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## Antibodies, Ice-Buckets and Molly the Sheep - the Story behind Abcam

The idea for Abcam came early in 1998 out of a laboratory in the University of Cambridge, UK. The principal founder Jonathan Milner was working as a Post-Doctoral researcher studying the newly discovered breast cancer protein BRCA2 in Professor Tony Kouzarides' laboratory. The project slowed because of problems finding quality antibody reagents that had honest and up to date information about their uses and limitations. It was frustrating. It was then that Jonathan and a number of other people in the laboratory, came up with the idea for a web-based antibody company of like-minded scientists. Tony invented the name which is a hybrid of antibody (ab) and Cambridge (cam). The idea was that Abcam would sell the best antibodies in the world with the most comprehensive, honest and up-to-date datasheets, fast delivery and helpful customer service & technical support. It was a tough vision!

A lucky break came when Jonathan met and discussed the idea with Dr David Cleevely (a Cambridge telecoms entrepreneur) who was smart (or some said crazy!) enough to join him in the venture. So in the summer of 1998, Jonathan left the world of academia to work full-time on Abcam, which he describes as the scariest thing he has ever done. Initially Abcam had a small amount of money from David, family, friends and Jonathan (after re-mortgaging his house; he has a very understanding wife!), but they realized that they needed a big injection of capital to build a website to accomplish the vision and increase production of Abcam's own antibodies. A business plan was written and the Directors went out confidently to raise money from venture capitalists. However, the next couple of years were really tough as Abcam struggled to convince the VCs that a viable business could be built from such an idealistic vision.



Things were looking really bleak and Abcam needed to get some sales quickly, so Jonathan took an ice-bucket full of popular antibodies around the University of Cambridge laboratories in order to get friends and colleagues to buy them, which they did (thanks guys!). Hence the legend of Abcam's humble beginnings from an ice-bucket was born!

Our first notable successes arrived in the early part of the new millennium: [Chromatin antibodies](#), [loading control antibodies](#) and [GFP antibodies](#). Then we had two further lucky breaks. First, some local business angels (people from the Cambridge business community who wish to help technology businesses get started) were convinced to invest and second, some like-minded scientists and talented individuals were recruited (who form the basis of Abcam's management team today) and this succeeded in boot-strapping the company through those difficult times. Of course there was also tremendous determination to prove that those venture capitalists were wrong and that a successful profitable company, that would also make a valuable contribution to life science researchers, could be built on such a business plan.

A lot of researchers ask where we got the idea for Molly the sheep. It was simply because Dolly the sheep was making headline news at the time, so we created the body out of a molecular space fill model and gave her antibody legs, and thus the molecular Dolly became Abcam's Molly.

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