

Roche in Rotkreuz: from a small acquisition to the largest private employer

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The most striking example of an industrial headquarters in the canton is the diagnostics centre of Roche in Rotkreuz. Its origins were modest. In August 1969, Roche acquired a small firm in Zug, Elektromedizin Respirator AG, for 565,000 francs, through a shell company named Tegimenta AG, so that the name of Roche would not appear in the canton.¹ In the early 1970s, the headquarters in Basel considered moving the operation to Basel, but decided to expand it locally, because skilled mechanics, electricians and machinists were difficult to recruit in the Basel region. In 1972, Tegimenta moved to the industrial zone "Forren" in Risch-Rotkreuz, where it built two modern buildings for administration and the production of respirators.²

The site in Rotkreuz became a centre for the development and production of diagnostic analysers. After the first prototype of the Cobas Bio analyser had become operational in 1977 and serial production had begun in 1979, the Cobas Mira was launched in 1984. It became the best-selling analyser in clinical chemistry, with up to 160 units produced per month at its peak.³ The workforce grew from about 75 in 1976 to 190 in 1979, 500 in 1989, 580 in 1999 and some 2,600 in 2020.⁴ Today, Rotkreuz is the headquarters of Roche Diagnostics International, with some 2,500 employees from more than seventy nations. Roche is the largest private employer in the canton.⁵

The history of Roche in Rotkreuz is instructive for three reasons. The first is that the decisive factor in the early years was labour: Roche expanded in Zug because it could find skilled workers there, at a time when the industrial tradition of the canton, shaped by Landis & Gyr and the metalworking industry, had produced a pool of mechanics and technicians. The second is the discretion of the initial acquisition. The use of a shell company to conceal the identity of the buyer, a common practice at the time, reflects the caution with which large groups approached a new

location. The third is the transformation of a small acquisition into a global headquarters over five decades. The site in Rotkreuz grew because it succeeded. Its success came from combining industrial capability with the advantages of the location.

1 Notes

1. Zug in der Welt, "Von «Rochekreuz» zum «Pharma-Valley\"", zuginderwelt.ch, accessed September 2026: in August 1969 Roche acquired the Zug firm Elektromedizin Respirator AG for 565,000 francs, establishing Tegimenta AG as a shell company so that Roche would not be visible in the canton; Roche, "50 Jahre Roche in Rotkreuz", roche.ch: arrival in 1969 through the predecessor company Tegimenta in Zug with around 60 employees. ↩
2. Zug in der Welt, "Von «Rochekreuz» zum «Pharma-Valley\"": in the early 1970s Roche's Basel headquarters nearly relocated the operation but chose to expand locally because of the difficulty of recruiting skilled workers in the Basel region; Tegimenta moved to the "Forren" industrial zone in Risch-Rotkreuz in 1972, with two buildings for administration and respirator production. ↩
3. Zug in der Welt, "Von «Rochekreuz» zum «Pharma-Valley\"": first Cobas Bio prototype operational in 1977; serial production from 1979; Cobas Mira launched in 1984, the best-selling analysis apparatus in clinical chemistry, with up to 160 units produced monthly at peak. ↩
4. Zug in der Welt, "Von «Rochekreuz» zum «Pharma-Valley\"": employees of about 75 (1976), 190 (1979), 500 (1989), 580 (1999) and about 2,600 (2020). ↩
5. Roche, "Roche feiert 50 Jahre Diagnostik-Standort Rotkreuz", roche.ch, accessed September 2026: about 2,500 staff from more than 70 nations; headquarters of Roche Diagnostics International; central hub for diagnostics business functions and research and development; 131 apprentices; largest private employer in the canton of Zug. ↩

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