

Entrepreneurial ID «venture leaders» 2008



Pierre-Jean Wipff

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HelvaLab – We propose innovative cell culture dishes for biotech, pharma and cosmetic research

Industry: Biotech

The venture leader

Pierre-Jean Wipff is responsible for the business development and the future CEO of HelvaLab. Pierre-Jean received his MSc in Molecular and Cellular biology and his MSc in Bioengineering at the “Ecole Supérieure de Biotechnologie de Strasbourg (ESBS)”, France and is presently finishing his PhD in Biotechnology and Bioengineering at the “Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL)”, Switzerland. In 2003, Pierre-Jean had his first contact with the industry, working for 1 year as an engineer in project management.

Presently, in order to become a successful entrepreneur, Pierre-Jean is thoroughly working on strengthening his business skill by assiduously taking business classes given at the EPFL (management of innovative technology, entrepreneurial finances, venture challenge,...). Pierre-Jean’s business project was awarded “one of the best business ideas 2008” by the prestigious Venture 08 competition organized by ETH and McKinsey; moreover, he received the selective EPFL’s grant for entrepreneurship “Innogrant” which will allow him to fully concentrate on his business for one year as soon as his PhD is completed.

The Company / project

HelvaLab proposes innovative solutions for cell culture, a process that permits ex-vivo expansion of cells in plastic culture dishes. Cultured cells constitute a crucial tool in life sciences since they are inescapably used for studying normal/diseased cellular functioning and for testing potential therapeutic drugs before administration to living bodies. Cell culture can be expensive and tedious due to the biochemical environment that must be finely adjusted to optimize cell growth and characteristics. The proposition of HelvaLab is to grow cells on soft culture surfaces that imitate the rigidity of the organ the cell is originating from (instead of hard plastic) to enhance cellular characteristics. HelvaLab has developed a polymer suitable for cell culture which viscoelasticity can be adjusted: it can be as rigid as bone to virtually as soft as brain!

HelvaLab’s culture dishes were shown to:

- improve the yield of cell harvesting by increasing cell multiplication
- improve the quality of cells produced by increasing cell homogeneity
- reduce the use of expensive culture additives

HelvaLab’s target customers are:

- research laboratories in academia and research
- pharmaceutical/cosmetic companies
- companies growing cells for therapeutic purposes (grafts, tissue engineering,...).

HelvaLab will be founded in April 2008. In 5-years time, we plan to employ 50 collaborators and to reach 10% of the market of culture dishes expected to attain \$300M in 2013.

HelvaLab is actively looking for:

- investment (\$3+2M) to set our production lines
- a chief of production operations (CPO) to complete the winning team
- for partners who could help us to be visible on the market (distributors,...)
- for partners who would provide us with plastic ware

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