

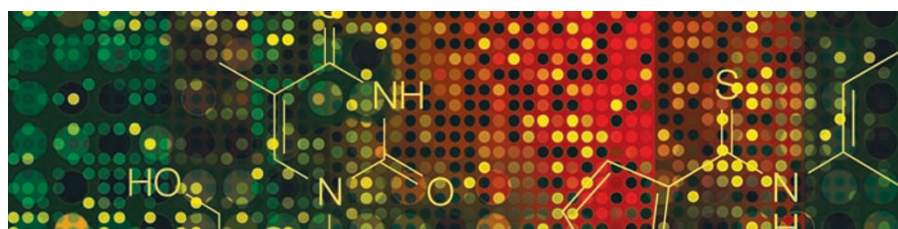
Beachcombing for bioscience

Recent developments in bioscience are reported in a business-oriented publication, called *SciBX*, a joint venture by *Nature Publishing Group* and *Biocentury*.

Two widely accepted and credible reasons to publish are to recognise and endorse technological and scientific advances and to avoid re-inventing the wheel. Although this is all well and good, with the mass of literature produced every year and the proliferation of new journals, it is a daunting task to sift through and find the information we need. There are, of course, readily available web-based tools and search engines that screen the information we receive and keep us up-to-date with the latest results. But, keeping abreast with new concepts and developments in science is not limited to academic and laboratory-based industrial researchers; sections of the business community have a similar need for information, though from a completely different perspective.

Take biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies — those working in drug discovery and development teams make risky decisions about the future of projects, constantly look for new targets and lead compounds and must remain aware of the competition. Along a similar vein, business executives in these companies and independent investment professionals, including venture capitalists, need to know the latest commercially relevant research to make an informed choice in their cherry-picking of early-stage concepts, technologies and small companies. Knowledge is essential for these business-minded individuals to weigh up the scientific and financial risks associated with their decisions.

With the aim of fulfilling some of these needs, *SciBX* (*Science-Business eXchange*), a joint publication between *Nature Publishing Group* and *Biocentury*, was launched in January 2008 (ref. 1). On a weekly basis, *SciBX* combs through the scientific literature to find and analyse research with potentially important commercial implications. This latest news is then reported from a science and business perspective. Topics covered since the launch include a Sanger sequencing



Groundbreaking results and technologies should not be 'lost in translation' between the science and business worlds.

technology based on polyacrylamides, which has much faster DNA read times than existing Sanger techniques², and the discovery that the pancreas could have an important role in obesity, based on recent studies of the hormone leptin³. *SciBX* also summarizes new research in a section called 'The Distillery', in which results are categorized by either potential therapeutic area or technique — one column of this section is devoted to the licensing and patent status of the work. Thus, at a quick glance, both the main scientific conclusions and the current business position can be seen.

Biomaterials and bio-related techniques reliant on materials science will not be forgotten in this venture and, considering the commercial investment and recent therapeutic advances made in these areas, they should form an essential ingredient. Drug delivery, tissue engineering, biosensors, biomolecular screening and lab-on-a-chip technologies are some of materials-based research topics that we can expect to see in *SciBX*. In this issue of *Nature Materials*, Jeffrey Hubbell and co-workers⁴ report the discovery of a peptide that targets cartilage tissue and the subsequent design of a polymer-based nanoparticle for potential drug delivery to this tissue. This kind of technology, on the boundary between materials and life sciences, will surely get the wide and commercial appreciation it deserves,

as well as, at a more basic level, encourage collaboration and the communication of ideas between materials and life scientists.

Initially, the impact of *SciBX* will be difficult to assess. There are already incentives for academics to focus on commercial initiatives, with some grants restricted to the development of proof-of-concepts rather than the pure advancement of knowledge. The prevalence and well-established workings of technology-transfer departments associated with universities already communicate academic research to the business community. Also, *SciBX* targets only scientific journals in its search for new commercially viable results — crucial information that appears in patent literature before the scientific paper is born is thus not screened⁵.

Considering our opening reasons to publish scientific research, *SciBX* must be a good idea — not only does it act as a kind of commercial accreditation but it prevents research becoming 'lost in translation' between the science and business worlds. In this information age, this has to be a positive for scientific pioneers.

References

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