

Case Study: SeaBed Technologies, Inc

Hanu Singh wanted to commercialize his SeaBed vehicle and imaging technology that he and his colleagues invented at WHOI. He requested a license and described what he wanted to do in a short business plan that he presented to OAO. OAO reviewed the plan, and presented it to the AOEPE Chair, and the WHOI Trustee Business Development Committee. The plan was approved, and the license was granted to Hanu, that he could then take to start his company, **SeaBed Technologies, Inc.** WHOI made an explicit decision to not own equity in the company, based on several factors, such as desire by founders for capital, availability of cash, and perceived risk. Sometimes WHOI will have a stake in the spin out company, other times, it will decide not to (e.g., yes for **EOM Offshore, LLC** and **Petrel Biosensors Inc.**, no for **Hydroid**; both conscious decisions the Institution made when the companies spun out). In all cases, the license to these companies provides that royalties are paid to WHOI.

Since Hanu maintains his full-time Scientific Staff position at WHOI, he works in his spare time to establish and build SeaBed Technologies, Inc. and all activities related to the company are conducted off campus.

Hanu's decision to start a company came about because he saw a business opportunity based on his unique technology and a strong market for the capabilities he had to offer. The technology is not patented, but rather protection relies on the complexity of his system and his know-how to make the systems perform as desired.

Hanu's advice to WHOI staff interested in commercializing their invention or idea: be transparent in your endeavor, be realistic, and understand that you need to wear two hats—one as a WHOI PI, the other as a business person representing a company. Find the support you need for each hat, and be able to clarify each role you have to others.

Commercializing Your Invention at WHOI

WHOI encourages Scientists, Engineers, and Technical Staff members to commercialize their inventions through licensing to an existing business or new business start-ups. Licensing provides a means to make the technology available to the greater oceanographic community, satisfy funding agencies' desire for a broader impact, and return royalty dollars back to the Institution, the Department, and the inventors. New start-up companies provide these same benefits in addition to the opportunity for a greater financial return to those who contribute time, energy, and resources. Although there are WHOI policies and legal processes that must be followed, Institution resources are available for guidance and support.

A license or new business can be based on a chemical compound, an instrument or sensor, software or hardware, or a method or process you've created.

Here are the basics:

- Make sure the invention is protected either by a patent or trade secret (see the Goodwin Procter presentation to WHOI for more details).
- Decide what your best options are given what you have to offer. It may be to license it to another company, or to create a company on your own. There are myriad ways to do this, depending on your product, its market value, and what kinds of customers you are targeting.
- Next step is to write up a description of what you aim to do—a summarized business plan—that can be presented to OAO, your Chair, the Director of Research, and ultimately select WHOI

Board Members. Since inventions made by WHOI employees are owned by WHOI, it is ultimately WHOI's decision as to what gets done with it. However, your participation is critical and what you want to do is a major consideration when arriving at the best outcome for the invention.

- There are support mechanisms for each of these steps at WHOI—people available to review your business plan, provide guidelines, examples, and anything else you should need along the way to make it as straightforward as possible. Contact OAO to get started and the Office will provide the right resources for you, including expertise from select WHOI Trustees, outside business contacts, as well as legal support from Goodwin Procter, WHOI's external legal counsel.

Calendar

Intellectual Property Seminar

PO and G&G Departments
Winter 2012 date still TBD.

Commercialization Q&A and EOM Offshore Case Study Seminar

All Departments
Spring 2012 date still TDB.

For more details, and for Goodwin Procter Intellectual Property seminar presentation: www.whoi.edu/technologytransfer/

Got feedback? What issues or topics would you like to discuss or learn more about? Please **contact OAO** with suggestions for future seminars or newsletter topics.