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With a strong UTC entrepreneurial fibre

Sarah Benosman, who graduated from UTC in 2009, although starting her career as an eco-design consultant, founded the start-up Vrac'n Roll in 2016, the first organic and zero waste online shop. Here is a portrait of a young woman with clear ideas, determination and a strong entrepreneurial spirit.

25 Mar 2020

With a strong UTC entrepreneurial fibre

Does Sarah have clear ideas? Yes indeed and she demonstrated this when, as a young 5th year high school student at Perpignan, she wanted to choose an education path that would allow her to "reconcile," she says, "her taste for science and for all that is artistic and creative". "I have always loved science but also the arts. I used to draw a lot, do music – I spent two years at the Conservatory -, doing theatre training, etc."

Still thinking clearly? "It was a friend's uncle working in the design department at PSA (Peugeot automobile Co) who told me that the UTC was offering training courses for design engineers - I didn't even know that existed," she admits. That's when she made her choice. It was going to be UTCCompiegne. "In 2004, my final high school year, I was invited for dossier based interviews UTC. And give that I obtained my "Bacc" cum laudae, I was admitted to UTC," explains Sarah Benosman.

She definitely does not regret her choice here, even if she admits receiving a "slap" in the first semester. "I was far from my parents. I thought it was great to have my own apartment, to see my friends whenever I wanted. I also appreciated the very free spirit of an engineering school where you could choose your subjects, where you didn't feel the pressure of grades and so on. As a result, I didn't work a lot. The result was not long in coming: I failed half of my subjects. It was bad news for me. My pride took a bashing. For me, who graduated from high school "with honours" without too much effort, it was a hard fall," she says. But her determination remained intact. "I realized that I ran the risk of being expelled from an establishment that I hadn't chosen at random. Luckily, the work placement gave me a chance to recover. At the end of this internship, which went very well, I admitted to the jury that I could only blame myself, and I promised to be more rigorous, more regular in my work. Although they doubted my ability to continue along this path, I managed to convince them. They trusted me - a quality that cannot be denied at school. It's a trust that I've respected, since I haven't failed a single subject in the rest of my UTC years," she adds.

However, her passage through Carlton University, Ottawa, Canada in her third year made her doubt her choice. "We were learning a lot about drawing and materials. But that's when I realized there was one thing I didn't like: the client choosing which concepts to pursue, not the designer. I, for one, was putting too much emotion into the proposed concepts and the fact that my favourites were not chosen did not please me at all. In short, I realized that I love to work more in participatory innovation, helping people find ideas, participating in the creativity phase, leading work groups, looking for new materials, etc. I also love to work with people in the design process. Emmanuel Corbasson, head of the UTC design Department, and other teachers from the

UTC helped me in this increased awareness process through various exciting projects. The design course has continued to support me in my various professional experiences, in particular by training new students that I have been able to take on internships and now on permanent contracts," she emphasizes.

Convinced by and attracted to the business world during her various internships, Sarah joined Eeva, an eco-design consulting firm (founded by Jean-Baptiste Puyou, himself a UTC graduate engineer) as soon as she completed her studies in 2009. She stayed with Eeva for seven years, but the desire to become an entrepreneur was the stronger. It is quite naturally that she responds to a call for projects from the ADEME (French Environment and Energy Management Agency) for ecoinnovations, with the result that she receives substantial funding over three years. Vrac'n Roll, an e-commerce company, was born. With one leitmotiv: 0 waste.

"We started with a drive and home delivery in Lyon and the surrounding region. Since October 2019, we have been delivering all over France via Relais Colis de France points - groceries, hygiene goods, zero waste accessories (e.g., reusable stainless steel drinking straws), etc. - in returnable boxes made of light and resistant plastic. Boxes that are shipped and returned in a patented, reusable package," summarises Sarah Benosman.

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