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Hello On The Way, thank you for inviting me on here. My name's Camille Perbost, I'm the co-founder of La Tournée. I studied engineering, which had nothing to do with the world of waste, or rubbish bins, or packaging design! I was more specialised in data science. And then in my final year, like many people in my class, during lockdown we watched conferences with Jean-Marc Jancovici and Gaël Giraud, and that was sort of our ecological awakening.

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And I was torn between data science and cutting back rubbish. Well, I totally went for it. And so I started out, right after my studies. It was 2021, I was 24, and that's when we launched La Tournée. So my sort of general ecological awakening happened during the first lockdown. After the subject of packaging, that came much earlier.

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In my second year I was lucky enough to stay with a host family in Germany for three months. And what's really interesting in Germany is that return systems are everywhere. So if you take a pretty emblematic German product, a bottle of beer, when you buy one at the supermarket, you pay a small deposit for the bottle. And when you've drunk your beer, you take it back to the supermarket, you put it in a deposit return machine, and you get your bottle deposit back.

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And that bottle is washed and reused. This idea had always stuck in my mind, and it came back to me when I got interested in the subject of packaging during my final year. My partner Juliette and I like to say that we met over a rubbish bin. We think that's a nice founding myth! We got interested in the subject of rubbish.

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We saw that people were producing more and more of it. Here's one small statistic: every French person generates over 500 kilograms of rubbish every year. And when you look at what's in our rubbish bins, you realise that the main problem right now is plastics. They're everywhere. The big problem with all this plastic is that it's really difficult to recycle.

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When it's recycled, it loses a lot of its physical properties. At best it's de-cycled, so typically plastic packaging goes into making street furniture and that sort of thing. It's really difficult to give it back its original properties, and be able to recycle it infinitely, as you might have thought, if you believed the marketing, not all the plastic is recycled, which is actually the majority of it: Right now, 80% of plastic is not recycled.

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It's either incinerated, so it's burned in thermal power plants, or it goes into landfills. And in those landfills that plastic breaks down and spreads all over the environment and has a devastating impact on our health and on ecosystems. We're only just becoming aware of the impact that all this plastic will have, given that it is going to be here for hundreds of years in our environment, and it's creating a real time bomb.

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So there's this clear consensus that we have to drastically reduce our use of plastic, and most of all, single-use plastic. Right now, when you look at your rubbish bin, what are the other sorts of packaging in there: There's cardboard, there's aluminium. So these are interesting materials. But it's still hard to get good recycling rates for these materials.

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And then you've got glass. So glass has everything it takes to be a good material. Currently, 88% of glass is recycled in France. But the big problem with recycling glass is that it's actually massively energy intensive. So you put your glass bottles out into the green bin, and they're sent to a sorting centre.

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And so that glass has to be washed for a first time. Then they have to heat it to melt it, and for glass to melt it has to be heated to 1,500 degrees. So that's a huge amount of energy, and then you have to re-mould the raw material to make new bottles. The whole process, even though it looks eco-friendly, and people say that glass is 100% recyclable, it's still really energy intensive.

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Once we'd got an overview of the state of the art of recycling, we realised that in fact it really is a solution, and you shouldn't totally reject recycling. It's still a solution, it's important to sort your rubbish, but it's not an optimal solution, at least it's not enough. And we have to go out and look for other alternatives. And so that's when I remembered taking bottles back to the supermarket.

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When you look at what other countries like Belgium, Canada, and Sweden are doing, you realise that return systems are out there, they used to exist in France, but have disappeared. But, if well executed, they could be much more eco-friendly. What's quite interesting about the return system is that actually there are still a lot of French people around today who remember it.

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Myself, when I talk to my grandparents and my parents about it, they remember that when they were young it was their job to return all the glass bottles and yogurt pots to the grocery shop, and that earned them a few cents for pocket money to buy sweets. So it's something that worked really well in France, and that has gradually been dismantled, leaving only plastics and recycling, but it's completely feasible and achievable.

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So why is a return system so much better than single use? Returnable glass bottles are a bit thicker, they're a bit heavier, but in fact they're built to last. Whereas today, you only have single-use packaging that's designed for one single use. With a glass bottle, it's designed for up to forty uses, so it's much stronger.

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And then, even though it obviously costs a bit more to produce them, in fact you amortise all the energy used, all the raw materials counted over the number of times they are used. With a properly optimised return system, you end up with usage that's much more eco-friendly than single use or recycling. An example that's often used in impact studies to quantify the comparative impact of a solution is the Meteor brewery in Alsace.

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So bear in mind that people in Alsace are real fans of the return system. They're the last in France. In fact this brewery currently uses 100% returnable bottles, which it has managed to develop on an industrial scale in Alsace. When you look at their environmental performance, they save 79% in greenhouse gas emissions, compared to the equivalent in lost glass.

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That also lets them save water, contrary to what you might think, as the return system obviously needs water for washing. But, in fact, you also need water for recycling. A properly optimised return system is far more eco-friendly. And that's why we're certain that this is a solution that we have to move towards.

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So once we'd worked out the state of things, we asked ourselves "Ok, so how are we going to get back to this return system?" And we started by doing what's called in the startup world, the "discovery phase". So we went out to talk to people, people in the street, and also to our grandparents.

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That's where we gathered all those memories. And, in fact, we realised there was total agreement among people. There was an Ifop survey in 2019 that said that 88% of French people would be happy

to go back to return systems. There was a clear consumer trend. So then we went off to visit manufacturers.

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So why did you actually switch to disposable glass? Is there any reason not to go back to a return system? And in fact we found that all these producers were also really interested, they were totally aware that something had to be done, but they kept telling us that they didn't actually know how to do it, how to wash bottles, what sort of bottles to use, and so on.

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I'm talking about bottles, but of course we also mean jars, all sorts of returnable packaging. How to could we get back to that, and most of all, how could we distribute these products? Because in fact, right now, there are no retailers that have a return system. There are no classic supermarkets where there are return terminals like in Germany, where people can return their containers.

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And so we realised that we'd have to build something ourselves. To become an actor for all those consumers who want to move towards a more zero waste lifestyle. And all those producers who actually want to test out things, who want to try to change, but who in fact don't necessarily have all the tools or the distributors to be able to do so.

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Bear in mind that the return system hasn't completely disappeared in France. It still exists in the hospitality sector (cafes, hotels, and restaurants). If you go to a cafe and drink a soft drink out of a glass bottle, if you look at that bottle, you'll see that there are small wear marks on the sides of the bottle.

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And in fact those are returnable bottles. So lots of producers have kept on part of their bottle return systems, but only for cafes, hotels, restaurants, and notably for aesthetic reasons. Because it looks better having a glass bottle on your table. But that meant in fact that there was still a sector in place, and we realised that we could start from this sector, and try to construct an organisation that would bring the return system up to date.

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And so once we'd made all those observations, we came up with the idea of La Tournée. La Tournée is a zero-waste online supermarket. The concept is very simple: you shop for all your everyday items on our website. All those returnable packaging products are delivered to your home, and on the next delivery round, our delivery person collects all your empty containers, your jars and empty bottles.

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And we take all those empty jars and bottles and take care of washing them and getting them back to our suppliers to reuse. And so in fact that's where the name "La Tournée" comes from. "La Tournée" means a milkman's round, in French. The idea is to make delivery rounds, delivering to various customers along the same route, as they did in villages in the past, for milk and for other products.

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So how exactly did we launch it? Because in fact we really didn't know anything about the world of logistics. So my partner Juliette and I were filled with a lot of innocent enthusiasm. We rented a small 15 metre unit, the sort you put your furniture in when you move house, we rented a van, and we bought an initial range of products, using a handful of catering wholesalers and producers who were already using a return system.

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And we started going to markets in the western suburbs of Paris with some flyers to try and talk with potential customers, and get them to place orders on La Tournée. And that actually worked out really well. Word of mouth took off straight away.

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And so very soon we couldn't make all the deliveries ourselves anymore. Our van was too full, so we got out first warehouse, we expanded our team, we got our first vans, and our first delivery people. And in fact all these initial customers and that initial appetite allowed us to expand our range.

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You realise very quickly when you start looking at mass distribution that volume is power. And so if you try and convert a producer to a return system but you've got no customers, then they're not going to listen to you. But once you already have a few hundred super-loyal customers, who are fans of the return system concept, then you've got a convincing case to push them towards trying something out.

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Not completely changing, but just trying something new. So then you've got the seed for change. And that's what we were able to do in that first step. We managed to get some initial producers to work with us, and to add new products to our range. That's what we've been doing for the last one and a half years. Our customer base has only been growing since then.

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We first launched in the western suburbs of Paris, so we serve the 78, 92, and 95 post codes, and we've just opened a second warehouse near Boissy-Saint-Léger, to serve the eastern suburbs of Paris. That's allowed us to have over 6,000 customers now, who are our main sales point when we go to see producers and we tell them, "Look, people want to switch to a return system, and you can do that with us!"

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Currently we've got over 6,000 customers. They're mainly families. All of them are currently in the suburbs of Paris. And what we're seeing in these customers, is that they're very attached to La Tournée, to the return system, and that in fact they're our best ambassadors. Right now we've got some really good word of mouth publicity.

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And that allows us to grow every day and win over more and more people. As we said at the beginning, the return system is really something that everyone agrees on, something that crosses generations. And what we're seeing is that of course there's this main market of families, but we've also got older people who've actually ordered for the first time online with us, because we're the only ones who have a return system.

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We've also got younger people who don't have memories from their childhoods, but they've been won over by the environmental impact. And in fact we're managing to reach a lot of different generations. We're reaching people who wouldn't initially define themselves as eco-friendly. Today, nobody loves rubbish bins, unlike other ecological subjects, which are more divisive.

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Everybody wants to change. We're offering them a solution that's really practical, that fits right in with their daily lives. Because returning your jars and bottles to the delivery person on the next delivery, that's not really a big chore. It's just as easy as taking out your rubbish bins. When you make that option available to them, with products that they like, then you realise that you can change a lot of people's habits.

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Currently our range has over 400 products. We're aiming to get to over 1,000 products. Our main constraint is of course that we want to work with producers with return systems. Obviously we have to support some of them, to convert some of them, so as to be able to have them in our catalogue. We've always listened to our customers about the products we supply.

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And in fact we quickly realised that it's very important to have an organic and local range, and of course to move in that direction, but we also needed to bring producers along with us, and in fact people have a very strong attachment to the brands that they've used since they were very young. And so we decided not to make the choice for our customers, and to offer them various possible alternatives for each thing they need, and provide them with all the information so they can make informed choices.

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So bear in mind that for producers there's is a law about this, called the Agec law, the anti-waste circular economy law, which sets out reuse targets until 2040. So every producer will be obliged to provide a percentage of their production in returnable, reusable packaging, and that percentage is going to increase as the years go by.

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So there's a legal obligation being put in place. That's the first thing. And then us, being distributors, who are well connected to the overall return ecosystem, of course the first thing we do is to put them in contact with all of the necessary people for implementing a return system at their own companies.

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So that's going to mean washing centres, who really have expertise in washing. Understanding how much it would cost, and the different constraints that come with it. The second thing is putting them in touch with packaging suppliers, who work specifically with reusable solutions. And then it's about showing them that we already have an existing customer base, that we've got a certain percentage of our customers who are already asking for their products, and that in fact it's really easy for the players who are already in place, pretty much everywhere, and so they can set up a pilot project, a test, so that they can see that it really works.

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What we're seeing is that people have a very strong attachment to our brand and to our concept. Our customers, once they've really experienced the return system, once they've placed their first couple of orders, they see that it's really practical, that it fits right into their daily lives, and that it's as easy to give back a box of returnable jars as it is to put your rubbish bins outside your home.

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We're seeing that after one year we're only losing 5% of our customers, so 95% of our customers are staying with us after their second orders. And that's very strong leverage, including for producers. So in fact, currently, if you want to move to a return system, there are very few other producers who've already done that. And so you have a wide open opportunity to have a product that's appreciated by very, very loyal customers.

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So that's a really strong sales point for us to win over producers.

Our value proposition is based on a number of things. We provide a very convenient service. You don't have to go to the supermarket to do your shopping anymore, you do your shopping on our website, and we deliver to you in lots of different time slots during the week. It fits into your day-to-day life really easily.

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And then, for rubbish, right now you take out your rubbish out three times a week. With us you only need to take it out once, and soon you won't have to do it at all. You won't have to worry about your rubbish bins anymore.

So when we launched La Tournée, of course we thought about the principle of deliveries themselves, which are quite controversial right now, as we're seeing its excesses in ultra-fast deliveries.

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We realised that deliveries could also be very eco-friendly if they're well executed. So we chose to employ all our delivery people on permanent contracts. And in fact we have delivery people who are assigned to certain zones. So each of our delivery people, when they deliver to our customers, they also establish a connection with their customers, there's a recurrence that's created.

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And in fact we've managed to create a relationship that's really rather virtuous. And for the actual delivery rounds themselves, always listening to our customers has been our guiding principle from the start. We've realised that getting your deliveries within three hours isn't all that essential, and that you can also plan for your shopping arriving the day before or even a bit further in advance, especially when it's recurring items, because with us our items are all everyday products.

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Currently we're working with warehouses that are set up locally, very close to our customers. So right now we've got a warehouse in the western suburbs of Paris, and a warehouse in the eastern suburbs of Paris. And that allows us to have delivery rounds that are highly optimised for delivering our customers' shopping. So in fact now, with La Tournée, you choose a delivery slot up to 24 hours earlier or later, and we can deliver to all of the customers in your neighbourhood who have chosen similar delivery slots as you, on a delivery round that's highly optimised.

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These delivery rounds are so optimised that we're able to greatly reduce journeys between each customer, and we're more eco-friendly than driving a traditional vehicle to the supermarket, which is what 80% of our customers do when they go shopping.

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So what are our next steps? The first thing is to continue to develop in Ile-de-France. Currently we've got two warehouses. We're aiming to open two more in Ile-de-France, and to continue densifying all of our delivery routes, and convincing more and more people to move to a return system.

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The next step in our expansion is moving into other towns in France, to other major French cities. And then in terms of our range, the idea is to continue expanding our range, and provide more and more products. Right now we've got 400 products. The idea is to move up to 900 or 1,000 products, so we can really cover everyone's daily needs.

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And doing that means convincing new producers and manufacturers to switch to the return system. That will also mean continuing to develop our own brand. So we've also developed our own-brand of returnable containers, called La Tournée, and we're continuing to develop our overall range while trying to standardise our packaging as much as possible, so that it can then be reused as much as possible, as easily as possible, by all of our suppliers.

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The idea was also to create our own brand, La Tournée, so as to be able to provide as many products as possible. And to do this we've teamed up with local actors, and local packagers too, local fresh produce producers. So for example, right now all our fresh products in the western zone of Ile-de-France come from a producer in Normandy, who is located 110 kilometres from our warehouse.

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And that's really something we want to do, working with partners who are as close as possible to our distribution zones, and who also actually allow us to standardise our packaging range as much as possible, so that reuse is as efficient as possible.

And the third thing we want to do is to do a lot more in terms of transparency, by providing an environmental indicator for all of our products.

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So there are initiatives like Planet Score that we really like, which give you an idea about the impact on different criteria for each product. And that's what we're working on with each of our partners, this environmental indicator, so that all of our customers can make informed choices and be aware of exactly what they're buying.

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So the major strengths of this model, and the reason why we believe in it, is that firstly, as we've set up our warehouses locally, we've got delivery costs that are really low, notably thanks to our optimised rounds, and also the fact that our customers really like the concept, and they've become attached to it, and so they'll stay with us as time goes on.

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With these two strengths, we've been able to build a profitable model. Our first warehouse in the west of Ile-de-France is about to make a profit. So how did we get here, and how are we going to develop moving forward? Bear in mind that mass distribution is a field that's pretty capital intensive.

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Obviously you have to rent a warehouse, you need vans, and you need big pallet racks in those warehouses. So my partner Juliette and I started out using our own funds. We invested some of our savings in renting our first space and renting our first van, as well as our initial stock of returnable bottles.

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The concept worked so well that very soon we got our first investors, our first business angels. So these business angels have also invested in some companies that you may know. Companies like La Ruche Qui Dit Oui, like Back Market, like Midnight Trains, who are trying to bring night trains up to date. So companies that have the same sort of mindset as ours.

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These first investors allowed us to rent our first warehouse, to continue to prove our concept, and to open a second one. And now we've have found new investors to take things even further, to develop our next warehouses, and then expand all over France by the end of 2024.

But there's what people don't see, all this seems very simple, it looks like any other online commerce site that you can see all over the internet, where you buy your different products, you choose your delivery window, and you get your deliveries.

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But in fact we've done everything internally. We've got our own warehouses, we've got our own delivery people, we've got our own vans, and so that means creating all the software to make everything work together properly.

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So in fact we've created our own internal warehouse management software, that's designed for the return system. Because all the current existing solutions don't allow for a return system. We have a solution that lets us optimise all our delivery rounds, according to our constraints. So the size of our cases, the autonomy of our electric vehicles, as of course you can't cover the same distance as an internal combustion vehicle.

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So you have to make sure that you're able to complete a given delivery round. And, of course, there are time constraints on our delivery people.

All these end-to-end solutions are where we come back to that initial data science. That's what allows us to have a service that works very well, with reasonable costs, which allow us to be profitable.

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At La Tournée, we're obviously very clear about what we're doing, but we're still tiny compared to the current mass distribution players such as Carrefour and Leclerc. But we're certain that things can change. And this change is going to come from various things. Obviously that will come from the government, with ambitious laws on the subject. We hope people will comply with the Agec law, which was an initial step, and that there will be even more strict laws to come in the future.

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And, of course, it's also going to come from us, as citizens, who are making new consumer choices by ordering from companies like La Tournée for example, or taking part in initiatives from associations like Zéro Waste France.

And obviously from companies, who aren't waiting around for government regulations to test things out.

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It's also only by testing things out that you can really work out their feasibility, and so it's essential, even if they aren't forced to do so today, to refocus on these topics, like return systems, and to take some risks. Testing out new packaging with players such as La Tournée, so that we can build the future of mass distribution.

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My advice about all this is really to ask questions. I think that's the first step to take to move towards change. These days we're exposed to a lot of marketing-speak about packaging. Slogans like "100% bio-sourced", "100% recyclable", when you've got no idea what the underlying recycling rate actually is. So it's really important to ask questions, to try and understand what's behind all these issues, so as to be able to make more informed choices.

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And the more you ask questions, the more everybody understands the subject, the more the entire agri-food industry will be forced to change, because actually those slogans won't work anymore.

So in order to ask the right questions, I've got a some resources I can recommend to you. First, there are a couple of Instagram accounts that I really like. The first is "M. & Mme Recyclage" (Mr & Mrs Recycling, in English), two packaging engineers who are a couple that are passionate about the subject, and who tell you what actually happens to the things you put in your rubbish bins.

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The second Instagram account is called "Écolo, mon cul," (or "Environmentally friendly, my ass" in English). It's a very simple principle. The idea is to look at comparisons between everyday products, their impacts. So there's packaging, but there are also other products. Comparing their environmental impacts, and going a bit further than preconceived ideas, because there are a lot of preconceived ideas about all these products.

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And the other two are books. The first, which was something of a revelation for me, was "*Recyclage: le grand enfumage*" (Recycling: all smoke and mirrors") The title is pretty evocative! It talks about all the flaws in the current recycling system, and what a self-sustaining system might look like. And my second recommendation is a book called "*Plastique, le grand emballement*" (Plastic, the Big Cover-Up) by Nathalie Gontard, who's a bit of a pioneer researcher in packaging, and explains the problem of plastic, and the tragedy that's going to happen with all these plastics that are accumulating everywhere on the planet, and we've got no idea about what's going to happen to them at the end of their lifespans.