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# Cluster initiative expedition

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*A visit to eight of the 'go-cluster' members*



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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>NIRO – the dynamic difference.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Promoting innovation in Bavaria’s chemical industry .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>The sky’s the limit: aviation in the Hamburg Metropolitan Region .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>The future of mobility lies in central Germany .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Saxony – the heart of Europe’s microelectronics sector.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Northern Germany – a beacon of the German food industry .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>The Lake Constance region – a showcase for the digital industry.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>A networking platform for the media and digital industry in Berlin and Brandenburg .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>The ‘go-cluster’ programme.....</b>	<b>36</b>



# Introduction

Germany has a very diverse cluster community that spans all German regions. The Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy's 'go-cluster' programme brings together more than 80 outstanding, strong and efficient innovation clusters. Long-term cooperation between different stakeholders from business, science and other fields clearly benefits everyone involved. By working together, the partners can pool their strengths and achieve better results. There are many factors that help make an innovation cluster strong and competitive, but a key element for its success is professional cluster management.

So what exactly happens behind the scenes of a cluster initiative? How does it operate? Who works with whom and what role is played by cluster management? There are many different answers to these questions – in fact, they are as diverse as the cluster initiatives themselves. The cluster initiatives' working procedures and structures vary, depending on the field of technology they work in and their objectives in terms of cooperation and organisation.

As part of the '2nd German cluster week', which was held in 2019, the 'go-cluster' programme team took a tour around Germany to find out more about the clusters. It selected eight members from very different German regions and fields of technology. This has resulted in eight highly interesting and timeless documentations, with both cluster

managers and individual stakeholders from the clusters sharing their experience. The following pages provide an insight into the diversity, working procedures and people behind the 'go-cluster' programme.

Of course, the selection of clusters presented here is not exhaustive. All the innovation clusters that form part of the 'go-cluster' programme are special and unique. They all add value to the German economy and serve as role models for innovation. There are plans to provide more insights of this kind into the world of clusters in the future.

All relevant information, contacts, an overview of Germany's cluster landscape and cluster policy and the success stories linked to the 'go-cluster' programme can be found on [www.clusterplattform.de](http://www.clusterplattform.de).

## NIRO – the dynamic difference



The NIRO team (from left to right): Insa Kunz (byNIRO GmbH), Ingrid Lange, Anja Zühlsdorf, Margarita Grünstern and Ludmila Riewe

On a clear and sunny if somewhat cold November day in Lüdenscheid, participants are pouring into the conference hall of ERCO GmbH, a globally leading expert on LED lighting in architecture and a NIRO member, to attend the 12th members' meeting of the NIRO cluster initiative.

NIRO stands for 'Netzwerk Industrie RuhrOst e.V.' (Network for Industry in the Ruhr East region) and brings together manufacturing and mechanical engineering companies

from the region. The Unna district, the Ruhr area, the Münster region and the adjacent Sauerland region are characterised by their large number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Many of these businesses are family-owned, true hidden champions, which a lot of people would not expect to come across this far off the beaten track. One of the network's objectives is to improve these businesses' visibility.

“The more digital our lives become, the greater our need for social contact and face-to-face communication,” Ingrid Lange, managing director at NIRO, muses. Engaging in close contact with the currently 66 members of the network is part of her daily work and that of her team of four employees (and one dog) at the NIRO office in Unna.

NIRO was launched in November 2006 by eight founding members. Four years later, the number of members had grown to 50. The idea for the network was conceived by the Unna district’s business promotion agency, which sought to link up businesses better – particularly the region’s SMEs – with a view to strengthening the region and enabling businesses to master the challenges of competition by working together.

## What services does NIRO offer exactly?

NIRO provides services across several fields of action. These are procurement, logistics and imports/exports, innovation, Industry 4.0, as well as HR and marketing. Within each field of action, different communication and meeting formats are used.

Procurement has played a key role right from the beginning of NIRO’s launch, as businesses that buy products or services together can negotiate better terms. The heads of the purchasing departments of NIRO’s member companies meet regularly in negotiation rounds to define their procurement priorities. All member companies are then asked to communicate their requirements so that bidding procedures for the suppliers can be launched. The next step is to negotiate specific framework agreements, which the member companies can then sign up to. A highly innovative and inclusive procedure! In addition to this, the NIRO office organises information events in close coordination

with its members, for example following changes in the law or in exceptional political situations – such as Brexit. NIRO also benefits businesses that are not members in the cluster initiative: With the foundation of byNIRO GmbH – a 100% subsidiary of NIRO – in 2012, the use of the framework agreements for the joint procurement of products and services was opened up to all interested manufacturing companies across Germany; there are now more than 150 customers in the region.

The services provided across the other fields of action include traditional presentations, but also workshops, the sharing of best practices and the provision of business-to-business advice. One example from practice is a workshop that was organised on maintenance and repair. 23 maintenance officers visited a local company to look at



**Jens te Kaat, managing director at Kueppers Solutions GmbH and spokesman for the board of NIRO e.V.:** “Working together means creating things; I am all for cooperation and think it is key for everyone to focus on what they do best and look to others for those things they are less good at.”

its maintenance strategy, documenting what they thought was good or inadequate, and where they saw opportunities or risks. The results were then discussed in more details in small groups and presented to the host company. This idea to ask experts with in-depth knowledge on the subject to provide their input and advice resulted in a great learning effect. Of course, this requires a great deal of mutual trust.

‘NIRO-Wissen’ (NIRO knowledge), the network’s intranet platform, provides information on the fields of expertise



**Stefan Bubenzer, head of procurement at Eisenbau Krämer GmbH: “The most important benefits of the network include working together with procurement officers from other member companies and opportunities to engage in dialogue within the NIRO network – for example on issues relating to daily business activities all the way to strategic questions –, benchmarking and of course inspiration. For heads of procurement such as myself, combining procurement volumes is also key. As a group we are more attractive to suppliers with whom we would be unable to work otherwise. At least not at the same terms.”**

that different employees at different companies specialise in. This helps the NIRO office organise events that match people’s needs, invite the relevant employees and link up the right contacts with one another. Ingrid Lange considers her team to be “the spider in the web – a catalyst. The perfect situation would be for us to become fully redundant, a situation where our members know one another so well that they instantly know whom to call whenever they have a question on a specific subject.”

‘NIRO-Wissen’ is also used to schedule meetings and there are forums on different subjects that allow users to share documents such as forms and templates, so that other users can use these as well. There is also a blackboard where users can advertise or ask for example for manufacturing capacity. In addition, NIRO-Wissen features a job board.

## NIRO-Akademie helps close the skills gap

Under the HR field of action, further training and qualification measures are developed. Having access to efficient, regional and at the same time professional training is particularly important for SMEs. NIRO-Akademie (NIRO-academy) engages in dialogue with the members to identify their specific skills needs and organises targeted workshops and courses. In addition to this, there are programmes that have been developed in cooperation with the members, such as a programme for the training of managers. Under this programme, master craftsmen and production foremen receive 9 months of training, providing them with the skills they need to take up a leading role in the business. ‘Talent Plus’ is a training programme geared towards new talent, which focuses on the development of soft skills and on project work. Given their size, many SMEs are unable to provide this kind of training. Here, the cluster network can bridge the gap and link up new talent from different

companies. The duration of the programme is one year, and working together for such a long time creates a lasting bond among the participants, who become particularly aware of the importance of networking.

## How do networking and competition go together?

One of NIRO's most important rules is that businesses which are in direct competition with one another are not accepted as members, which is a good basis for working together in an atmosphere of trust. Let's take the following example: If company X works in industry A and company Y works in industry B and both industries use the same material, then both companies can find a way to deal with the situation. NIRO seeks to maintain its exclusivity, which is why the maximum number of members has been set at 80. The larger the network, the more difficult communication with the members becomes. For Ingrid Lange, it is therefore important to know each member personally. "Networking means human interaction. If I know someone at a particular company and it takes me only 15 minutes to get there, then I'll get in the car. If it means a 3-hour drive, I'll think twice about whether I actually need to meet this contact in person." Small but special and with a focus on the region – that's the NIRO motto.



**Stefan Leutloff, managing director at Schmöle GmbH:**  
"Being a NIRO member really pays. The savings we make as part of the procurement pool are already more than we pay in membership fees. And everything that comes on top of this, networking for example, the possibility to help one another out, business-to-business advice, further training, the NIRO-Wissen platform, all of this makes NIRO membership worthwhile, not least from a financial perspective."



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# Promoting innovation in Bavaria's chemical industry



Part of Dr Patrick Prühs' team at Chemical Cluster Bavaria.

In February 2020, around 50 participants convened for an expert forum on the digital transformation at Innovationspark Augsburg. The event, which was organised by Chemical Cluster Bavaria (Chemie-Cluster Bayern) in cooperation with the Bavarian centre for digitalisation (Zentrum Digitalisierung Bayern), discussed the issue of digitalisation in the chemical industry.

Taking part in events like this is just one of the perks that the 120 or so members of the Chemical Cluster Bavaria enjoy. However, this is only a small part of the cluster's service portfolio, as cluster manager Dr Patrick Prühs stresses. "Quite simply: we want to help our members develop innovative products and processes and take marketable solutions to new national and global markets."

Dr Prühs has supported Chemical Cluster Bavaria right from when it was set up in 2006 as part of Bavaria's Cluster Initiative and has served as its managing director since 2018. The Cluster Initiative led to the formation of several networks, each of which has a different focus. Bavaria's chemical industry associations (the Bavarian state representation of the German Chemical Industry Association (VCI e.V.) and the Association of the Bavarian chemical industry (VBCI e.V.)) had also been actively promoting the creation of the cluster and continue to be represented by Dr Günter von Au, who serves as the spokesperson of the cluster's advisory committee. One of the key goals of the cluster right from the beginning was to better link up scientific institutes and businesses so as to drive forward innovation and meet the needs of the industry. Chemical products are essential, not least in downstream value chains.

### Targeted services for a diverse industry

The members of Chemical Cluster Bavaria include businesses (such as global players like Wacker Chemie AG, Clariant Produkte Deutschland GmbH, Roche Diagnostics GmbH, Linde AG), research institutes, universities and also many SMEs. Many of the SMEs working in the chemical industry are largely unknown, however, they are often hidden champions in their specific field of business and can be found both in the metropolitan regions of Nuremberg and Munich and in rural areas. Bavaria's chemical industry – which is known to be very diverse – currently has 156,000 employees.

Dr Prühs and his team face the daily challenge of matching and adjusting their services to the specific needs of their member companies. "The chemical industry covers a wide range of different companies and each member has different needs." At Chemical Cluster Bavaria, we are ready to



**Lilo Sallinger, managing director at IRSA – Lackfabrik Irmgard Sallinger GmbH: "We developed an innovative product in the area of environmentally friendly drying, however, due to a lack of resources, we were unable to fully implement it ourselves. The cluster helped us obtain funding and we were thus able to find a partner for implementation. Small companies like ours – we only have 14 employees – need to be particularly innovative to survive. That's something we cannot do on our own, and I am grateful to Chemical Cluster Bavaria for the help we received."**

accommodate different ideas. We are engaging in dialogue with our members to develop new support formats. Linking up businesses within one particular sector creates new value chains for the whole industry."

A key focus is placed on networking. For example, the cluster manager puts together cross-sectoral groups, engages in traditional business development, coordinates the acquisition of external funds, provides advice on available fund-

ing programmes, manages projects and provides project transfer services. These services are supplemented by the organisation of regular events such as a workshop series entitled 'Chemical industry meets...', where cluster members obtain in-depth knowledge on the development processes of key industry customers or customised and theme-specific formats such as the expert forum mentioned above. The cluster also holds conferences, takes part in trade shows and publishes a bi-weekly newsletter to improve its visibility and the flow of information.

### Cross-cutting and forward-looking issues

Visibility and information are two important aspects of the cluster's work, not least for the future. As many of the employees who are currently working in the chemical industry will retire over the next ten years, one key challenge is closing the skills gap and attracting new talent. How can this challenge be mastered? How can a hidden champion located in the heart of Bavaria find a successor so it can continue to develop innovations?

In addition to skills development, sustainability is another area where many projects are currently being undertaken. Biodegradable packaging is becoming increasingly important, and there is a growing need for alternative resources. Dr Patrick Prühs describes an example from his daily work. "So you receive a request via the network: someone is looking for pigments from renewable sources which can be used to coat labels and films. This is how we become aware of companies we didn't know existed and we then ask them to become a member in the cluster so we can link them up with existing members." In 2017, the cluster managers also began to look for start-ups in the chemical industry as a way to identify important drivers of innovation and link these up with established companies. More than 200 start-

ups are now listed in the cluster's nationwide database. Many established firms lack information on the start-ups that are active on the market, and not every company can afford tech scouting or an incubator or accelerator.

This is where Chemical Cluster Bavaria comes in. Over the last few years, it has served as a matchmaker and linked up businesses. Interest in the network continues to grow.



**Reinhard Schmidt, CEO at econ industries: "We really enjoy working with the Chemical Cluster Bavaria team! It is very helpful for us to network with other businesses from the chemical industry. It shows us what we need to focus on in our industry segment – the recycling of industrial waste. And most importantly, we get to know one another, not least large chemicals companies which we would otherwise be unable to engage in direct contact with. The fact that these companies are also members of Chemical Cluster Bavaria helps us find new groups of customers, because most of our business is currently abroad."**

This also helps to boost disruptive innovations – another important forward-looking issue that Chemical Cluster Bavaria intends to address in the coming years.

### Successful as a team, not only in Bavaria but around the world

Forming strategic alliances with chemical industry hubs in Europe, Asia and the U.S. helps make the cluster members more competitive and is therefore an important objective for Chemical Cluster Bavaria. Taking part in European projects can trigger inquiries from international partners, which benefits the cluster's members. Engaging in dialogue with clusters from around the world can also be worthwhile. Recently, one of the cluster's member companies was looking for a partner in southern France and Chemical Cluster Bavaria was able to arrange a contact via its French counterpart. For Patrick Prühs and his team, it's moments like this that really matter.

Seven persons are currently working for the cluster and are dealing with the daily challenges that arise. The members of the team come from a wide range of different backgrounds such as chemistry, biotechnology and process technology, and there are also experts on internationalisation, EU projects and economics, with the digital transformation and start-up culture also playing an important role.

It is always a triumph for the cluster when it can link up firms that have previously not engaged with one another, which can help boost innovation. "We were contacted by a large manufacturer from the aviation industry – not a company we would traditionally be targeting as a member – which had a chemistry-related question on a new product, because its existing products were soon to be made subject to new rules. We were able to link the manufacturer up with

one of our member companies and we are pleased that the two firms are now conducting a feasibility study together – that's a premiere."

None of these innovations would have been developed if it weren't for the services of Chemical Cluster Bavaria, which is why Dr Patrick Prühs and his team want to continue to work towards maintaining and expanding the role of Bavaria's chemical industry as a driving force for efficiency.



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# The sky's the limit: aviation in the Hamburg Metropolitan Region



The Hamburg Aviation team with managing director Dr Franz Josef Kirschfink (2nd row, 3rd from left).

From the windows of his office, cluster manager Dr Franz Josef Kirschfink has a direct view of the Elbphilharmonie – the city's new concert hall and emblematic landmark. However, the players he's directing are not in the music business, but in aviation. Hamburg Aviation is the aviation cluster of the Hamburg Metropolitan Region – which currently is the world's third-largest aviation hub.

The metropolitan region covers a surface area of approx. 100 by 60 kilometres and has around 5 million inhabitants. More than 40,000 people are directly employed by the aviation industry. The cluster was initiated back in 2001 after Airbus had announced plans to bring part of the A380 production to Hamburg and to also considerably expand its production of the A320 aircraft family there. This resulted in a greater need for engineers and skilled staff. Following talks with the city of Hamburg, a skills initiative for the avi-

ation industry was launched, which served as the starting point for the cluster. The next milestone was reached in 2007, with the cluster's application under the Leading-Edge Clusters Competition. It had been driven forward by stakeholders from science, business and the city of Hamburg and ultimately resulted in the development of Hamburg's first aviation strategy in 2008. After winning the Leading-Edge Clusters Competition, the cluster was further expanded. This led to the creation of the Hamburg Aviation e.V. cluster management organisation in 2011, with two employees at the time.

### **A sound basis, three pillars and a lot more**

Dr Franz Josef Kirschfink has been the cluster manager for five years, and the number of team members has grown to twelve. The Hamburg Aviation Office provides the cluster with a sound basis, implementing the measures adopted by the cluster. Its goal is to bring the members of Hamburg Aviation closer together, to promote skills development, expand knowledge transfer and improve the business environment. Three groups have been set up to meet these goals: one on community management, which focuses on member support and cooperation, one on internationalisation and another one on marketing, PR and events.

A range of different formats for implementation are being used. There are target-oriented events with a key focus on networking – the largest one being the Hamburg Aviation Forum, which is held three times a year. The Forum brings together 200 participants for a dialogue on trends and technology in the aviation industry. For other topics of interest such as employer branding, financing or new forms of cooperation, BarCamps and workshops are organised. In cases where interest in a particular topic is high, a dedicated working group may be set up. The Hamburg Aviation office

team is using a wide range of outreach tools to support its members. For example, it is providing regular information via its website and social media channels. The Aviation Cluster also runs a joint stand at all large international aviation trade shows.

The cluster's priorities are research and innovation, HR and skills, and supply chains and services for SMEs. The research and innovation pillar is managed by the Centre of Applied Aeronautical Research (ZAL). Under this pillar, companies are given access to cutting-edge infrastructure and are working together to explore and develop new technology for the civil aviation industry. The TechCenter was established in 2016. Its premises cover almost 26,000 square metres and provide room for around 600 employees. "It's like a Silicon Valley for aviation packed into a very small space," Dr Kirschfink explains.

The HR and skills pillar is managed by the Hamburg Centre of Aviation Training-Lab (HCAAT+ e.V.). It focuses on the development of forward-looking training courses and on retaining staff at the aviation hub of the Hamburg Metropolitan Region. New study courses are being developed at the Hamburg Center of Aviation Training, and workshops on new technologies are being offered, for example under the DigiNet.Air project, which is being funded by the Federal Government. The training courses developed under DigiNet.Air aim to help SMEs take their business into the digital age.

The third pillar – supply chains and services for SMEs – is managed by the Hanse Aerospace e.V. and HECAS e.V. associations, and combines considerable expertise on SMEs with engineering services. The focus here is on expanding and developing supply chains and on integrating small and medium-sized players based in Hamburg into existing supply chains. The aviation cluster is also active in the

Supply Chain Excellence Initiative, which brings together all regional and national German aviation networks.

### Composition of members reflects diversity of the cluster

The aviation cluster was launched in 2011 by 15 founding members. These included large industry players Airbus, Lufthansa Technik, Hamburg Airport, associations Hanse-Aerospace, HECAS and the German Aerospace Industries Association (BDLI), research institutes such as the German Aerospace Center (DLR), HCAT+ and ZAL and Hamburg's four higher education institutions. Hamburg Invest and the Departmental Authority for Economic Affairs, Transport and Innovation (BWVI) were also on board. Today, the network has 175 members, of which 130 are SMEs. According to Dr Franz Josef Kirschfink, the cluster believes it can attract around 60 additional firms to the cluster and convince these to settle in the metropolitan region. "We are not actively advertising membership in the cluster, we want it to speak for itself. Companies should see the added benefit of joining the cluster. It is very important for us to gauge the mood. We therefore engage in personal contact with our members and visit them at their sites to learn what their current priorities are. This helps us adjust our services. For example, we are currently looking at developing a process for SMEs to 'share' students who are on work-study programmes. We are also currently undergoing a strategic process in which all our members are taking part. We want to find out what's particularly important to them and what they really need."

### Internationalisation and particular highlights

Internationalisation plays a big role in the aviation industry as suppliers are increasingly located all across the globe. Against this backdrop, the cluster has developed an internationalisation strategy targeted at the aviation industry's SMEs, which is now being continuously implemented. The strategy is a source of pride for the cluster managers. "We have identified Portugal, Brazil and Canada as the main regions for cooperation. Quebec has already launched a number of research projects in this area from which we have learned a lot, and we are intensifying the dialogue. Just recently, a delegation of 40 Canadians came to visit us here. It's always nice to see how your work pays off." In addition, the European Aerospace Cluster Partnership – a pan-European cluster initiative – is being steered from Hamburg. The initiative has existed for 10 years and currently represents 43 clusters from across 18 countries.

Another aspect the cluster is particularly proud of is its work of aircraft cabins. Hamburg is the global leader in this area and wants to maintain this position. The Crystal Cabin Award, which was created in 2007, is awarded each year in different categories by an international jury. "For us, that's the Academy Awards of aviation. There is a lot of media coverage for the awards, because everyone knows what a cabin looks like and hopes to see these innovations on a plane one day," Dr Kirschfink says. Many companies and individuals suddenly received a lot of attention after being honoured with the award and Kirschfink is pleased that their businesses have also benefitted from this. "Just to give you an example: Krüger Aviation from Barsbüttel – which is known for producing plastic bathroom mirrors for aircraft – made it to the final round of the awards three

years ago. In 2019, they were once again on the shortlist and received a great deal of attention from the international press.” Start-ups in the aviation industry are also being increasingly focused on. The cluster – spearheaded by Airbus and Lufthansa Technik – launched a number of initiatives which allowed for a variety of ideas to be explored in an accelerator phase. Several start-ups have since established themselves on the market. One of these is jetlite, a company which provides solutions for reducing jetlag during long-distance flights.

An evaluation conducted by the University of Freiburg recently found that the aviation cluster provided for a high level of networking between its members. This is not surprising considering the cluster’s hard work.



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**David Küstner, managing director at Synergeticon GmbH:**  
“Hamburg Aviation Cluster provides young companies like Synergeticon with a good platform that allows us to network, take part in events, present ourselves and receive the attention we need to access the market. The cluster also provides a forum for linking up businesses with the public sector and in particular with scientific institutions such as research institutes or universities. We highly value these contacts because they help us access fresh knowledge and transform it into efficient industry products. This speeds up innovation. The cluster initiative also facilitates our recruiting process as it allows us to target people fascinated by aviation and therefore to attract the best industry talent. Committed and passionate employees are key for implementing our vision.”

# The future of mobility lies in central Germany



The MoWiN.net e.V. team headed by Dr Astrid Szogs (3rd from left).

The foundry at Kassel university is one of the few monuments that has survived since the early days of industrialisation, and provided the perfect setting for the 15th members' meeting of MoWiN.net e.V. on 5 March 2019.

MoWiN.net, which stands for network for the mobility industry in northern Hesse, was founded in 2004 as a non-profit organisation and is affiliated to the regional management of northern Hesse. It is a spin-off from Kassel

university and seeks to strengthen and support the mobility and logistics sector of northern Hesse. The network was originally founded by 28 members from science and business. This number has now gone up to 130. Many of the faculties of Kassel university and the Fraunhofer Institute for Wind Energy Systems (Fraunhofer IWES) continue to be actively involved in the network. However, the majority of the network's members are businesses based in northern Hesse and work in the fields of logistics, electric mobility,

railway technology, mobility management, public transport and vehicle construction. Some large groups such as VW and B. Braun Melsungen are also members. Astrid Szogs has been head of cluster management since September 2015. She highly values the friendly and loyal atmosphere within the network. “I know roughly half of the members personally, and working with all of them is easy and pleasant.”

### **‘Moving more together’ – a motto which applies both to MoWiN.net and the cluster managers**

The network’s activities are grouped into five categories. These are research and development, HR, international business, marketing and cooperation management. Astrid Szogs and her team are working together on all of these. Informal aspects also play a key role for the team’s daily work. “Thinking and acting, initiating projects, bringing people together, raising funds, writing and submitting applications – that’s all part of the job. There is no typical day in the life of a cluster manager”, Szogs says. The four team members are responsible for PR and marketing, member relations, back office and project management. At the end of the day, everything goes hand in hand and is implemented together, taking into account the input provided by the network’s members.

There are plenty of different implementation formats, which are being continuously enhanced. Network meetings are a great way for members to get to know one another informally. Four to eight such meetings are held each year, including visits to sports events such as ice hockey matches. “Now that’s teambuilding!” Astrid Szogs states. “We usually have an expert give a presentation at the beginning of the meeting, but later everyone joins together in a more relaxed atmosphere. These formats are particularly popular with members looking to network.” Similar meetings are being



**Jens Meißner, head of service at Jungheinrich Vertrieb Deutschland AG & Co. KG: “MoWiN.net pools considerable expertise from all areas of the mobility sector and has access to a large network which allows members to engage in dialogue with one another and share their experience, which benefits everyone involved. We are very happy to be part of this network.”**

held at the member companies. For example, a company invites the other members for a plant tour, which is then followed by an informal get-together. Such meetings hold great potential for knowledge transfer. This portfolio of formats is supplemented by conferences and conventions such as a logistics day, special events such as a logistics night, a cooperation forum, joint stands at trade fairs such as transport logistics; traditional newsletters and publications are of course also available.

## The mobility industry – strongest business sector in northern Hesse

The mobility industry has traditionally been an important sector. However, in the last 15 years it has picked up even more speed. German reunification has put the Kassel region right at the centre of Germany and turned northern Hesse into a centre of the automotive industry, a railway innovation hub and European logistics centre. The region's geographical location as a mobility hub is ideal. This is no news to the more than 76,000 employees working in the region's mobility sector – which corresponds to around 20% of all jobs there. This positive development and the region's current position are not owed to the cluster's work alone, but it has made a considerable contribution to job creation and cooperation.

### Issues that move

MoWiN.net is currently working on various issues across a wide range of different projects, ranging from electric mobility and logistics all the way to the use of drones in passenger and goods transport. Most cluster initiatives and businesses also regularly deal with cross-cutting issues such as demographic change and artificial intelligence. In addition, there is cooperation on big data and dialogue with experts working at the interface of mobility, logistics and IT. In 2017, MoWiN-Up – an innovation and start-up strategy promoted by the go-cluster programme – was launched. Its goal was to link up start-ups from the mobility sector with established network members. This has resulted in some initial cooperation projects. The strategy has also led to the creation of the MoWiN Innovation Lab, a new cooperation format which is to allow MoWiN.net members to have innovative ideas evaluated by an expert. As part of this format, a workshop is held at the Kassel Science Park and

afterwards an expert panel made up of suitable members evaluates the viability of the company's idea. The goal is to promote cooperation on R&D projects by linking up businesses and universities. The Urban Air Mobility project was launched in 2018. It looks at using new technology and approaches that allow the airspace to be used in a sustainable manner, particularly for urban goods and passenger transport. The region of northern Hesse wants to serve and can serve as a European pioneer here. 2019 was a year of celebration as MoWiN.net marked its 15th anniversary in the summer.

Of course, this only reflects part of the very diverse work done by the cluster. Going forward, Astrid Szogs and the MoWiN.net team want to promote even closer networking, pick up input provided by the network and attract new and interesting partners and projects. This is to raise even more awareness for the region of northern Hesse as a mobility and logistics hub. There is a good chance their efforts will be successful.



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# Saxony – the heart of Europe’s microelectronics sector



Part of the Silicon Saxony team with managing director Frank Bösenberg (5th from left).

We are visiting the offices of Silicon Saxony in Dresden on a bright spring day. Frank Bösenberg has just returned from a project meeting to Delft, he also recently travelled to Singapore and is departing for Wrocław the next day. However, all these trips share a common goal: promoting Saxony as a business hub for hardware, software and connectivity.

“By working together” is his answer to how this goal can be met. Frank Bösenberg has been working for Silicon Saxony e.V. since 2014 and has served as cluster manager and board member since December 2018. Silicon Saxony has around 350 members, making it Saxony’s largest high-tech network and one of the largest microelectronics and IT clusters in Germany and the EU.

Saxony has played a leading role in microelectronics since the 1970s. The cluster initiative was launched almost 20 years ago, the cluster itself set up in 2000. Back then, it had 35 members. The idea for creating a network first came up when Saxony’s microelectronics firms presented themselves together under the Silicon Saxony brand at the SEMICON trade show in Munich. The network initially aimed to link up its members within the region, particularly small companies with large industry players (such as Siemens, and later Infineon and AMD) with the intention of creating joint business opportunities.

Today, Silicon Saxony is a self-financed association that brings together businesses, service providers, higher education institutions/universities, research institutes, public-sector bodies and relevant start-ups based in Saxony and beyond – with some members coming from as far as Munich, Hamburg or even Sicily. The network covers the entire microelectronics value chain, from suppliers and production firms such as Globalfoundries, Infineon, XFab and Bosch all the way to software companies such as SAP and T-Systems Multimedia Solutions – a portfolio which makes the region unique. Meeting these businesses’ requirements is a daily challenge for Frank Bösenberg and his team.

## How does the network support its members?

The network’s cluster management currently has eleven staff members – including one trainee – and is charged with the organisation of events, communication and administrative tasks. The team has experts on hardware and software. “There are also 30 volunteers we can call on in case of need. We receive all sorts of inquiries. Recently, we were contacted by a firm looking for extremely thin tungsten film and now we are trying to find a suitable partner. It is helpful for



**Johannes Kade, Business Development Manager at Fraunhofer IPMS:** “I am a huge fan of networking. We have been a member of Silicon Saxony for 15 years and we have been able to build valuable business relations, form consortia and launch projects over that time. Taking part in trade shows such as SEMICON West in San Francisco makes much more sense when you are there as a group – because it helps raise awareness for Saxony as one large business hub. Microelectronics is a key-enabling technology. This means that businesses are under constant pressure to innovate. Here, Silicon Saxony helps us find suitable partners for forming a research consortium.”

the whole team to be in one room, because constant interaction is key,” Frank Bösenberg explains.

He and his team have grouped their work into five categories, namely information and communication – which includes compiling and distributing relevant information to the network’s members and other stakeholders – network-

ing members within the region and beyond by organising events, support for marketing, for example by organising joint stands at important trade shows in Germany, Europe and around the globe, representing the network's interests at regional, national and EU level towards policymakers and last but not least initiating cooperation and conducting innovation projects.

Of course, each member has different needs. For some members, the network's main benefit lies in marketing. These members are mostly involved in the trade shows. Other members particularly value the network's work in representing their interests. "These companies see us mostly as a channel to communicate their needs to policymakers. But there is one thing that all our members have in common: they all want to be networked! And it is our task to find out who should be linked up with whom." The needs of the members are also reflected in the issues the cluster is working on. Currently, it is placing a key focus on Industry 4.0, automation and of course artificial intelligence (AI).

Around 50 events are organised each year, including smaller formats such as internal working groups – currently 17 in total – which focus on issues such as RFID, AI and HR development and where you can discuss different approaches in a rather hands-on manner. In addition, there are conferences, large networking events for members (forums, club nights, summer party), the annual members' meeting, events for individual network bodies such as a strategy day, meetings of the heads of the working groups and events on strategic planning for volunteers. The Silicon Saxony Day is a mix of all these formats and is the network's most important annual event. In addition, newsletters and personal contact with members are key. The Silicon Saxony office team aims at seeing and speaking to each member at least once per year – for example at an event or by visiting the company's premises.

## Past, present, future

There is one thing Frank Bösenberg wants to make clear: "The fact that Silicon Saxony e.V. is so strong today is (almost) entirely owed to Gitta Haupold – the long-time managing director of the network – who through her energy and relentless efforts provided the network with a sound basis. Her calm and discreet manner gave companies



**Mirko Paul, innovation manager at SAP: "Silicon Saxony allows us to combine hardware, software and connectivity in a user-friendly manner. The Smart Systems Hub – Enabling IoT provides the perfect environment for this. Silicon Saxony is bringing together cutting-edge research, SME users and start-ups. SAP is making use of this to drive forward co-innovations, and we are contributing our expertise in international software development and implementation, global availability and a large customer base. We are represented in the network's working groups on AI, start-ups, software and training and we are also a premium partner in the Smart Systems Hub."**

confidence in times of a crisis which also affected Europe's leading semiconductor hub. Under her leadership, Silicon Saxony e.V. developed into a globally respected brand."

One of the network's great achievements was convincing Bosch to settle in the region – it was the group's most important individual investment at the time. It was a close call, but in the end, Bosch opted against Singapore and in favour of Dresden. It was probably not Silicon Saxony alone that turned things in Dresden's favour, but the existence of a strong industry network has definitely made Saxony more attractive as a business location over the last few years and therefore contributed to Bosch's decision.

Becoming more international is one of the network's key goals and will continue to influence its work in the future. Silicon Saxony has already joined with its European counterparts to form the Silicon Europe metacluster. Its objective is to promote cooperation and trigger innovation across industry and organisations so as to help European microelectronics businesses compete against companies from Asia and the US. A number of projects have already been launched, more action is to follow.

Silicon Saxony has also helped initiate a Smart Systems Hub that promotes close cross-industry cooperation between businesses and scientific institutions on the development and exploration of hardware, software and connectivity

solutions. The Hub's basic idea is to make use of existing infrastructure, initiatives, approaches and allies. It therefore makes sense for a large number of the industry network's members to be part of the Hub. All of this means that Saxony is in a good position to be a successful hardware and software hub, not least thanks to the work of the services provided by its strong industry network.



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# Northern Germany – a beacon of the German food industry



The foodRegio e.V. team with Professor Dr Jacobsen (left).

As we drive to our meeting with Jochen Brüggem, head of foodRegio e.V. at Brüggem KG, the smell of roasted grains floats through the streets of Lübeck. With a turnover of 51 billion euros and 152,000 employees, the food industry is one of northern Germany's most important economic sectors.

The first ideas of how the achievements of this industry could be made more visible were discussed by Brüggem

KG as early as 2004. This served as the starting point for founding a network. Back in 2004, the region was mostly focusing on its tourism, logistics and medical technology industries. Even though the food industry was already an important element of the region's manufacturing community, it had a low profile. But all this was about to change. In 2005, seven companies from the region joined the informal circle around Brüggem KG. Quickly, the companies became aware of the fact that networking was a key ingredient for

strengthening their position and that they could achieve more by working together, for example when it came to adapting infrastructure or closing the skills gap. Food and nutrition were not yet taught as subjects at Lübeck's higher education institutions – something which has changed today. This marked the birth of foodRegio, which was officially set up as an association in 2007, bringing together twelve members. Today, this number has grown to 80. The network reunites members from all five federal states of northern Germany, although southern Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg continue to be the main hubs. The network's members cover the whole of the food value chain, from initial production and refining all the way to distribution and consumption, and include both start-ups and traditional companies such as Brügger and Schwartauer Werke.

### Working groups at the centre of the network's activities

One of the most important tasks of the foodRegio team is to involve everyone equally. Despite the fact that the network's offices are located in Lübeck, cluster manager Professor Dr Björn P. Jacobsen and his team know what's going on with all of their members. "We are no longer exclusively a network for Lübeck, we are open to all companies based in northern Germany. This is why half of our events are held outside Lübeck and across the region." Working groups are the backbone of the network's activities. There are currently nine working groups, which bring together experts and members to discuss the issues of procurement, mechanical engineering, innovation, logistics, market and communication, general HR issues, HR and training, quality and certification as well as packaging. Each working group is charged with specific projects and meets at least twice a year. However, most working groups meet even more often. Each of the team members of the foodRegio offices

is responsible for managing two to three working groups; in addition, there is a company contact for each working group who provides advice on technical aspects.

The network's targeted activities have yielded a number of different projects, all for the benefit of the member companies. For example, the HR and training working group developed a campaign for trainees in the food industry named 'foodstarter', to which the working group for general HR issues contributed a job website. However, training and upskilling of employees is just one of many factors that make cooperation within the network so successful.



**Dr Torsten Schröder, founder of Perfood GmbH: "Membership in foodRegio has given us nothing but advantages. It has helped us implement a large number of projects and establish new partnerships. I am particularly looking forward to taking an active role in the new 'customised nutrition' focus group. This group brings together established and young companies like ours to develop new business models that lie at the intersection of food and healthcare."**

## What issues are currently on the agenda?

Using the food value chain as a starting point, foodRegio identifies cross-cutting issues, which are then dealt with in more detail by the working groups. Challenges that concern all industry sectors such as digitalisation, or start-ups and accelerators in the food industry, are also currently on the agenda. Clusters play a key role for mastering both of these challenges, Professor Jacobsen explains. “When you want to create a new business, finding the best talent is key. Here, personal contacts and working together with trusted partners within the network are particularly helpful. Digitalisation, as I have come to see myself, is a very complex subject. The more we embrace it, the more customised services we are asked to produce – which means services that are in essence not digital.”

The third subject that the industry network is currently focusing on is customised nutrition. FoodRegio organised the first expert conference on the subject – entitled NEW-TRITITION X – in Europe and is working to position itself as a leading region in this area. The goal is for northern Germany to take the lead on personalised nutrition as a forward-looking issue. The infrastructure needed for this is in place, including many excellent research institutes.



**Jochen Brüggemann, managing director at H. & J. Brüggemann KG:**  
“We were one of the co-founders of foodRegio in 2005. In an industry which had a strong regional focus already, our aim was to make better use of the things we have in common. One of the key benefits of the network is that it creates an atmosphere that makes it easy to engage in personal contact. This is facilitated by the working groups and events that are organised. Everybody knows one another, you just call them up or pay them a visit, and we learn from one another. The network also creates economies of scale. Let me give you an example: Our companies have noticed that we are serving some of the same customers in food retail, with each of us delivering only a few palettes. So we decided to pool these deliveries, which benefits all parties involved. The third big advantage that foodRegio offers is the possibility to work towards structural changes. Once you have a critical mass of companies that share the same interests – for example closing the skills gap in the food industry – it becomes a lot easier to engage in dialogue with universities because it strengthens your negotiating position. The network’s work has helped raise a lot more awareness, not least among policymakers, for the strong role that the food industry is playing in northern Germany.”

## Personal contact as the basis for trust

In view of the variety of subjects, a large number of formats are used. These include events such as ‘marketing dinners’, project meetings, members’ meetings, company visits – including together with regional policymakers – and also trade fairs. In 2019, foodRegio was represented for the first time at the Anuga in Cologne – the world’s leading trade show for the food industry – and held the NEWTRITION X conference there. In addition to this, the network also organises training events, seminars and workshops that provide its members with information on relevant topics such as hygiene management or food safety.

One of the highlights on the network’s agenda is the ‘trend day’ – which has been held every year for more than a decade and is known among industry stakeholders far beyond the region. During the last edition, which was held on 21 February 2019, it looked at superfoods and featured 230 participants – a new record. “The ‘trend day’ provides an insight into the network’s structures and how we work together,” Professor Jacobsen says. “It is a great tool to reach out to others and it has helped us convince many companies to join foodRegio.”

Formats like these facilitate networking activities, but the main focus of the network’s work is on helping companies engage in direct dialogue with one another and creating an atmosphere of accessibility. The goal is for companies to call one another or pay one another a visit – without the need for constant formal exchange. “Trust between all stakeholders is and will continue to be the trademark of our network,” Professor Jacobsen states. “I don’t think this will be replaced by digitalisation any time soon.” As the network does not engage in sales and marketing activities, it does not create a situation of competition between its members.

The focus is on issues that have no impact on competition such as optimising production, logistics, employees’ skills. The network has also developed a code of conduct for its members, promoting a culture of networking that creates a sound basis for trust. The network’s members are also continuously working to enhance the network’s strategy – the masterplan for 2025 – and fill it with life.

For Professor Jacobsen, working together is key. “It is a great privilege for me to work with committed companies, to learn from them and to see them develop.”



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# The Lake Constance region – a showcase for the digital industry



Nicole Amann and Tobias Fauth are working together to advance the interests of their members in the digital industry.

Tobias Fauth's day begins on the trade fair grounds in Friedrichshafen. As the managing director of cyberLAGO e.V. he is giving a presentation on the 'BodenseeMittelstand 4.0' project at 'all about automation' – a key trade show on industrial automation technology. The project helps SMEs from Germany, Austria, Switzerland and the Principality of Liechtenstein take their businesses into the digital age. The goal is to pool the expertise from businesses, scientific insti-

tutions and SME institutions based around Lake Constance and improve access to this knowledge for the region's SMEs.

Following his presentation, Tobias Fauth boards a ferry to Konstanz, where the offices of cyberLAGO are located. "Lake Constance is the key unifying element in this region where four different countries come together", he says. Tobias Fauth has been working as the network's managing director

since the beginning of 2018. CyberLAGO e.V. was founded in October 2013 and has since developed into the largest cross-border network of digital experts at Lake Constance. The number of members – initially around 30 – has grown to almost 90 today. Around 55% of the digital businesses are based in the city of Konstanz itself. The companies, start-ups, higher education institutions and (public) institutions which form part of the network aim to raise awareness for the Lake Constance region’s digital expertise, create added value, disseminate knowledge, attract and retain skilled staff and strengthen the region in the long term.

The cluster initiative regards itself as a central point of contact for answering all questions related to digitalisation, the digital transformation, IT and IT security. This includes looking at new business models, marketing, human resources and agile development methods (such as scrum or lean development) and sharing experience on new technologies (such as IoT, big data, artificial intelligence, blockchain, digital twins, chatbots, cloud services and mobile apps).

### A small team mastering big challenges

At the network’s office Tobias Fauth and his two colleagues are developing activities to support their members in line with their individual needs. The work is based on three pillars: strengthening the region’s digital industry, shaping the digital transformation in the region and driving forward digital innovation – with all of these subjects being closely intertwined. Ultimately, the network aims to detect new opportunities and link up the right people at the right time. All of this is being done in close coordination with the network’s members. “The cyberLAGO network is shaped by its members – the digital experts – not its office. I regard myself as a service provider for the businesses that have joined



**Stefan Eichenhofer (right), managing director at Seitenbau GmbH: “It is very important for us to raise awareness for Konstanz’s IT sector and the important role it is playing for the economy here, to actively work for the region and, ultimately, to make our work more innovative. To give you just one example: we want to show students that there are jobs for highly skilled workers right here in Konstanz – because this is usually not something the Lake Constance region is associated with. By working with the other members within the cyberLAGO network, we can pool our strengths and become more visible, not least to policymakers.”**

the network and for the region. It is my job to enable things, to make things happen and to keep things going. This means keeping all kinds of details in mind. The intention is to get the network’s experts actively involved, and they really do join in,” Fauth describes his approach to cluster management. For example, the network helps experts speak at conferences or publish articles, and it facilitates cooperation. By engaging in activities like these, cyberLAGO is emphasising its ambition to shape and encourage the digital transformation at all levels and create flagship projects that raise awareness far beyond the region’s borders for the region’s innovation potential.

Marketing Lake Constance as a showcase for digital technology plays an important role in all of the cluster initiative's activities. "The digital expertise of Lake Constance businesses is largely unknown. We want to link up businesses, so this expertise can be pooled, made more visible and better used. The cyberLAGO brand represents digital expertise in the Lake Constance region. That may sound trivial, but promoting Lake Constance as a digital hub is an important part of our work, not least as there is a lot of competition for attracting IT talent. We therefore need to have a clearly defined profile," managing director Tobias Fauth explains.

### Customised activities that meet companies' needs

Starting a business, working more closely with higher education institutions, attracting skilled staff and driving forward innovation are at the heart of the network's work. A wide range of different formats are being trialled, including hackathons or failure parties, where entrepreneurs tell the audience about failing – situations when things go wrong. "Stories about failure are far more credible and teach us a lot more than stories about success. Stories about failure are stories about personal experience. They are highly valuable because they can teach young entrepreneurs, researchers and developers not to make the same mistakes."

These unusual formats have met with a lot of success, with cyberLAGO receiving plenty of positive feedback. For Tobias Fauth and his team, this is something they can be proud of: "If you have an idea, reach out to people and can get them on board – that's just great." There are currently a number of projects where this has been achieved.

For example, the Lake Constance region is currently known primarily for its tourism industry. CyberLAGO wants to make use of this to promote a positive view of digital technology. It has therefore teamed up with the University of Konstanz to develop a virtual reality project in which the city of Konstanz can be experienced in a completely new manner. The project is to help improve confidence in digital technology, raise awareness for the region's digital expertise far beyond its borders and make the region even more attractive – thereby achieving three goals at once. Another example is the city of Konstanz's plan to develop a strategy for digital mobility management. This project involves experts from the network, with businesses, policymakers and scientists all pulling in the same direction.

On attracting new members, Tobias Fauth says: "Of course, I'm looking to attract new companies, but only those that are interested in strengthening the network. People who are committed to live by the network's principles and are ready to give and get involved. The network's main benefit is working together to strengthen each individual company and the entire Lake Constance digital region."



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## A networking platform for the media and digital industry in Berlin and Brandenburg



The media:net berlinbrandenburg team with managing director Andrea Peters (second from right).

It is February in Berlin and we are standing right in front of Haus Ungarn, only a few steps away from the iconic television tower. At first glance, the location resembles a trendy club, but this is not only a place for parties: the new years reception of 'games.net' – an initiative by media:net berlinbrandenburg e.V. targeting the capital's gaming industry – is all about networking.

Personal contact is what has made media:net berlinbrandenburg e.V. one of the most successful industry networks for the media and digital industry in Germany. The network was founded back in 2001, after many large media companies such as Universal Music, Axel Springer, Scholz & Friends and Sat1 had moved back to Berlin. It was also a time when many new internet companies sprang up. Forming a joint network seemed interesting and beneficial for all stakeholders involved. The network was initially founded as

an independent association and received additional financial support from the German federal states of Berlin and Brandenburg. The Commissioner for Media for Berlin and Brandenburg at the time, Bernd Schiphorst, was one of the most vocal proponents of the network and is now serving as chairman of its supervisory board.

Andrea Peters has been CEO at media:net for eleven years. She and her team of around 15 staff members are currently serving 420 members – all companies from the media and creative industries, IT, communication and Industry 4.0. According to Peters, these companies include “established and globally active companies, but also innovative start-ups from the Berlin-Brandenburg region, publishing houses, companies working in music, film, TV and even advertising. The digital industry is represented by companies that develop mobile or internet applications, gaming companies and companies from the IT and telecommunications sector. Around 20% of the network’s members are based in Brandenburg – mostly in Potsdam – in close proximity to Studio Babelsberg, broadcasting company rbb, film production company UFA, the film university and the Hasso Plattner Institute. However, in our globalised world, companies don’t care so much about where a business is located as long as cooperation works well”, Andrea Peters states.

Her job and that of her team is to effectively and lastingly link up all of the member companies – which often have diverging goals –, raise awareness for their interests among policymakers, and work to improve the business environment for these companies in the Berlin-Brandenburg region.

### Many possibilities to open doors

The work of the network rests on three connected pillars, with networking being the most important one. To pro-



**Christiane Gehrke, deputy CEO at Gaming-Aid e.V.: “I’ve been working with Andrea Peters and her passionate and creative team since 2013, and our dialogue has always been close and easy. We believe that media:net berlinbrandenburg’s strongest suit is its diversity – with the network covering policy-making, film, business and gaming. Its interesting composition of members, the organisation of excellent – and often cross-cutting – events and the possibility to take part in the joint trade fair stands at a number of attractive trade shows makes membership very much worthwhile for us.”**

mote networking, the network organises a wide range of different events – from pure networking events, thematic round tables and workshops all the way to dinners bringing together start-ups and investors. For Andrea Peters, these investor dinners are a real highlight. “It’s like inviting start-ups and investors to a blind date,” she says. “Meeting investors over dinner takes some of the pressure off the start-ups, which usually have to present their pitches on a big stage.” In total, more than 130 different events are organised for the network’s members each year.

media:net also improves its members’ visibility via a wide range of communication tools such as social media

channels, newsletters and websites. There are various formats for conducting interviews with individuals or companies from the network. In addition, efforts are being undertaken to raise the profile of individual persons from the network as conference speakers, thereby strengthening their role as experts.

Joint trade fair stands and international delegation trips are also being organised. “Last year, we took 30 of our members to Los Angeles on a trip focusing on virtual reality,” Andrea Peters reports. “This visit showed that the companies from our region are absolutely on a par with their U.S. counterparts.”

The second pillar is knowledge sharing. Here, the network’s activities focus on further training, the integrating of businesses that are driving forward cutting-edge technology into the network, and cooperation with higher education institutions. The annual ‘medien.barometer’ publication looks at the business climate in the industry. The third pillar – benefits and services – supplements the network’s services portfolio. The focus here is on skills and HR, on job and internship listings, job newsletters, HR networks, HR newsletters, industry days and job fairs for professionals from specific fields.

Under the fourth pillar – representation of interests – the network is promoting dialogue with regional and Federal policymakers. “This includes inviting policymakers to a moderated dialogue session. Federal Education Minister Anja Karliczek and Governing Mayor Michael Müller have recently taken part,” Andrea Peters states. “Events like these give our members the opportunity to air their concerns.”

## It’s a people business

Andrea Peters believes that she knows most of the network’s members, at least by their first name. In this industry that is relatively young and communication-driven (and even hip), people are usually on a first name basis. Every day, the cluster managers contact at least two to three of their members. “This includes acting on inquiries such as: ‘I found company X in media:net, can you link us up?’ I am often amazed at how well this works. Just recently, a producer approached me with a screenplay. I linked him up with a new distributor who is a member in our network.



**Jenny Beutnagel, Director Corporate Development: “The network events organised by media:net berlinbrandenburg are worth their weight in gold. They allow you to get to know the people behind the companies, and that’s important, because ultimately it’s you as a person talking to other persons. If you have a direct channel of communication and know people personally, it’s much easier to come up with new ideas and ways of working together. This is how we created the MediaTech Hub and flagship projects such as VoluCap – that’s the first volumetric studio in mainland Europe, which is something we are quite proud of here in Potsdam Babelsberg.”**



**Professor Dr Jens Junge, design akademie berlin – SRH University of Communication and Design, operator of spielen.de: “In my view, networking with one another regularly and over many years is a real benefit. The events organised by media:net berlinbrandenburg are like family reunions among experts. They allow you to discuss the upsides and downsides of the gaming industry, which is a fast-changing sector, and to freely share information. This includes talking about internal matters that you would never read about in a newspaper article or discussing with other managing directors particular indicators or KPIs that can help you position your business on the market and find out how your business and the whole industry is faring. To look at these things from different angles and shape these things together is an invaluable benefit.”**

It took less than thirty minutes for him to get an answer. Thinking and acting quickly, knowing whom to link up with whom – that’s the added benefit we offer our members.”

Andrea Peters therefore would like the network to grow further so that even more companies can be linked up. For

example, the network’s new berlin.digital initiative is placing a key focus on the digital industry. Initially, there was ‘only’ the production:net initiative, which covered the film and TV industry. Now there are seven initiatives plus its own GmbH. This means that a new initiative has been launched every two years on average. Internationality is becoming increasingly important. The BerlinBalticNordic.net initiative opens up opportunities to get to know new locations in the Nordic and Baltic countries.

Andrea Peters is also proud of the fact that she is regularly approached by other German regions which are planning to set up similar networks. “Sometimes I can give them a bit of advice, but my focus is on media:net and its members here in Berlin and Brandenburg. I want our members to know that we at media:net always have an open ear for them. Many of our members have joined because it’s just what you do. You become a member because it’s OUR network here in Berlin and Brandenburg. I also think that engaging in dialogue with others and getting to know new people is just part of our DNA as cluster managers – otherwise we would probably not be doing this job.”



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# The 'go-cluster' programme

The 'go-cluster' programme is used by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy to promote cluster excellence. It brings together the most productive innovation clusters in Germany. These innovation clusters have excellent structures and support cluster players according to their needs in various fields of activity. The innovation clusters participating in the 'go-cluster' programme are vanguards for innovation and reflect Germany's high level of expertise in many sectors and fields of technology.

The 'go-cluster' programme provides advisory and other services to help innovation clusters develop into organisations with global excellence in their field. It therefore also supports innovative cluster services such as 'cross-cluster' approaches and strengthens the networking of innovation clusters at European and international level.

The programme is primarily aimed at efficient innovation clusters from Germany. In order to be admitted to the programme, companies need to fulfil a number of excellence criteria in the areas of structure and composition, cluster management and structure, activities and cooperation, and visibility and impact. Candidates must go through an application process. The necessary forms are available at [www.go-cluster.de](http://www.go-cluster.de).

Whether it be for cluster managers, cluster players or representatives from the political field, research or business, the 'go-cluster' programme offers services that are geared to the needs of the respective target group. For example, innovation clusters taking part in the programme receive the following free advisory and other services:

- The programme certifies the individual innovation cluster's quality and productivity in line with standardised evaluation criteria that are based on European quality standards.
- Participating clusters can use the 'go-cluster' work mark and logo as a quality label.
- The programme covers the cost for the European benchmarking and certification procedures for the Bronze and Silver labels of the European Cluster Excellence Initiative (ECEI).
- The innovation clusters are showcased on the Federal Government's 'Clusterplattform Deutschland' internet platform; needs-based advice is provided on issues including strategic development, financing, enhancement of the services portfolio, sustainability and stability of cluster structures.
- Workshops on current cluster management issues and cluster instruments are organised; the cluster's work and selected innovation success stories are presented to the public via various channels (events, newsletters, websites).
- Clusters are incorporated into and given increased visibility in economic policy initiatives sponsored by the Federal Government.
- Networking activities with the most productive innovation clusters from Germany and Europe.

The 'Clusterplattform Deutschland' website is a joint initiative by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

The portal offers a clear and concise overview of cluster-related activities at state, national and EU level. In addition, a search tool offering a variety of search categories is used to reflect the diversity of Germany's cluster landscape



**Are you interested in the 'go-cluster' programme, or do you have any questions about it?**

Information, advice and services:

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