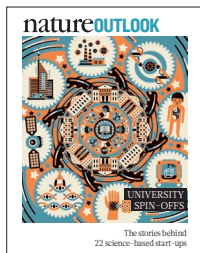


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UNIVERSITY SPIN-OFFS

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The arduous nature of a career in science is not especially suited to the pursuit of business ambitions. Science's raw allure — the intellectual force brought to bear on questions so difficult that no one thought to ask them, much less answer them — selects for a certain type of person. But starting a company demands a suite of skills and attitudes that are far from universal among scientists, from managerial finesse to a flair for building strong and productive relationships.

A substantial proportion of researchers harbour entrepreneurial ambitions. In a survey of *Nature* readers (go.nature.com/2pebi6m), 47% of the 815 people who responded to the question said that they would consider leaving academia to commercialize their research in a start-up company. However, few ever actually do so — a mere 6% of the 1,403 respondents reported having started a company. The greatest perceived barriers were financial risk and insecurity (cited by 72% of respondents) and lack of business skills (53%).

This Outlook presents a portrait of 22 start-up ventures that have emerged from universities around the world to turn laboratory research into practical, profitable products. This eclectic group of initiatives represents just a tiny fraction of the spin-off activity from the world's universities, yet spans a broad range of disciplines, from drug discovery to energy storage, rocket science and structural engineering. Not all have 'succeeded' — many are embryonic, and some have taken tortuous paths and have yet to turn a profit. But together, these stories make it abundantly clear that there are ample commercial opportunities for university research.

We salute these entrepreneurs — and the academic institutions whence they came — for showing so many ways to turn scientific investigation into practical innovations.

Herb Brody

Chief supplements editor

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VISIT THE OUTLOOK ONLINE

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