Coates and his research team had been developing novel catalysts for use with biodegradable polymers for several years. This research was partially funded through Cornell’s New York State Center for Advanced Technology, known as the Center for Life Science Enterprise. The center identifies and funds research that can lead to significant economic development within the state.

As the research progressed, one of Coates graduate students, Scott Allen, became interested in the commercial possibilities for the technology produced by the research. He and Coates began developing an innovative catalyst system that would enable the synthesis of new, customizable plastics and materials in order to streamline current industrial processes, with a focus on sustainability. The technology consisted of proprietary catalyst systems that can help

Partnering with Cornell Centers for Company Startup
Novomer

Novomer is an Ithaca-based startup company that has utilized a variety of university resources to get started and to accelerate growth. Founded in 2004, Novomer makes polymers and plastics from carbon dioxide and other renewable materials. The company is based on discoveries made by Geoffrey Coates’ research group in the Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology.
create materials used in existing and emerging fields such as advanced ceramics, energy storage, food packaging, flat panel displays, automotive manufacturing, and drug delivery. Working with Cornell Center for Technology, Enterprise, and Commercialization (CCTEC), the intellectual property was developed into a suite of patents that would provide the necessary intellectual property protection for the start-up company. Today, the company holds exclusive license to 12 Cornell patents with several more in process.

**Founded in 2004** Novomer makes polymers and plastics from carbon dioxide and other renewable materials, based on discoveries made by Geoffrey Coates’ research group in the Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology.

Scott Allen started working on proof of concept for the commercial markets in the garage of his home in Lansing, New York. Upon completion of his degree program, Allen became the first full-time employee of the new company. Allen and Coates teamed up with a local entrepreneur, Tony Eisenhut ’88, to form Novomer LLC., with Coates as the chief scientific officer and Allen as the director of research and development.

In the fall of 2004 the company was selected as the first Cornell startup company to be “virtually incubated” on campus. The Center for Life Science Enterprise was using teams of students from the Johnson Graduate School of Management in a program designed to study the potential for a proposed business incubator to be located on the Cornell campus. Novomer was selected as the prototype startup company to test the concepts that may be applied to future campus-based startups through the business incubation program. The Johnson School students were given responsibility for assisting the company with the logistics and services that would be part of a “real incubator.” The student teams helped negotiate space and operating conditions for the company and assisted with marketing studies and strategic plans.

In the spring of 2005 Scott Allen and Tony Eisenhut participated in a pre-seed workshop sponsored by the Center for Life Science Enterprise, the Cornell Center for Materials Research, and Cornell Center for Technology, Enterprise and Commercialization. These workshops are designed to provide researchers with an overview of the business steps required to commercialize a technology and to provide a basic framework for moving from research to commercialization.

During this same period, the ongoing research behind the company’s products was also selected by the university as one of the technologies submitted to New York’s Technology Transfer Incentive Program (TTIP), a grant program set up by NYSTAR to commercialize university intellectual property. Novomer received the TTIP grant for $300,000 in spring of 2005.

Working with the Center for Life Science Grant Proposal Office, Novomer submitted proposals to the federal Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program. This program provides federal grants to small businesses that are commercializing research in areas that the federal agencies recognize as potentially useful and commercially viable. To date, the Novomer proposals have yielded a total of $800,000 in SBIR grants from the National Science Foundation and the Department of Energy.

In 2006 the company made further progress by hiring a recent Johnson School graduate, Charles Hamilton BS ’95, MBA ’04. Hamilton helped conclude a product sales agreement with a major research chemical supply company to distribute Novomer catalysts. In late 2006 Novomer concluded another agreement to partner with a major New York company to develop exclusive polymers for products aimed at mass consumer markets. Also in 2006 the company was selected by WIRED magazine to display at NextFest 2006 in New York City.
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After three years of “virtual incubation” on campus, Novomer has moved into dedicated laboratory and office space in a renovated industrial building in Ithaca and currently employs 15 people, including scientists and business professionals. The company is generating revenue from sales of products, and rapid growth is expected over the next few years. The emergence and growth of Novomer is due in no small part to the successful use of community and campus resources provided through the unique collaborative efforts of several Cornell centers and colleges. The cooperative relationship between the company and the university provides an important example and a path to success for other startups to follow.

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On November 7, 2007, Novomer Inc. announced that it had raised $6.6 million in a series A funding. Physic Ventures co-led the financing in partnership with Flagship Ventures.