Ideas from the Research Sector for the Market
www.profund.fu-berlin.de
Our Mission: From the Idea to the Market

Scholarly and scientific endeavors and research in general provide impetus for a society’s development and help to create and secure prosperity. At Freie Universität Berlin, new ideas that could make our lives better in the future are born every day. We support the culture of innovation on campus so that knowledge and technologies originating in research can be applied faster.

Profund Innovation supports students, scholars, scientists, and alumni in three areas:
- Protecting intellectual property and commercial exploitation thereof;
- Starting businesses, especially those with a connection to research; and
- Cooperative research initiatives with companies and contract research for companies.

However, a highly developed culture of innovation is not only an obligation toward society at large. It is also a gain for the academic environment. Cooperative business initiatives and spin-offs offer fresh stimulus for academic research and make it possible to raise external funds that benefit the university as well. A portion of the income from exploiting patents and other intellectual property rights also flows back to the university.

International Network University
Freie Universität Berlin is among the eleven higher education institutions in Germany that were successful in all three funding lines in the Excellence Initiative jointly organized by the German federal and state governments in 2012 and whose future concepts are receiving support. A full university, Freie Universität Berlin encompasses twelve academic departments and schools and three central institutes, offering more than 170 academic programs for approximately 29,500 students. There are about 2,500 scholars and scientists working on the campus in Dahlem.

“We consider transferring knowledge and technologies to society at large to be an important part of the mission of Freie Universität, alongside research and teaching.”
Prof. Peter-André Alt, President of Freie Universität Berlin
Entrepreneurship is becoming more and more attractive as a career option: One in five students in Germany now wish to work for themselves later on. At Freie Universität Berlin, curricular and extracurricular teaching activities offer many opportunities to get to know this option and prepare to start a business. At the same time, key skills such as personal initiative, team spirit, and creativity are instilled in students, giving them competencies that are also valued by employers.

More than 30 different courses can be combined into individual curriculums for doctoral candidates and those pursuing a master’s or bachelor’s degree. For example, the individual curriculum or study plan for bachelor’s degree students in all disciplines recommends that those with an interest in entrepreneurship start out by participating in the Funpreneur competition. The three-month Start-up Advanced Program provides support during the start-up process for those who wish to start their own businesses.

Entrepreneurship education at Freie Universität is decentralized, interdisciplinary, and geared toward action: Courses with extensive practical parts are offered by both Profund Innovation and instructors at various academic departments. At the same time, many classes and events are not limited to a specific department, so work is often performed in interdisciplinary teams.

For an overview of what Freie Universität offers, please visit www.fu-berlin.de/entrepreneurship-edu.

"Successful entrepreneurs, coaches, and important figures from the business sector contribute their skills and knowledge to teaching activities. That’s how we bridge the gap between theory and practice.”

Britt Perlick, who is responsible for entrepreneurship training at Profund Innovation
Two Examples: The Right Option for Everyone

More than 1,800 students have participated in the Funpreneur competition since 2007. These “funpreneurs” experience an intense time marked by both highs and lows, have a chance to demonstrate their teamwork skills and creativity – and, in the process, often discover their talent for entrepreneurship. The participants work in teams to develop business ideas. After completing compact courses in project management, marketing, sales, and law, they start a limited-term business and launch their products on the market in five weeks. They are supported in the process by mentors from the business sector. The top ten teams present their results to the panel of judges and the audience at the Chamber of Industry and Commerce of Berlin and can win prize money totaling 2,500 euros. The competition’s partners are Berliner Bank, the Chamber of Industry and Commerce of Berlin, and Wirtschaftsjunioren Berlin.

Together with the Dahlem Research School, the umbrella institution for structured doctoral programs at Freie Universität, Profund Innovation offers its ProGründung intensive course. Participants develop research-based business ideas, draw up a financial plan, and complete a program designed to hone their presentation skills. They submit their ideas in the “Research to Market Challenge.” By engaging in this way, scholars and scientists prepare to start a business as a career option while also learning methods they can use as managers and executives in academia, the research segment, and the business sector alike.

Methods such as the “Business Model Canvas” and “Empathy Map” help lend structure to business ideas.
Exploitation: Finding the Right Path – Together

A physicist launches an invention on the market from his or her own business, a software program is licensed and sold by the millions: There are many examples that show how innovations from the research sector can become competitive products.

Acting in concert with researchers, Profund Innovation identifies and evaluates research findings with market potential and examines which path toward exploitation would be suitable. Is a spin-off a possibility? Can a technology be patented and licensed to existing businesses? Or should it be further developed in cooperation with an enterprise?

If the entrepreneurship path is chosen, start-up advisors support the team as they develop the business model and during the process of starting the business. All of the parties work together to identify solutions to finance the product development phase, which sometimes lasts several years. If the plans call for licensing patentable results to existing firms, the Senior IP and Licensing Manager is in charge of all further steps.

Research to Market Challenge

The Research to Market Challenge is an opportunity for fast evaluation of a product or business idea. This competition is open to ideas from research activities at Freie Universität and Charité that focus on the healthcare sector, information and communication technology, and media and the creative sector. The best proposals receive award money totaling 12,000 euros.

“The success of a business model depends not just on the market, but also on the people involved. That’s why we provide holistic advice and offer support during the entire start-up process.”

Anke Fischer, Profund Innovation, start-up advisor

Physics professor Karsten Heyne (left) is a co-founder of Humedics GmbH, which specializes in direct, accurate measurement of liver function.
Patents: Protecting Intellectual Property

Veterinarian Dr. Julia Rosendahl discovered how certain mechanisms in the rumen of dairy cows work. This discovery formed the basis for her idea for a natural feed additive that makes it easier for the animals to digest concentrated feed and improves their health. Even before her findings had appeared in a scientific publication, Profund Innovation worked with Rosendahl to design a strategy to secure the rights to the invention and paved the way to obtaining a patent, with support from specialized patent attorneys. Applying for a patent has many advantages for researchers:

- The university bears all the costs and manages the applications and patents.
- The patent application counts as a publication.
- Doing this opens up possibilities of cooperating with industry partners and facilitates external fundraising.
- It pays off – in the form of remuneration to the inventor and a bonus paid to the scientific team.
- It secures a competitive advantage for spin-offs.

If there are no plans for the invention to be exploited by a spin-off, Profund Innovation steps in to pursue the sale or licensing of the invention to companies. Many inventors use their own contacts for this. External commercialization agencies are also commissioned to reach out to potential licensees. Profund Innovation itself handles the negotiations regarding the terms of licensing to spin-offs and other interested companies and the drafting of the contracts.

“We analyze the possible scope of protection and the market potential of inventions in-house instead of delegating this task to external service providers. In this way, we are able to provide capable support for the exploitation process.”

Dr. Claudia Keil-Dieckmann, Profund Innovation, Senior IP and Licensing Manager

PerformaNat develops gentle, ecofriendly feed concepts for high-yielding cows.
Intellectual Property: Authors and Creators Have Rights, Too

Not all ideas that stem from research are suitable for obtaining a patent. Profund Innovation engages in research and discussion to clarify whether the protection of copyrights or a trademark can be claimed instead.

Copyrights offer protection for software that is not patentable. However, other copyrighted works, such as text, images, audio, music, and data and the technical know-how of scholars and scientists can also be utilized under certain circumstances.

In the life sciences, there are numerous other possibilities for commercialization of materials that are not patented. These include cell lines, mouse models, proteins, chemical compounds, DNA, and RNA. When these kinds of materials are shared with external cooperation partners or research institutions, it is advisable to enter into material transfer agreements, possibly in conjunction with nondisclosure or confidentiality agreements. Profund Innovation is also responsible for this.

Parameters for claiming an invention:
- Attractiveness of the market
- Patentability, including adequate protective scope and without easy circumvention
- Existence of specific potential licensees designated by name
- Team or department bears a share of the costs of obtaining a patent
- Invention forms the basis for a project application or a spin-off
- Supplement the existing internal patent portfolio

“Professional clarification of intellectual property rights on a secure legal footing in advance of cooperative research arrangements is crucial to later exploitation of patents, copyrights, cell lines, and other things.”

Dr. Andreas Schoberth, Profund Innovation, attorney responsible for contract management
Financing: Many Ways to Raise Seed Capital

Profund Innovation advises members of the university on financial planning for their exploitation project and assists them in applying for public funding and looking for private investors.

About 80 teams from Freie Universität and Charité have already received EXIST Business Start-up Grants from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs. With a budget of 145,000 euros, three team members can work on the product and market launch for a year. So far, fourteen projects have benefited from the EXIST Transfer of Research program, which provides high six-figure sums in support of research-intensive start-up projects.

The German Federal Ministry of Education and Research supports the validation of the innovation potential of research results through the “VIP+” program, which provides even more extensive funding, up to 1.5 million euros. The Central Innovation Program for SME (ZIM), by contrast, is tailored to cooperative research initiatives between universities and businesses. The Investitionsbank Berlin program “Pro FIT” also offers various lines of funding for innovative spin-offs and other businesses.

Good preparation improves the prospects of success when looking for private investors. With this in mind, the start-up and financing advisors provide detailed information on investor requirements, offer training on presentation skills, and review business plans and application documents. They also recommend participation in suitable competitions and matching events, which frequently put entrepreneurs in contact with investors.

“Without recommendations, young teams have a hard time winning the attention and trust of venture capitalists. We bring start-ups together with the right people.”

Aneta Bärwolf, Profund Innovation, start-up and financing advisor
Incubators: The Right Location for Rapid Growth

Low costs, good equipment and features, being close to other start-ups and the university – these are the things spin-offs want from their first business location. Freie Universität offers 25 offices at three locations on campus. Each one is equipped with office furniture and Internet access, and there are conference rooms for meetings with clients and others. An open atmosphere invites people to engage in dialogue. These sites are free to use for teams with knowledge- and technology-based business ideas during the start-up phase. A professor’s recommendation and a positive assessment of the start-up project from Profund Innovation are required.

Starting in fall 2016, the offices will be clustered together in even greater proximity, as they move into the new incubator building (the Gründerhaus) at Altensteinstraße 40 together with Profund Innovation. This location offers a perfect connection to the future Berlin Southwest Technology and Start-up Center (Technologie- und Gründungszentrum Berlin Südwest), which is due to be developed on the adjacent grounds of the former American military hospital at Fabeckstraße 60–62.

“The Berlin Southwest Technology and Start-up Center will give our spin-offs room to grow while benefiting from synergies on campus.”
Steffen Terberl, head of Profund Innovation
Networks: Knowing Who Has the Knowledge

The best ideas are seldom the product of a single mind. Profund Innovation organizes events such as the monthly Business & Beer networking session and maintains ties with many people who support entrepreneurs.

Professors share not only their subject-specific knowledge, but also business acumen, since many of them already have experience with patents and spin-offs. Alumni of entrepreneurship programs and other business founders with ties to Freie Universität have joined forces in the Netzwerk Unternehmertum entrepreneurship network to help newcomers on a volunteer basis. A mentoring program also helps with this, as does the Start-up Grill event, where start-up projects present themselves and receive feedback on their business concepts.

Experts and coaches are easy to find via the coaching platform operated by B!GRÜNDET, the start-up network of Berlin's higher education institutions, of which Freie Universität is also a member. These experts have agreed to advise spin-offs on special terms, and they are evaluated regularly. The Profund Innovation network also provides good services for those looking for co-founders and employees.

“Start your business and talk about it! The experiences of others can help you avoid making mistakes of your own. That’s why Profund Innovation creates many opportunities for networking.”

Ulrike Ernst, Profund Innovation, responsible for networks and partners
In its activities to support start-ups, Freie Universität Berlin cooperates closely with Charité – Universitätsmedizin Berlin, the joint medical school of Freie Universität and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Together, we pursue the strategy of the “Entrepreneurial Network University,” which won grant funding from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy in the “EXIST Culture of Entrepreneurship – Entrepreneur University” competition in 2013. Implementation of this strategy is being co-financed with funds from the German federal government until 2018.