

How Scientist-Inventors Move Ideas From Lab to Marketplace

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Many important innovations grow out of the research done at colleges and universities. For example, technologies related to healthcare or the natural environment are often rooted in academic research. The process of moving new ideas out of a research lab and into the marketplace is called “technology commercialization.”

Commercialization can involve many different players, including startup firms, investors, patent attorneys, and established companies. But at universities, some of the earliest and most important commercialization efforts are undertaken by the individual scientists who come up with new inventions. And historically, we haven’t known much about their role. So, in a recent study, several colleagues and I set out to learn more about how scientist-inventors form new companies.

In our study, which was published in 2021 in the *Journal of Business Venturing*, we identified nine scientist-inventors at major U.S. universities who were thinking about starting a new company. And we conducted several interviews with each of these scientists over a five-year period. We learned that these scientists thought carefully – and sometimes quite differently from one another – about how to assemble the teams of people they needed to start their companies. They also strategized more broadly about how their companies ought to navigate the commercialization process. Over time, too, they acted in ways that were consistent with their ideas.

In [this video](https://faculti.net/lab-gig-or-enterprise-how-scientist-inventors-form-nascent-startup-teams/) (https://faculti.net/lab-gig-or-enterprise-how-scientist-inventors-form-nascent-startup-teams/), I summarize our findings in more detail. Also, you can [download the complete article from this link](https://carlsonschool.umn.edu/sites/carlsonschool.umn.edu/files/2021-09/zellmerbruhn_etal_21_jbv.pdf) (https://carlsonschool.umn.edu/sites/carlsonschool.umn.edu/files/2021-09/zellmerbruhn_etal_21_jbv.pdf), where it’s available free on an “open access” basis. Our findings are likely to be of interest to investors, corporate innovation managers, policymakers, and

others who want to better understand how scientists think and act while forming new companies.

