



Modul-Bio tells us



Return to France under “high protection”

Persistence pays ... Creating a company in France while living in another country is not so easy! Laurent Jacotot and Philippe Vaglio, 2 young French engineers working in Boston are well aware of this problem. Fortunately, Provence Promotion came just at the right time to help them get it right! Since then, the results have been excellent for this young company that helps research laboratories in their fight against cancer.

> Two Frenchmen in Boston

Laurent Jacotot, Robotics engineer. I began my career in the United States in 1996 as a research worker in the robotics department at the MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology-Boston) sequencing centre, as part of my military service. I stayed for seven years in the end, because after the two years at MIT, I set up a business as an independent consultant working with companies and academic laboratories including Harvard Medical School. That is where I met Philippe Vaglio.

Philippe Vaglio: I had been living in the United States since 1999 as bioinformatician manager of a laboratory. Laurent Jacotot and I were very complementary in our work, and therefore we decided to set up Modul-Bio, the company that allowed us to return to France, from the United States.

> "Home sweet home" by chance...

Laurent Jacotot: Philippe and I wanted to go back to France for personal and professional reasons. He had young children. Our families and friends were in France... Nevertheless, business opportunities were decisive and we would perhaps never have come back if they had not existed.

Philippe Vaglio: We knew Provence Promotion by pure chance, since we were in Boston at the time of the first "Home sweet home" convention. The Provence Promotion team even created the first contact through a common contact! Because we did not know this organization, even though we were thinking of returning to France.

> Provence Promotion gets involved!

Laurent Jacotot: let's be honest: it is not so easy to go back! Finding accommodation, social coverage, a school for children or even opening a company bank account, making contacts with banks, insurance companies, finding incubators, company nurseries, etc, are not easily done from another country. The very active support of Provence Promotion was very valuable in this respect.

As an anecdote, I had asked about twenty real estate agencies when I was looking for an apartment. None of them wanted to help me because I didn't have any salary slips.

> Importance of public grants...

Philippe Vaglio: there is no doubt that Modul-Bio would never have opened its doors as quickly as it did if there had not been any public and private grants and initiatives. As far as the public is concerned, we participated in the Oséo-Anvar competition in which there were some very attractive prizes, and we were prizewinners.

At the same time, we earned the status of a JEI (Jeune Entreprise Innovante – young innovative company), thus exonerating us from social charges. The State and the PACA region also contributed through the PRCE (Prêt régional à la création d'entreprises – Regional company creation loan), and the FDPMI (Fonds de développement des petites et moyennes industries – Development funds for small and medium-sized industries) and others.

The Paoli Calmettes Institute (Regional Cancer Research Centre) in Marseille also provided us with a great deal of support; particularly by accommodating us in its premises and helping us in creating the structure. An outline partnership contract was signed between the Institute and Modul-Bio.



Laurent Jacotot (at left) and Philippe Vaglio: co-founders of Modul-Bio

Modul-Bio in a few words and references

Modul-Bio is a computer company that designs, makes and installs systems for data management and manipulation of samples for biological research laboratories in genomic fields, and more precisely functional genomics and proteomics. Our team has several years experience in setting up databases and robotic systems for biological activity, acquired from internationally known laboratories (M.I.T. - Whitehead Sequencing Center and Harvard Medical School - Dana Farber Cancer Institute). In particular, we have participated in projects for sequencing the human genome, cloning of all coding parts of *C. elegans* genes and protein-protein interaction maps in *C. elegans* using the two hybrid technique.

Most Modul-Bio clients are in France (INSERM, Institut Pasteur, Normale Sup. Lyon, CNRS, etc.), but the company also has a large contract in Boston, others in England and is maintaining contact with Harvard. Finally, Modul-Bio has recently received a grant from the famous American N.I.H. (National Institute of Health).

Further information can be found on our site www.modul-bio.com.



Modul-Bio tell us



> ... and private grants !

Laurent Jacotot: We also won a prize in a competition organised by the Aventis Foundation, in addition to the financial value of the competition, we benefited from an excellent training course on the theme of company creation in France. Legal, tax and social aspects and problems related to management, intellectual and industrial property, etc., were dealt with in detail over about 10 days. We are in a position to know that this is very important for company creators!

Laurent Jacotot: Therefore, in summary and considering our personal investments, we collected a total of 500 000 euros, which was invested in 2003 in the creation of our company now set up in the Institut Paoli Calmettes in Marseille.

The result has been fairly positive since the company was created, since we have encountered a great deal of vitality, ambition and skills, and we were very strongly supported. We are now also part of the PACA Cancer Cluster.

> Small extended vade mecum for the use of anyone who wants to return to France

Laurent Jacotot: therefore, it is possible to go back to France and create a company under good conditions. The only absolute requirement is that all aspects of the return (private, economic, logistics, organisational, status, etc.) have to be planned very carefully – from the expatriation country. Organisations such as Provence Promotion are available for this purpose. They are good facilitators; we must be aware of these organizations and must make them known.

Philippe Vaglio: Although Marseille and its region are obviously not yet as dynamic or as large as Boston, the region is moving forward quickly and there are genuine opportunities. In fact, the brake is not Marseille, but rather France and all of Europe. We still need more financing and more scientific projects, and the Americans are the biggest providers of these projects at the moment.

On the other hand, all regional players provide genuine support to company creators and institutions related to our activity (INSERM, CNRS, etc.) are genuinely dynamic with a desire to accept challenges which is genuinely stimulating. There are many start up companies and an increasingly large number of large companies setting up. It is a very good sign!

Finally, Marseille has excellent communication means, its employment basin is becoming enviable, and obviously the quality of life is far from being negligible!...