

**Wanted: New technologies for the health society of the future**

**27.6.2011** The first “Innovation Roundtable” on the subject of “eHealth” in mid-June in Bern highlighted two tendencies for the health market of the future: prevention instead of treatment and health customers instead of patients. There is still a lack of clear formulas for making the new communication technologies profitable.

Health means far more than not being ill. Healthy individuals are also part of a “healthy” social environment and can take care of their own wellbeing. In future, “eHealth” is set to become a major topic: it will combine health services with new technologies and means of communication. For example, it will be possible to centrally store and quickly access personal illness and health dossiers as well as important data on healthy and physically active lifestyles. This, in turn, will facilitate medical consultations via telephone.

When the 30 or so participants came together for the first roundtable on the topic of “eHealth” of the Swiss venture platform CTI Invest, they all agreed on the initial premise. “We don’t want to talk about illnesses today, but about health and opportunities for taking on responsibility for one’s own health”, said host Dieter Bernauer, CEO of Swisscom Participations to the young entrepreneurs, corporate representatives and investors. “We have to make it possible for excellent ideas and innovations to enter the market.” At the “Zum Äusseren Stand” restaurant in Bern, the group focused on a question to which there is no adequate answer as yet: what approaches are suitable for making the many promising inventions in the technology and service sector profitable?

The path to profitability differs greatly depending on perspective. According to CTI Invest chairman Christian Wenger, the dilemma facing participants in the “eHealth” market lies in the fact that the market is developing slowly and for the long term, but investors are unwilling to wait that long for returns. “They want to see profits within three to seven years”, said Christian Wenger. That is why “eHealth” is still considered risky terrain, as the market is still developing and current approaches have not yet resulted in large profits.

#### **The long road to the “health society”**

“We are currently transitioning from an illness society to a health society”, said Beat Villiger, the former long-term head of the Nottwil Paraplegic Centre, who is now the medical director of the Medical Health Center in Bad Ragaz. According to the experienced 67-year-old sports medicine specialist, “treatment, care, recovery” is the approach of an obsolete pathogenetic healthcare system that focuses on treating illnesses and sick people. Even today, 80 percent of all healthcare-related costs still fall into this category. But members of the new “health society” are much more concerned with preventative measures, a healthier lifestyle and consciously taking much better care of their health. This salutogenic approach is said to be geared towards healthy people who want to stay healthy without any instructions or prescriptions.

“It is never too late to make a lifestyle change”, said Villiger, whose appearance embodies the image of this new health awareness. But to do so, every single person needs easily comprehensible, accessible and enjoyable support. Instructions are not desired, as everyone wants to be their own coach and needs to take on responsibility for themselves. Thus “eHealth” products are a key element for modern health customers.

**Target group: families**

A look at the United States shows that there are already some promising approaches to this issue. According to Thom Rasche of Earlybird, for example, the so-called community approach is well-developed. Here, health is promoted in groups. As such, families represent the smallest unit and therefore a specific target group. According to this approach, those who wish to promote health need to “make families happy”. Stephan Hägeli of Acredis thinks the essential question is what is required to achieve this and how the problems and worries facing families can be resolved. Hägeli: “The family manager plays a crucial role in this process. And that is usually a woman.”

“In the light of this holistic perspective, I see Swisscom as an important player in the healthcare market”, said Dieter Bernauer. Recording and accessing up-to-date personal health data is essential. “As a telecommunications provider, we can support personal health management with comprehensive services. For example, with intelligent end devices, network services and services to facilitate learning and the exchanging of experiences. These are key factors for the health and health management of families.”

#### **Sensors, image software and information systems**

Six start-up companies attended the “Innovation Roundtable” to present their products from the technology and service sectors. The Swisscom subsidiary Evita introduced its online health dossier of the same name, which was launched this spring. It allows for all personal health data to be made accessible for personal use and to selected medical professionals - around the globe. A similar approach is taken by Medudem, which links health information between medical specialists and patients. Faster, secure access is meant to provide additional information in emergencies in particular. Thanks to new graphic techniques, nhumi (pronounced “new-me”) strives to offer much faster options to transfer and present a patient’s health and illness data.

In terms of technology, the focus is on biomedical sensors with web-based analysis and comparison platforms. New sensor technologies also serve to promote health. Driven by top-level sports applications, these products are now being introduced to a broader audience. Myotest, for example, is about to launch a device that calculates performance, strength and speed through three-dimensional accelerometry. Sense, on the other hand, combines sensor technology with analysis software so that the measured activities can be saved and compared to others. And, as well as sensors and software, Thor also offers a sophisticated means to compare one’s own athletic performances to those of other people.

#### **Poster child Switzerland?**

“In Switzerland, we come up with fantastic ideas and can fall back on excellent technologies”, said Christian Wenger at the specialist conference. “But we still need to put in a lot of effort to turn them into products and take them to market.” In his opinion, the lower level of market orientation in Europe compared to North America and Asia is also evident in the “eHealth” segment. However, Wenger is convinced that closer partnerships could serve to create a high-quality model in Switzerland that could be deployed around the world.

It is a fact that the “eHealth” market has huge potential and that there are still a lot of uncertainties. But Beat Villiger is sure of one thing: prevention is making up ground against care. Looking at the future, he asks a crucial and somewhat sarcastic question: “Would you rather work out for one hour a day or be dead for 24 hours?”



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[www.evita.ch](http://www.evita.ch)

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