

Edelweiss Connect: Product safety with minimal animal testing



*Barry Hardy, CEO of Edelweiss Connect
(Img: Technologiepark Basel)*

“Creating a lab is always an adventure – especially for a company like us,” says Barry Hardy, CEO and founder of Edelweiss Connect. “But thanks to Technologiepark Basel, we were able to pull it off.”

Edelweiss Connect launched operations at Technologiepark Basel in 2016 as a one-man-show. “Within the last three years, we have grown to a team of 20 in 8 countries,” explains Dr. Hardy. Created at the intersection of computational chemistry, toxicology and molecular biology, as well as knowledge management and data modeling, the Edelweiss Connect team develops new methods for product safety assessments. Cloud and data based knowledge mining and modeling refine, reduce and replace traditional assessment methods, especially those based on animal testing. In lieu of animal experiments, Edelweiss Connect deploys integrated strategies, combining *in silico* knowledge about molecular pathways and existing science experiments. That way, Edelweiss Connect is able to design models with weight-of-evidence that allows for judgements about the safety of a substance.

Community is key

A key application area is in chemical industries, fragrances and cosmetics. Accordingly, in March 2019, Edelweiss Connect launched “SaferSkin”, a cloud-based, non-animal testing app that evaluates skin sensitization risk in compounds. “Imagine a cosmetic company with a new chemical or fragrance they want to put into a new product,” Hardy breaks it down for us. “First, they need to check the compound’s safety, whether it could cause an allergic reaction.” The EU now bans animal testing in the development of cosmetics, so companies

must use non-animal testing methods. And that's where SaferSkin enters the fray: Without bothering a single animal, the application combines data from sources such as biological key events, research, *in vitro* and computer modelling to provide a risk and safety assessment.

An important side effect of SaferSkin is that it allows partners to share their research. Community is, in fact, the foundation of Edelweiss Connect's business model: "Whether by cloud-based collaboration platforms or at networking events - we are committed to developing relationships", says Hardy. "Bringing people from different disciplines together always carries the seed of future collaborations and knowledge." For this CEO, sharing platforms and knowledge is key to successful team work and create better solutions for all.

Out of the meeting room, into the lab

Being "one of the world's centers for research and development in Life Sciences that would allow us to connect with other good scientists", Dr. Hardy had set his sights on Basel early on. But the move to Technologiepark Basel was pure serendipity. "Our accountant had a



client in Technologiepark and he thought that we would be a fit. We needed meeting rooms, so I thought why not give it a try?" Little did Hardy know that Edelweiss Connect would soon be an onsite company with two offices and a lab – a crucial step for the small business which, up to that point, had mainly done *in silico*, i.e. computer modeling, work. "When we look back in a couple of years, I believe that renting the lab will feature as a key moment in our success story," Barry Hardy says.

*The Edelweiss Connect lab
(Img: Technologiepark Basel)*

"EdelweissData" for more collaborations in Basel



The location Technologiepark Basel proves especially helpful, Dr. Hardy says – not only when the lab lacks a piece of equipment, but really with any other professional problem too. He welcomes the growing interaction between his employees and other tenants at Technologiepark Basel. "You never know when or how, but early connections always pay off at some point. I expect our scientific and business exchange to grow organically within the local Basel network," Dr. Hardy says.

*Technologiepark Basel
(Img: Technologiepark Basel AG)*

In line with that prospect, his team is currently putting the finishing touches on the company's second product, a virtual approach to combining data from different partners, named the "EdelweissData" platform. Expected to launch in April 2019, EdelweissData will provide a novel solution for data and research sharing between labs, including local institutions such as the Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz. "Edelweiss Connect combines and integrates research data as well as strategies from different groups, making sure that any collaboration builds on solid, harmonized data management across multiple partners and sites," says Hardy. "Hopefully Edelweiss Connect will be a model for how we collaborate here in Basel in general!"

Edelweiss Connect

Edelweiss Connect manages collaborative projects to achieve goals in scientific research, infrastructure development or service provision. It develops groundbreaking solutions through research, knowledge management, community development and international collaboration. The company was established in 2008 and moved into Technologiepark Basel in 2016. It currently has 20 employees in 8 countries.

www.edelweissconnect.com

Technologiepark Basel

The Technologiepark Basel is the premier address for early-stage tech start-ups in Basel that transform knowledge into marketable products and services. It offers a collaboration-friendly, yet business-driven environment and is part of the rapidly growing Stücki Park in the dynamic northern part of Basel. Tenants are selected carefully to ensure a high level of innovation.

www.technologiepark.ch