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Smartgrid technologies and advanced batteries stand out in the cleantech space

By Amy Biemiller

If cleantech is the innovation focus du jour, where should forward-thinking investors look for the next most interesting investment opportunity?

Think 'integration,' specifically IT and cleantech, says Kef Kasdin, general partner with Battelle Ventures and Innovation Valley Partners. "Smart-grid technologies – deploying networking technologies to enable better energy utilization and to obviate the need to build more fossil fuel power plants – offer significantly differentiated, breakthrough technologies," she says.

Kasdin, an experienced venture capitalist, focuses on investments in communications and energy technology. She also works closely on identifying promising technologies, projects and synergies with the National Laboratories that Battelle Ventures' sole limited partner, Battelle Memorial Institute, manages or co-manages for the U.S. Department of Energy around the country. She takes a broad view of the cleantech sector, and the portfolio at Battelle Ventures includes companies developing solar, energy storage and energy-efficiency and smart-grid technologies. "Cleantech research into solving the problem of transmitting renewable energy from different sources onto the grid is an important research focus at Battelle Ventures and at the National Labs, as well as for cleantech entrepreneurs" she says.

"We expect that innovative ideas for achievement in smart-grid technology will attract the attention of those who invest in the cleantech sector," she says. Those ideas include integration of renewable technologies like solar and wind on the existing electricity grid, which also requires intelligence in the grid network.

Advanced energy-cell and battery technology is another energy-sector concentration of the fund. "In order to make electric vehicles practical and affordable, game-changing innovations that address the shortcomings of traditional chemical cells are needed," Kasdin explains. "We're seeing new developments with solid-state lithium technology with the potential to enable large-format batteries that are substantially smaller, cheaper, safer and more powerful than is possible with existing rechargeable chemical battery technology.

On the entrepreneurial side, breakthrough solutions are what will draw venture capital interest in new offerings in the clean tech space, she says. But entrepreneurs need to be sure they have a buttoned-up business plan and executive summary that address the issues critical to any investor. "They need to show how the technology will generate returns for the investor, as well as how the solutions will have a game-changing impact on the marketplace."

Cleantech entrepreneurs looking for funding also need to make sure they pursue the right investment targets, Kef says. Making a short list of venture capital funds that invest in cleantech is the right start, but that needs to be followed by serious, targeted networking.

"Seek opportunities to network with these funds at cleantech industry conferences and events. If your business plan and executive summary create interest among attendees, you may win one of the coveted presentation slots," she says.

Kasdin currently serves on the Boards of Directors of Aldis, Inc.; Ampulse Corp., Planar Energy; and Rajant Corp. Active in the venture community, she serves as secretary for on the Board of Directors of the National Association of Seed and Venture Funds and is a coauthor of [Inside the Minds: Green Venture Capital](#) (Aspatore Books, Nov. 1, 2009).