

NEWS

Entrepreneurship in action: two successful alumni of HEC Paris tell us about their careers

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HEC Paris supports entrepreneurship and we recently interviewed two visionaries and HEC graduates: Eric la Bonnardière (M.06) and Alexis Grabar (MBA.02).

Eric la Bonnardiere (M.06) created, 6 years ago, Evaneos.com, an original travel platform. Evaneos.com

Can you briefly talk about your career?

After gaining my Engineering degree from Supélec and my Mastère HEC Entrepreneurs in 2006, I joined the Consulting Office *Advancy* where I mainly worked on Development Strategies in sectors such as hostels and distribution. I have always wanted to be an entrepreneur, and an encounter with my current associate (thanks to the HEC Alumni Entrepreneurs mailing list!), encouraged me to go for it. We had common interests (travel and digital technologies), and very compatible profiles.

We wanted to bring about a revolution in the tourism market and share our travel experiences. This is why we decided to create Evaneos.com.

Our platform allows visitors to customize their travel projects, in direct contact with local agencies that we have selected around the world. Thanks to the low cost of our service and the expertise of our agents, we provide a unique travel experience to all of our customers.

How did you get the idea for [Evaneos.com](http://www.evaneos.com)?

As we were understanding the way the travel market was working, the idea came gradually. The 'travel chain' has a lot of intermediaries, and, to create unique travel experiences and access to infinite possibilities, the only way was to get closer to agents, in order to avoid standardization. When we discovered these local agencies, who previously had worked in B2B networks, it appeared obvious to us that it should move to B2C.

Their wish to speak directly with the client, to add value to their expertise and to vary their clientele convinced us that we were about to change the experience of both the agency and the customer.

How has training you received at HEC Paris been important in realizing this project?

The HEC Entrepreneurs training has been extremely rewarding as it was based on practices and actual cases. I sensed, therefore, that I was able to understand the reality of entrepreneurship and was prepared for both the good and bad times.

We also learned to work in groups on projects which encouraged me to find complementary partners who shared my vision and values.

You are already present on French, Spanish, Italian, German and British markets. Do you have other markets in sight?

We currently focus on the development of these markets, which is already a big challenge. But in our desire to become a major player on the global scene, we will ask new questions in 2016.

Advice for people who want to undertake but who are afraid to start:

I think that it is possible by investing little money but lots of time in the evening and at weekends to test ideas, achieve MVPs (minimum viable products) for forming beliefs in a sector and the viability of your ideas. I think that this can begin with a sufficient level of confidence and low risk. But it takes time and you must know how to persist and adapt to find the correct positioning, and to respond to simple problems in a simple way.

For example, the founders of Blablacar have launched their website by continuing to work and by waiting several years to raise funds (which is not a required step) before having the success that we know today.

Your best memory of HEC Paris:

The HEC Entrepreneur in Lajoux seminar: a good time to unite the promo, meet our sponsor of the time (PKM) and other contractors. And partying!



[Alexis Grabar](#) (MBA.02). He built up significant knowledge and experience in several fields such as aviation and aerospace.

Can you briefly describe your background?

I am a Franco-American entrepreneur who has been based in London for the past 13 years. I am an

expert in the Aviation, Media, Tech, Luxury, Retail and Cosmetics industries with a particular focus on UK and International markets.

Prior to my MBA from HEC Paris, I worked in the private sector with Eurocopter, Airbus and Cap Gemini. I have since founded 4 companies in the UK, France and Russia, including [AviaMediaTech](#) and Avolus

Today I am a Board member of the 1st cosmetics group in Russia in charge at the Arnest Board level of Corporate Governance, Governmental relations, International major accounts management, Internal/External communication and HR.

What is the idea behind AviaMedia Tech?

The idea behind [AviaMediatech](#) is a consulting and Capital Services company capable of 1) incubating companies 2) fund-raising 3) consulting SME/Family businesses/ Fortune 500 companies at Management and Board levels with a focus on 3 original industries- Aviation, Media and Technology.

What were the initial hurdles you encountered when creating AviaMedia Tech?

Creating a sustainable and scalable business model, not being taken over by managing the incubated companies (AVOLUS/VHLC/KHC), not being able to become a Venture Capital Fund to finance as I was not coming from an Investment banking background but from an industrial one.

How did the MBA program at HEC Paris help you create your business?

13 years ago, HEC Paris MBA gave me the tool box to do all this with strategy/finance/marketing skills.

What are your goals in the next 5 years?

Grow AviaMediaTech Ltd to £1M revenue and create/turnaround 2-3 more companies in the UK or France. I am looking at an airline at the moment and a helicopter operator!

What advice do you have for people wishing to get into entrepreneurship?

Be resilient

Your best memory from HEC Paris?

My strategy classes with Professor Pierre Dussauge and my thesis on Aircraft leasing with Finance Professor Laurent Jacques.



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