“My father was a huge influence on my decision to come to Columbia Engineering,” says Machlin, “and given my passion for math and science, it was just a natural thing for me to do.”

However, Machlin didn’t follow her father’s career path into academia. She had a mind for business. Machlin is the founder and CEO of New York-based ecoPlum, a socially conscious website that sells a range of environmentally friendly products. ecoPlum resells only for vendors that have earned third-party sustainability certification or can provide notable eco-labels—a type of seal of approval that verifies a product or vendor meets certain “green” standards.

There is an education component to the website, too. “We want to foster environmental stewardship by informing and inspiring people to be conscious of their daily habits,” says Machlin. “We’re rapidly becoming a trusted source for information on how to be green.” ecoPlum made its formal debut in 2010.

Machlin credits the rigorous education she received at Columbia Engineering for giving her the fundamentals to succeed as an entrepreneur. “My approach to challenges is to break down the problems, and when formulating solutions, I’m methodical about ensuring that they fit all the constraints. Columbia Engineering taught me that.” Engineering was the foundation of Machlin’s future as an entrepreneur, but her career began in industry. “Working for a larger company allows young entrepreneurs to learn,” she says, “and to build a network of professional contacts who are critical for a fledgling venture.”

Machlin spent three years at Deloitte as a management consultant, but it eventually became clear that greater professional freedom would be more rewarding and profitable, and that is when she branched out on her own. So began a consultancy focused on the managed health care industry. At the urging of a client in 1998, she launched her first business providing software and services tailored to health care providers. “We got our first contract with a major managed health care company the day my son was born,” says Machlin, a mother of two. “From there, both Plan Data Management and Noah were my babies.” Her son and Plan Data Management grew strong and healthy. In 2006, Plan Data was acquired by health care management solutions provider TriZetto Group.

Machlin then took a break from her career to focus on raising her children. But she knew she would eventually start another business. This time, however, she decided to align her venture with her personal values. Since the formal launch of ecoPlum, she has been happily enjoying this next stage in her career as an entrepreneur. “If you look up ‘plum’ in the dictionary, below the more obvious definitions is ‘extremely desirable, rewarding, profitable,’” explains Machlin. “That’s entrepreneurship for me. It has been an incredibly rich and rewarding experience to find the balance between being a good business person and being a good mom.”