Record-Speed Communication Infrastructure and Tech to Reduce Buildings' Greenhouse Gases win CHF 150,000

Venture Kick awards FenX and Polariton 150,000 francs in pre-seed funding to support technologies that will accelerate global communications and reduce the environmental impact of the construction industry, two multi-billion-dollar markets.

Fiber-optic modulators and building insulation are 'hidden' topics, until devastating building fires or the frustration of slow communications bring these essential infrastructures to public attention. Both Zurich-based startups develop research originating from ETH Zurich.

FenX AG: fully-recyclable insulation maximizing fire-protection and minimizing CO2

The modern building industry faces challenges to reduce its energy consumption and carbon footprint: residential and commercial buildings account for about 40 percent of worldwide energy consumption and 36 percent of global greenhouse gases (GHGs). Better and greener insulation can reduce buildings' total GHG by a fifth. Unfortunately, today's insulation has either a relatively high CO2-footprint or is highly flammable.

FenX, a spin-off from ETH Zurich, tackles this by transforming industrial mineral waste into sustainable and high-performance insulation foam panels that also ensures safe fire-protection in buildings. The market is large: globally the building industry spends about $22.4 billion on thermal insulation. "Our fully-recyclable product minimizes CO2 emissions and maximizes fire-protection. This combination is new in the market and it is made from 'waste'," says co-founder Etienne Jeoffroy, "FenX's product generates between 3 and 10 times less CO2 over its lifetime than current technologies."

FenX is focused on completing European certification for its insulation panels, before developing pilot projects. The startup recently won a business development accelerator with Swiss Prime Site, Switzerland's largest listed real-estate company. Jeoffroy and co-founders Michele Zanini, Enrico Scoccimarro, Alessandro Dutto, André Studart, and Elena Tervoort plan to raise a seed round of about CHF 1.5 million in the 2020.

The CEO is thankful of Venture Kick's pre-seed support and entrepreneurial training: "Venture Kick has really helped us a lot to focus and refine our business model. In particular, the Kickers' Camp showed us how to identify our path-to-market better."

www.fenx.ch

Polariton Technologies AG: the world's fastest and smallest electro-optic modulators

Our world is filling with digital devices that need to communicate with each other, and modern lifestyles mean people want to receive more data via the internet. Modulators, which convert electrical signals into the light signals necessary to cross the world in fiber optic cables, are an essential part of our communication infrastructure.

ETH Zurich Pioneer Fellow Claudia Hoessbacher and co-founders Wolfgang Heni and Benedikt Bäuerle uses shorter-wavelength plasmonics, instead of normal light, to shrink these components to nanoscale, while providing unprecedented speeds of data transmission and reducing its energy consumption. Polariton's modulators transmit at up to 500 GHz, 10-times faster than the prevailing photonic modulator technology.

Polariton used Venture Kick pre-seed funding to validated business assumptions and meet potential customer and suppliers worldwide. The team recently demonstrated its nano technology - the culmination of six years research - to international key opinion leaders and gained its fourth team member. The Zurich-based startup has initiated contact with investors as it looks to raise a $1-2 million seed round at the beginning of next year, in order to add experienced business development staff and refine its modulators for first-customers in the test and measurement sector.
The startup also won financial support from Innobooster and enjoyed Venture Kick's entrepreneurial training camps: "The very-concrete feedback helped us improve immensely. It's also valuable to be able to network with founders at similar stages in different fields," says Hoessbacher, who is delighted at her transformation from researcher to entrepreneur. "It's about moving research towards the market. This is our baby – I'd love to see it out there."

www.polariton.ch

FenX’s Etienne Jeoffroy Polariton’s Claudia Hoessbacher

About Venture Kick

The philanthropic initiative Venture Kick provides up to CHF 150,000 in seed funding to Swiss startups. In addition, it offers a well-structured entrepreneurial path towards building a winning business. Startups pitch to expert juries at three stages to obtain funding, gaining direct feedback and access to an international network of successful entrepreneurs and investors.

Since its launch in 2007, Venture Kick has supported 640 Swiss startup projects with 27.3 million francs. The program of financial support, training and network, has led to the creation of 494 companies and 6,033 jobs. Venture Kick alumni companies have attracted a total of 2.5 billion francs, and represent 54 companies ranked in the TOP 100 Swiss Startups 2019.

In 2019, Venture Kick will pay out 4.35 million francs to idea-stage startup projects to bring Swiss science to global markets. More information in the Venture Kick annual report.

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