

Exploring Global Opportunities



These days, everywhere you look there is another person carrying a water bottle. It would seem that Americans are crazy for bottled water—according to the latest data from the International Bottled Water Assn., U.S. bottled water consumption increased in 2011, with each American drinking approximately 29.2 gal per year.

It turns out that Mexico is even more reliant on bottled water, however. The *New York Times* reported that Mexicans use approximately 127 gal of bottled water per year—more than four times that of Americans (“Bottled Water Habit Keeps Tight Grip on Mexicans,” July 16, 2012).

According to the report, Mexicans use bottled water not solely out of convenience, but out of need. Although the country has municipal water treatment systems, there is a constant concern over whether tap water will have a funny taste or odor, or contain dirt or mud—if it is running at all. For safety, people turn to bottled water, sometimes driving far from home to purchase it. The article even featured one entrepreneurial resident who purchases well water, treats it himself with a filtration system, bottles it, and then travels around on his bicycle to sell it to others.

While I read about the lengths these people go to obtain clean drinking water, I thought about the alternatives to bottled water, such as point-of-use or point-of-entry treatment systems. For many families—especially those struggling with money—a treatment system could save time and money in the long run, and make their lives easier. This led me to wonder: How are U.S. water treatment companies targeting the Mexican market? I saw an opportunity.

There is no question that there is a need and demand for water quality products and services, not just in Mexico, but in countries around the world; and opportunities in these markets will continue to grow as awareness of contaminants and water quality increases.

Bill Siegmund, owner of Pure Water Works Inc., a Michigan-based dealership, has leveraged international markets to diversify and expand his business. The international division comprises 45% of his company, servicing commercial clients from Canada to Brazil. According to Siegmund, this division helped Pure Water Works weather the economic storm of the past several years, because it balanced any regional economic fluctuations. (For more on Siegmund and his business, see “Water is Boss,” page 6.)

While expanding into the international market provides opportunities, it also presents a major challenge, especially for manufacturers aiming to reach new markets—product certification standards, which can vary widely from country to country. For this reason, it is crucial for business owners entering new markets to thoroughly research not just the needs of the marketplace, but also the product requirements for that country. (For more on international certification standards, see “Survival in a Global Market,” page 10.)

We live in a truly global society. As technology continues to advance, we are able not only to exchange ideas around the world, but also to exchange goods and products more quickly and easily than ever. The global economy provides many possibilities for U.S. water industry businesses—but they should certainly look before they leap.

Kate Cline

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coming up next month

- Regulations & Legislation
- Small Systems
- Testing
- Recreational Water Treatment
- Rainwater Harvesting
- Business Column

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