

Challenge^s

Jean-Louis Bouchard (Econocom) : “Being pioneers of the circular economy is in our nature.”

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What does the notion of ‘common good’ mean for Econocom?

It comes from a question I’ve always asked myself: what’s the point of businesses? Because I’ve got a conviction. Since society gives firms all they need to operate (infrastructure, training, social protection for employees, legal security and so on), we entrepreneurs have a duty to give society what it needs, starting with work, which I think is a ‘treasure’, like Jean de la Fontaine said in the fable *The Farmer and His Sons*.

You also want to be a ‘responsible digital entrepreneur’. How’s that expressed when you lease out computers?

Being pioneers of the circular economy is in our nature. When I began in the field, I sold seven second-hand computers in my first year. This year, we sold 430,000 second-hand assets (computers, smartphones, printers and so on). Today, we have a range of assets worth around five billion euros and this includes six million assets of all kinds (computers, screens, tablets and so on). Up to now, we’ve been using an ecosystem of trade in second-hand objects. But we’re now going to insource this value chain by handling refurbishing and sales ourselves through Sofi Groupe, a Montpellier-based firm that refurbishes smartphones and tablets.

Is the circular economy in your DNA?

Absolutely – you can’t imagine how much! I started out in life by putting on the market second-hand cars upgraded by rural garages. I sold over 10,000 of them! So, fifty years later, when I went to Montpellier, I was amazed by Sofi Group’s capacity to refurbish smartphones and tablets on an industrial scale. We refurbish 120,000 of them per year out of the 900,000 refurbished in France in a market of 2.6 million telephones that are refurbished and resold. And what’s possible for smartphones is of course possible for all digital devices, including computers. So we’re going to be sending half of what we sell each year in the second-hand market to Montpellier, which means it’ll be refurbished in France.

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This will also help us better respond to public calls for tender, which require 20% of equipment to be refurbished in line with France's law on fighting waste and promoting the circular economy.

When you lease out equipment for data centres, isn't the challenge to also reduce their energy consumption?

Or to use heat from big computers more efficiently. For example, Econocom's building is heated entirely by a group of servers we have in the basement. And we've developed our EcoCarbon solution for clients. This measures their carbon footprint from digital technology and helps reduce it by 10–15% through solutions that make their energy consumption thriftier. Digital technology produces 4% of the planet's total carbon emissions! Offering part of the solution to this is also a way to serve society.