

Water Everywhere; Well, Maybe Not Everywhere, and Maybe Not Forever

If you are weary of headlines about the collapse of the world economy and the hopelessness of resources being available to alleviating suffering among the world's poorest people, this may be your story.

by C. Blayney Colmore

Amid the tongue-clucking anger over the greed of rich Americans that has wreaked havoc around the world, NIKA, a start-up bottled water company, challenges the clichés about our avaricious spoiled young people who care about nothing except themselves.

Two young entrepreneurs, Jeffrey Church and Michael Stone, who rose to the top of the heap in the private equity jungle, restless with the Darwinian metaphor of Wall Street, set out to prove the entrepreneurial spirit could be harnessed to a wish to help shape a more humane world.

NIKA is the result.

NIKA bottles water and sells it. And gives all – 100% - of its profits to The Nika Charities, a non-profit enterprise dedicated to providing basic human needs – notably potable water and sanitation – in places that lack them.

Before you say, “Why do we need with another bottled water?” consider:

Water will soon replace oil – it likely did a long time ago in places where burning fossil fuels is a luxury – as the most precious, scarce and necessary commodity.

Humans lived a long time without burning the sunlight stored over eons in the earth's depths, but not for even a few days without water.

NIKA's water is purified through an innovative process that purifies the water beyond all standard industry requirements.

Not only do the two founders believe there is plenty more money to be made in bottled water, they are drawn to focusing their business on water as the powerful symbol as the next great crisis facing the human family.

NIKA has an initial target audience of young people because they hope to attract young people to their unique business model. They will invite them to apply to be “Agents of Change in which they can learn how to sell and promote

NIKA's water as their own mini-business with an eye toward success built not only on profit, but on making a contribution to human well-being.

Recognizing that even the most ecologically friendly plastic still produces pollutants, NIKA will make a 100% carbon offset to their manufacturing process by planting trees in NIKA forest (expected to be in Louisiana). They have already tested a biodegradable water container which is not yet ready. They are committed to moving to that once it is available.

And, incredibly, they are pledging that for every bottle of NIKA water sold, they will ensure that a corresponding plastic bottle is taken out of the environment and recycled. To do this, NIKA is working with schools and universities around the country to create plastic bottle buy-back programs where NIKA pays the sponsoring school a small fee for every plastic bottle they collect and recycle.

The focus of the foundation's work will first be on providing potable water and sanitation to places in the world that lack them. These projects currently include building a series of wells in Sri Lanka and Bweyale, Uganda to help communities destroyed by civil war and a water catchment system in Pimbiniyet, Kenya which will provide a centralized system to distribute clean water to the an village.

The UN estimates that 1.1 billion people don't have clean water and 2.5 billion have little or no sanitation. This results in the horrifying estimate that 4,500 people die every day from water borne disease. 90% of them are under 5 years old.

Much is made of hard-driving young entrepreneurs, and equally much of idealistic young people turning their backs on making fortunes to lend their energy to alleviating suffering. The two groups are usually separated by a huge divide.

NIKA is the unique marriage of the two equally important motives. For an inspiring look at how you might join in their work, go to www.nikawater.org.