

CEO, designing strategy and corporate vision

human resources

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The CEO position can't be reached easily and requires a lot of qualities. Some have the opportunity to evolve to this position. Others, more adventurous, start a business. This does not diminish their merits, on the contrary. Here is an interview with a CEO of an innovative French SME: Mr. Laurent Destouches from Solutions Composites.

**interview**



**Laurent Destouches**  
CEO  
Solutions Composites

**JEC Composites Magazine:** Can you tell us something about your career before you became the head of Composite Solutions?

**LAURENT DESTOUCHES:** My interests led me to train in mechanics and then specialize in composites at the University of Bordeaux. In 1988, I went to work for the Lhotellier group, first in an R&D job and soon after, as head of two production units (the railway shop and the aircraft pipes shop). I left that sector in 1990 to become head of the engineering and methods department at Humery (metal construc-

tion and special machinery), and then in 1995, head of production of equipment for the disabled with the Inva-care group. In all, ten years that were more than enough to convince myself that my future wouldn't include being an employee! I needed independence and freedom. I was lucky enough to meet the managing team of Top Glass (Kemrock Group), a very dynamic Italian company that specializes in pultrusion. They were seeking to establish in France, so in 1998 they took me on as their French agent to develop their business here. To promote new business,

the "traditional" commercial operations of an agency rapidly incorporated engineering work upstream of the projects. That was the start of Solutions Composites, a little more than 10 years ago.

Our operations are organized around the following three activities:

Engineering and R&D: for ourselves, or on behalf of customers, we develop many different solutions to extend the field of application for composite materials (design and development (drawings, design analysis, prototyping), testing).

Marketing: we develop business for our partner Top Glass (Kemrock Group) in the French market through marketing (customer base development, contractualization, com-

mercial management, pre- and after-sales services, etc.) and project management (planning and supervising, roll-out, industrialization, monitoring worksites, etc.).

Construction: we are now reputed for our design and manufacturing of high-tech structures and constructions. We use composites, of course (from a range of technologies), and methods that include machining, complex assemblies of materials that are often heterogeneous, and incorporation of technical components.

**JCM: What are your duties on a daily basis?**

**L. D. :** Those of a typical small-business manager: meeting with customers and partners, communicating with them as much as possible, supervising and participating in R&D activities (my «exclu-



Footbridge of the kindergarten of «La Conque» in Vitrolles, France

**More information ... About Solutions Composites**

Solutions Composites represents the Italian pultruder Top Glass (Kemrock Group) on the French Market through Marketing, Sales and Project Management but is far more than that. The company can manage the development of a product all along its value chain: Design, FEA, prototyping & testing.

Its specialists provide help to rapidly select the « right » technology. Solutions Composites is known for the design and the realization of advanced structures or constructions. The company use composites from several technologies, mill and assemble complex materials often heterogeneous and integrate technical components.

**Know-how and technologies**

**Development**

- Design and provision of pultruded profiles (Pultrusion & Pullwinding)
- Design and provision of parts or assemblies (low and high pressure composite moulding, lay-up, infusion, RTM, SMC)
- Design of plastic, metal or other materials parts : assembling by welding, foundry, wood work
- Integration : design of assemblies integrating devices ou electric components, data systems...

- Industrialization : Blue prints, prototyping, choice of the proper production technologies, pre-selection of partners or suppliers, industrial process planning, SolidWorks CAM.

**Production**

- Machining: composites, plastics, wood and metal,
- Assembling by: gluing, riveting, welding,
- Assembling in workshop and on site,
- Tests : design, tuning and production of specific test means,
- Provision of components or assemblies.



The SUDI shadow screen (a true photovoltaic charging station for electric cars)

**L. D. :** I don't want to push the company into a pattern of unfettered growth. To foster balanced development, I'm personally committed to keeping a direct contact with the operation (meeting with customers, designing products, managing projects, etc.). But we've got all kinds of projects in France and perhaps also abroad. I'm inclined to think that we'll have neither the time nor the resources

busy for some time; I'm thinking in particular about the "Sudi" (Sustainable Urban Design and Innovation) charging station for electric vehicles that we are developing in partnership with the Hervé group.

The railway infrastructure sector generates challenging projects for us on a regular basis, including right now. We just finished a large safety equipment project for the Marseille metro tunnel extension. With our new VIA Composites brand, we've launched a full range of urban equipment. And then there is the building and construction sector. You've already glimpsed the results of one of these partnerships with the Ecole des Ponts Paris Tech's Navier laboratory and Lionel du Peloux, the Durashell founder. As for the rest, I can't say much more without revealing some of our innovations prematurely. ■

sive preserve»!), and also settling all the daily management issues that crop up.

**JCM: What is the greatest challenge you have faced in this job?**

**L. D. :** Probably the one of just launching a small business. My experience as an employee got confused with that of team manager, in that

I had kept away from some purely operational tasks. I had to very rapidly acquire certain "job skills", all by myself. The first steps – the ones that allow you to hire your first employees, for example – are high and very difficult to climb.

**JCM: What do you think your company will look like in five years?**

to do everything, so I can imagine a «multiple» future for us, with development based on multiple partnerships, allowing us to continue to explore all these subjects – a source of vitality!

**JCM: What innovative projects are you currently working on?**

**L. D. :** The renewable energy sector has been keeping us

**More information:**  
[www.solutionscomposites.fr](http://www.solutionscomposites.fr)