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A great marketer can sell ice to Eskimos

August 15, 2013 - Front Section

Did you notice that public drinking fountains have disappeared or have been relocated - further away, harder to find? Remember when complimentary water was served in restaurants? (Yes, kids, air was free at gas stations.)

We can learn from the people selling H₂O how to market our own products: (1) Show pictures of romantic, relaxing settings (glaciers); (2) Use a cool name and graphics that implies your product is better; (3) Market your product as an affordable image-enhancer; (4) Sell convenience; (5) Promote your product everywhere; (6) Position it as a solution to a problem.

France's Dr. Louis Perrier was among the first to bottle and sell mineral water from a spring he bought in 1898. Since then, marketers have convinced us that 16 ounces of water (contents: water) is worth \$1 at a supermarket, \$2 at a parade, \$4 at a ball game, \$6 at a concert. Home delivery is a "bargain" - \$4 per gallon. More than milk or gas! Water refills are "free" at Disney World, though it costs \$80/day to get into the park.

Marketers have convinced us that bottled water is healthier than tap. It's a \$15 billion business, selling 10 billion gallons annually in the U.S. Many experts say bottled water isn't cleaner or safer. In fact, about 25% of bottled water is municipal tap water, reports the Natural Resources Defense Council. In a blind taste test in Atlantic City, one third of students preferred tap water over bottled brands.

The image-builders have convinced us to pay 2,000 times the cost of tap water for bottled water - actually a 4,000% markup since it takes five bottles of water to make plastic for one plastic bottle.

Beverage industry bigwigs have this marketing thing all figured out. It costs them a lot more to produce 16 oz. of soda or juice than to 'produce' the same amount of water. Now, when they promote drinking water (for hydration) as a safe alternative to soda, it's even smarter: They own both industries!

Ordinarily companies want their logos to stand out. But water bottlers aren't trying very hard since the demand is infinite. Competitors use 50 shades of blue on their labels: Nestle's Pure Life has a "splashy" logo. Coca Cola's Dasani bottle is blue. Pepsi's Aquafina uses ice-covered blue mountain peaks, and Danone, bottler of Evian (maker of Dannon and Activia yogurts), also uses bluish mountains.

Nestle's recent Pure Life's hydration campaign suggests we "enjoy healthy, feel-good lifestyles by swapping sugared beverages for water." (They market 70 bottled water brands around the world!)

Companies promoting flavored water and drops always make the additives' names (sorbitol, NutraSweet/aspartame, saccharin, stevia, sucralose or xylitol) microscopic, often in a hard-to-read color.

A government report says most plastic water bottles are discarded, not recycled. Convenience is good, but it's better to refill a bottle at home and carry it. (Clean well between uses.) Next time you're

relaxing with a refreshing bottle of water, consider: How much PVC is leeching into your water from that bottle?

All of this proves that a great marketer can indeed sell ice to Eskimos. So what are you selling and how can I help?

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