

# The Technology Center Witterswil – Home for Start-Up Companies at Affordable Costs

The origin of the Technology Center Witterswil was an obsolete Research Station of Novartis. Ever since, the Technology Center Witterswil offers favorable conditions for start-up companies and SMEs mainly in the area of life sciences.



## History

After the merger of Ciba and Sandoz to Novartis in 1996, the agrobiological research station in Witterswil became obsolete. As a consequence, the Technology Center Witterswil was formed by Jost Harr (former VP Research with Sandoz Agro) and then sold to entrepreneur Ueli Nussbaumer. In the year 2000, TechnologieZentrum Witterswil AG was incorporated together with Elektra Birseck Münchenstein AG as a second investor. The company has since increased the number of tenants and has heavily invested in its facilities. It has added a new building in 2004 and is planning the construction of several additional facilities for SMEs mainly in the life sci-

ences area. Today, already 200 people work in the TZW.

## Strategy

Running a technology center for start-up companies is a tricky business. Companies in the life sciences area have substantial financial needs to the tune of one to several million Swiss francs per year: the risk not to make it through all the necessary financial rounds is immanent and may lead to an early liquidation of the company. If a management company such as TZW AG can help in identifying new investors or actively participates in circumventing critical liquidity issues, one or the other start-up might be saved.



Start-ups also have unpredictable growth patterns. Some are too aggressively planned leading to unused (and therefore expensive) space; some have planned too conservatively and are faced with an unmet need for additional space in the short run.

TZW AG is pursuing a strategy addressing both scenarios: growth slower than predicted, and growth unexpectedly fast. TZW AG actively supports its tenants with flexible solutions at affordable conditions and is thereby adding to the attractiveness of the Basel area.

## Location

Witterswil is situated in the Leimental which stretches from the metropolitan Basel area along the French border into pleasant rural areas. Located about 10 kilometers from Basel it is similarly located as close-by Reinach. The SBB main station is reached by car in 15 minutes, the Basel-Mulhouse Airport can be reached in 20 minutes, and tram no. 10 links Witterswil and Basel in 25 minutes. With those attributes Witterswil – still a rural area, yet close to urban Basel – has become an attractive location for companies seeking affordable conditions and profiting from favorable recruiting opportunities also in close-by Alsace and Südbaden.

## Existing tenants

Already nine life sciences SMEs are tenants in the Technology Center Witterswil, and several have shown interest in moving there. As a positive effect of this growth, TZW already represents a cluster – a desirable effect enhancing the attractiveness of any location. The more similar or complementary companies are located in the same campus, the more attractive it becomes for additional SMEs to move there. The Technology Center Witterswil today is such a campus for tomorrow.

## Outlook

In anticipation of future needs, several new buildings offering attractive conditions for start-ups and SMEs are planned, thereby increasing again the attractiveness of the location Witterswil. Eventually, the site may become home to as many as 500–750 employees in the next 5–10 years. ■

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