since the partners teamed up in 2001, Ascenion has mediated over 80 revenue-carrying agreements on behalf of the institution and helped 12 spin-offs to get started. Martin Reichel, Head of Legal & Technology Transfer at the institution, comments: 'We have successfully consolidated our profile, and are now adjusting our IP portfolio accordingly. We are confident that in the next few years, together with Ascenion, we can translate a significant portion of our IP into products that contribute to human health. Ascenion's sector-specific approach is the right path to putting our research results into practice.'

HKI becomes member of the Life-Science Foundation

Following four years of collaboration with Ascenion, the Leibniz Institute for Natural Product Research and Infection Biology – Hans Knöll Institute (HKI) joined Ascenion's parent holding, the Life-Science Foundation for the Promotion of Science and Research. As a member, it will be represented by its director in the foundation's council. 'Having worked with Ascenion for several years, we are convinced by the sector-specific approach to technology transfer. Our decision to join the Life-Science Foundation reflects this view and highlights our long-term commitment to technology transfer,' Elke Jäcksch, Administrative Director of the HKI, comments.

DPZ extends license agreement for its antibody against prions

The DPZ anti-prion antibody has been licensed to the French Atomic Energy Commission (CEA, Commissariat à l'énergie atomique) for a further 10 years, to be used as part of an antibody cocktail that is exclusively sublicensed to Bio-Rad. Ten years ago, it was one of the very first antibodies targeting prions and the corresponding test compiled by Bio-Rad was the first effective tool for the rapid diagnosis of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) on the market. 'The extension of the license agreement is a great success for the DPZ,' Tina Damm, Technology Manager at Ascenion comments. 'Although a number of competing products have reached the market to date, the Bio-Rad BSE test is still a market leader in Europe, and we expect a substantial stream of revenues for the DPZ from this agreement over the coming years.'

Ascenion acquires shares in BITZ

Ascenion now holds equity in BITZ (Braunschweiger Informatik- und Technologie-Zentrum) gGmbH – a joint venture of the Technical University Braunschweig, the Helmholtz Centre for Infection Research (HZI) and the software and consulting company Lineas. As an independent, nonprofit organization it offers dedicated IT services to support life-science research.

NovaTec to commercialize new test for chikungunya fever

A team of researchers from the Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine (BNI), a member of the Leibniz Association, and the German Federal Armed Forces has developed a new ELISA for the diagnosis of chikungunya infections. Chikungunya fever is a viral, mosquito-born disease, which is most common in Africa, Southeast Asia and India. First outbreaks in Europe, however, were reported in 2007.
'The clinical symptoms of Chikungunya virus infections are often misdiagnosed as arboviral diseases,' Petra Emmerich, Researcher at the BNI explains. 'Laboratory diagnosis is therefore crucial to determine the cause of the disease and potentially initiate an appropriate public health response.' Mediated by Ascenion, the test was licensed to NovaTec Immundiagnostica GmbH, a specialist in the development and manufacturing of ELISA kits for the diagnosis of infectious diseases. The company has just launched its new chikungunya ELISA at this year's Medica in Düsseldorf.

Ascenion team news

Dr Marsha Schade
Project Management
Team Munich

Dr Isabell Schwenkert
Technology Scout
Team Hanover

Ascenion has an experienced team of scientists, lawyers, management consultants and analysts working at six branch offices all over Germany.

Marsha Schade joined the Munich team in September 2009 to support the Technology Transfer Competence Centre (KTT), the central service unit for technology transfer and communication within the Federal Program of Medical Genome Research. She assumed responsibility for public relations and project management. Amongst others, she took care of the KTT's website, which is now also available in English, see www.genome-marketplace.com.

Marsha holds a PhD in biology from Munich University and gained one year's experience of science teaching before joining Ascenion.

Isabell Schwenkert joined the Hanover team in September 2009 as technology scout. Together with her colleague Ralf Cordes, she will work with scientists from the Hanover Medical School (MHH) to identify commercially attractive results of their work, secure appropriate patent protection and support the translation of their IP into application. Isabell received a PhD in neurobiology from Würzburg University, held a post doc position at the Oregon Health & Science University, Portland, US, and gained substantial expertise in clinical research and development from subsequent positions in the medical device manufacturing industry, amongst others as clinical research consultant with BrainLab and clinical project manager with CareFusion Research Services.

Latest Technology Offers

- **New therapeutic approach for sepsis and infections: *in-vivo* modulation of natural killer cells via CD27** TO 02-00250
- **Nucleic acids for efficient conditional inactivation and mutagenesis of eukaryotic genes** TO 02-00097
- **Micro-array reactome: from metabolic networks to gene information** TO 02-00276
- **Novel adjuvant class for use in immunotherapeutics and vaccination** TO 03-00207a
- **Novel peptide drug enhancing immune response in patients suffering from immune suppression and leukopenia** TO 03-00207b
- **Peptides for diagnostic use and for treatment of pulmonary arterial hypertension** TO 03-00255
- **New candidate gene for diagnostic and therapeutic development to combat obesity-associated diabetes** TO 05-00033
- **New highly specific and sensitive marker for adenocarcinomas of the lung: ZP-2 monoclonal antibody** TO 14-00013
- **Casting mould for temporary spacer used in revision surgery** TO 15-00107
- **Treatment of sepsis with MALP-2** TO 15-00071
- **Treatment for cluster headache disorders** TO 15-00085
- **WT-1 as a prognostic marker for treatment stratification in acute myeloid leukaemia** TO 15-00108
- **Ceramic knee joint prosthesis** TO 15-00110
- **PGFM-detection for pregnancy testing in carnivores** TO 99-00037

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Editorial

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