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### Chip maker wins top Swiss venture prize

**Sensirion, a Swiss technology company co-founded by a PhD student in 1998, has won Switzerland's top award for emerging entrepreneurial talent.**

The Zurich-based firm won the Swiss Economic Award in Thun on Friday for making high-tech computer chips that are capable of sensing heat, moisture, gas flow and liquid currents.

"What's new is that we have brought together chip technology and sensor technology," said Felix Mayer, a Sensirion co-founder, told swissinfo.

"This means we integrate on one single chip both the electronics and the sensing element."

The chips are used in a wide range of industrial applications, where accuracy is critical.

#### Step-by-step

Mayer founded the company with his business partner, Moritz Lechner, after finishing his doctorate on chip technology.

The company has grown steadily and now employs 35 staff.

"We started by making prototypes and step-by-step found out what the market wanted," said Lechner.

One of the reasons Sensirion was chosen as this year's award winner was its ability to find new customers around the world.

"We do about a third of our turnover in Europe, a third in the United States and a third in the Far East. Swiss turnover is maybe five per cent," said Lechner.

"First, you have to make your technology work. But the second, and even bigger challenge, is to find customers to sell your product to. It seems that we managed both quite well," added Mayer.

The award, which includes SFr30,000 (\$23,000) in cash for the winner, is a highlight of the Swiss Economic Forum (SEF), an annual gathering of over 1,000 Swiss business figures.

#### Gore's appeal

Organisers boosted the profile of this year's event by attracting speakers such as former US vice president, Al Gore, The Body Shop founder Anita Roddick and the first Swiss man in space, astronaut Claude Nicollier.

Gore told a packed conference hall that entrepreneurs had a responsibility to effect positive change in society.

Cracking jokes about life after politics ("I'm a recovering politician," he said at one point), Gore also urged Switzerland to open itself to European enlargement.

"The very concept of nation states is breaking down," he said.

The failed presidential candidate also expressed deep regret at America's

involvement in Iraq, blaming poor leadership and planning for the current troubles facing US-led troops.

"This war was a mistake," he said. "The American people did not have a full and open debate about the impact of the war [before it started]," he said.

### **Runners up**

Runners-up for this year's Swiss Economic Award were Esmertec, a software firm that specialises in mobile Java software.

Third place went to Hocoma, a Volketswil-based firm, which builds orthopaedic devices that are attached to people's legs and use motors to drive their hips and knees – helping people recover from injuries.

swissinfo, Jacob Greber in Thun

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