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Amgen Inc

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Introduction

Since its founding in 1980 as Applied Molecular Genetics, Amgen Inc. has stood at the crossroads of scientific discovery and entrepreneurial ambition. What began as a modest venture-backed enterprise in Thousand Oaks, California, has evolved into one of the world's largest and most influential biopharmaceutical companies—an American success story with global impact. Amgen's trajectory mirrors the rise of biotechnology itself, as it transformed speculative science into real-world medicines that have improved, and often saved, millions of lives worldwide.

In the early days, few could have predicted the profound effect Amgen would have on health care. Fueled by breakthroughs such as the cloning of the erythropoietin gene, which led to the blockbuster drug Epogen, Amgen quickly distinguished itself as a pioneer committed to confronting serious illnesses with innovative science. This determination, underpinned by visionary leadership and bold scientific inquiry, enabled Amgen to move beyond basic research and seize the opportunities of the burgeoning biotech era.

The company's history is marked by a relentless pursuit of medical innovation, from groundbreaking therapies for anemia and cancer to game-changing drugs for osteoporosis, autoimmune diseases, and rare disorders. Strategic acquisitions—including the landmark purchase of Immunex and, more recently, Horizon Therapeutics—expanded Amgen's therapeutic reach and reinforced its stature within the rapidly evolving pharmaceutical landscape. These choices, always grounded in cutting-edge research, enabled Amgen to adapt to a shifting marketplace while keeping patient needs at the heart of its mission.

Beyond its scientific and commercial achievements, Amgen has demonstrated a deep commitment to corporate social responsibility, environmental stewardship, and education. The Amgen Foundation's dedication to advancing science literacy and access to knowledge is matched by the company's efforts to minimize its environmental footprint and support communities globally. Amgen's commitment to equity, sustainability, and ethical leadership has become as central to its character as its scientific breakthroughs.

Today, Amgen stands as a testament to the transformative power of blending vision, innovation, and integrity. With a robust pipeline of new therapies, investments in artificial intelligence and genetics, and a presence in nearly 100 countries, Amgen remains at the forefront of efforts to deliver next-generation medicines for devastating diseases. The company's recent financial performance and successful integration of strategic acquisitions position it for enduring growth in a complex and competitive

industry.

This book tells the story of Amgen Inc.—its founders and leaders, defining discoveries, challenges, and triumphs. It is a history of scientific ingenuity and business acumen, but also a reflection on the human drive to heal, to innovate, and to improve the quality of life around the globe. As we explore Amgen’s past and consider its future prospects, we discover lessons for all who seek to make a meaningful impact through science, enterprise, and responsibility.

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CHAPTER ONE: Origins: The Birth of Applied Molecular Genetics

The story of Amgen, like many great ventures, begins not with a grand edifice but with an idea, a handful of ambitious individuals, and a shared belief in the untapped potential of a revolutionary scientific field. It was April 8, 1980, when Applied Molecular Genetics Inc., or AMGen as it was initially known, officially incorporated in Thousand Oaks, California. This burgeoning company, which would later shorten its name to Amgen, was born from the vision of venture capitalists, most notably William K. (Bill) Bowes, and a cadre of scientists eager to push the boundaries of genetic research.

Thousand Oaks, nestled in Ventura County, offered a promising backdrop for a biotech startup. Its proximity to esteemed research institutions like UCLA and the California Institute of Technology meant access to a vibrant academic community and a pipeline of bright, young scientific talent. This fertile ground, combined with a significant initial injection of around \$19 million in venture capital funding, provided the nascent company with the resources it needed to embark on its ambitious scientific endeavors.

The early days of Applied Molecular Genetics were, to put it mildly, experimental. The scientific team, though small—starting with just three employees—was brimming with curiosity and a willingness to explore diverse applications of recombinant DNA technology. Before settling firmly on human therapeutics, their efforts ranged from attempting to engineer organisms that could extract oil from shale, a rather unconventional pursuit, to accelerating chicken growth. They even dabbled in creating specialty chemicals and cloning luciferase, the enzyme that gives fireflies their glow. One notable early success involved developing a process for producing indigo dye in *E. coli*, an achievement that was significant enough to grace the cover of *Science* magazine in 1983.

However, the ultimate direction for the company, as hindsight clearly shows, solidified around a more profound purpose: treating and curing human diseases. The shift wasn't immediate, but the underlying scientific curiosity and the potential of recombinant DNA technology were always geared towards impactful applications. The very name, Applied Molecular Genetics, hinted at a practical, problem-solving approach to complex biological puzzles.

A pivotal moment in setting this critical direction came in October 1980 with the appointment of George Rathmann as Amgen's first president and chief executive officer. Rathmann was no stranger to the world where science met business. A chemist

by training with a Ph.D. from Princeton, he had previously served as vice president for research and development in the diagnostics division of Abbott Laboratories. His recruitment by Bill Bowes, one of Amgen's founders, was a masterstroke. Rathmann, later dubbed "Mr. Biotech" by *Red Herring* magazine, possessed a unique blend of scientific acumen and entrepreneurial drive, qualities that would prove indispensable in guiding Amgen through its formative years.

Rathmann quickly established the company's scientific goals, even working from a small trailer to maximize laboratory space for his scientists. He was known for his persuasive nature, earning him the nickname "Golden Throat" among those who admired his ability to secure crucial venture capital and build early revenue streams through strategic partnerships. His leadership was instrumental in transforming the initial scientific curiosity into a focused pursuit of groundbreaking medicines. He not only brought scientific credibility but also a business savvy that was crucial for a startup in an entirely new industry.

The initial scientific advisory board assembled for Applied Molecular Genetics was a who's who of scientific luminaries, including Norman Davidson, Leroy Hood, and Robert Schimke, among others. This assembly of top-tier minds underscored the serious scientific ambitions of the fledgling company and provided a strong foundation for its research endeavors. Their collective expertise, combined with Rathmann's vision, set the stage for the pivotal discoveries that would define Amgen's early history and lay the groundwork for its future as a global biopharmaceutical leader.

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