

Youngsters - new startups "first seen at SUD"

At the startup days 2024 (SUD24) in Bern, 18 startups presented innovative ideas in the new Youngsters pitching format. From the early-stage candidates, three particularly promising ones were honored as "Catch of the Jury".

If you want to see what's happening in the young Swiss startup scene, listen to the Youngsters pitches at the startup days in Bern. 120 early-stage startups have applied. 18 were selected to present their ideas and products during SUD24. The business and networking conference with around 1300 participants, top-class speakers, investors and exhibitors provided the ideal stage for this.

Youngsters is a brand new format that differs from other pitching events. "First seen at SUD" is the motto: the applicants are in the pre-seed or seed phase, some of whom have not yet been presented in front of an audience and are therefore the (still) hidden gems of the scene.

This year, the focus was on innovations in the DeepTech and AppliedTech sectors. The broad, high-quality portfolio shows how carefully the 18 new companies were selected by the jury: The projects include novel compressors and robots for environmentally friendly geothermal drilling, analysis tools for skin, tissue and bone, a solution for extending battery life and a sensor for measuring water data and the associated risk of drought or flooding.

The panels are well attended and interest is high. There are quite a few young entrepreneurs in the audience, or those who want to become one. The guests immediately get talking while they wait for the sessions to start, in which three times six startups will be presenting.

Inveel is also pitching at the startup days. The startup specializes in nanotechnology and produces transparent, ultra-thin sensor films in the sub-micrometer range. The technology can be used in sensor skins for robots, for example. "At the moment, robots lack tactile feedback, which limits their application and poses a safety risk," says CEO and founder Barbara Horvath.

Inveel wants to close this gap. The startup has even made it into the "Catch of the Jury" category. With this award, the jury honors three young companies whose ideas they find particularly innovative and promising. The Catches receive in-depth mentoring, are featured in the Swisspreneur podcast and join the Alumni Group. They are also guests at the Secret Launch 2025, the exclusive pre-event of the startup days.

In addition to Inveel, Lightium and Manukai also attracted attention. With its new wafer technology, Lightium provides more bandwidth in telecommunications and data communication with reduced energy consumption. Manukai's copilot for computer-aided manufacturing (CAM) increases quality and efficiency in the production of complex metal parts.

Young companies like these should be supported, says jury president Dr. Thomas Bähler from Kellerhals Carrard: "The spirit of invention is a valuable asset in Switzerland. It is a huge competitive advantage that we have these clusters around the universities in this country, the technoparks and incubators. In the USA, there are only a few hotspots like Silicon Valley, for example."

The co-founder of the Swiss Economic Forum was surprised by the speed at which startups are maturing: "Today's young companies are faster and more focused than they were five or ten years ago. They are fitter sooner." Bähler sees the reason for this in the wide range of coaching offers and training at universities: "Founders know who they should ask for advice. They exchange ideas with each other and learn from the mistakes of others."

Exchange and networking are the core elements of the startup days. This is where the scene comes together for a stimulating family reunion. Established entrepreneurs talk openly about their successes and crises on the Unplugged Stage. Renowned speakers provide input in panels and workshops. The Youngsters format not only provides new entrepreneurs with a platform. They are also a source of encouragement for bright minds before founding a startup and therefore valuable for the Swiss startup scene as a whole.

"We are proud to have launched this new format as a pilot project in 2024," concludes Dr. Dominik Isler, co-organizer of the startup days and jury member. "We can now gather experience and build on it. For 2025, we will optimize and continue on this basis."

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startup days (SUD) are the nationwide business and networking event for startups, investors, enablers and SMEs & corporates in Switzerland. Every year, the dynamic Swiss startup ecosystem comes together for this family reunion to strengthen innovation and business growth. Attendees share peer-to-peer knowledge, network and explore collaborations in a safe and supportive environment.