

### **The Water Initiative: The Point is Now**

Based on studies, surveys, conversation and just plain common sense, water is the issue to which people worldwide should be devoting more time and energy. While many corporations are looking at ways to lessen process related water consumption or create products to consume less water down the value chain, The Water Initiative (TWI) is moving straight to what they call "Point of Drinking," or POD, technology and solutions. "There's so much dialogue and studies about unclean water issues and so little funding and other resources dedicated to innovations and deployment of solutions," says TWI's Chairman, Kevin McGovern.

TWI feels the global focus needs to shift away from second tier needs such as oil and power generation when the most basic of all needs is not being met. "Contaminated water issues affect us today; so many other issues garnering far more support are tomorrows issues," explains McGovern. Currently focused on deploying solutions in Mexico, TWI hopes to employ local 10,000 people and provide safe, clean drinking water to 1,000,000 homes in Latin America, and moving on to other areas in need, through a process that involves stimulating the local economy as it lowers the rate of death due to waterborne disease.

### **Global Issue, Local Solutions/Diagnostic**

The global consensus about water is that each region, and even localities within those regions, have water issues specific to their geographic and social climates. A localized approach to solving water issues then makes the most sense. TWI has taken this view and internalized it, creating a business model that focuses deeply in any given region and works with local change agents to spread the word and sell their products. It's a marriage of water awareness, technology, social networking and business generation. By approaching water issues in this manner, TWI is taking on more than water and creating more than just new technology.

#### *Water Awareness*

It's the beginning of the TWI multi-step process, and something that any water solutions company ought to have: an understanding of water and the local issues surrounding it. According to TWI, "many 'made in USA' technological solutions have been introduced to low income markets, but have failed to gain traction because they do not address the communities' felt unmet needs and are perceived as foreign." (source <http://thewaterinitiative.com/TheWaterInitiative.html> under BoP)

To avoid this, the first thing TWI does is a comprehensive regional assessment that includes understanding the water supply, contaminants and their sources, infrastructure, and community needs. To aid in this process, the company is creating a front-end software program that will include all current water technologies. Used as a field diagnostic, this program will be able to process the

aforementioned factors against the list of technologies and suggest an optimal solution or combination of solutions for any given area.

Having chosen Latin America, an area of the world where pathogens (bacteria and viruses) as well as both arsenic and fluoride regularly contaminate water, TWI is learning immediately how to combat all of these common issues in the global drinking water supply. Not only does this deepen the company's water awareness from the get-go, it also gives unique insight that allows TWI to create comprehensive, cutting edge, meaningful technology addressing all issues in one device.

#### *Technology/Development*

The ability to create "tailored solutions to the local market" has manifested both new technology and a reliable process that can be applied around the world. WATERCURA®, possibly the gem in TWI's array of meaningful products, is the latest in the young company's product list.

One of the WATERCURA® products is an arsenic removal system designed to be installed in the home, which removes the common carcinogen to World Health Organization approved safety standards and disposes of it through a means that meets the US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Toxicity Characteristic Leaching Procedure. It also provides pathogen, chlorine (bad taste), and pipe particle removal, treats 1,000 gallons of water for continuous availability and relies on gravity flow. Even in countries like the United States where water quality is perceived to be high, arsenic is present and detectable in over 30 states at concentrations that exceed acceptable US EPA.

Having worked in Mexico since 2007, TWI uses four technological steps to create safe drinking water on a municipal or facility level in a process it calls Point of Drinking Technology. First the water is pre-filtered, removing particulates at least 5 microns in size. Next chemicals such as arsenic, fluoride, mercury, nitrates, nitrites, and lead are all removed accordingly. TWI is careful to use different absorption material based on the chemical profile revealed in the initial local water assessment. The process then improves color and odor of the water by removing tannins or chlorine. The last technological step disinfects the water. "Unclean water and resultant water borne diseases is the number one public health issue in the world today," explains McGovern. Adding a disinfectant stage allows for a "measure of assurance." Water is then stored, tested, and available for sale. TWI is also examining additional options, such as heating, cooling or even flavoring the water upon exit of the system.

#### *Social Networking and Business Generation*

While TWI conducts a water analysis and co-creates technology to its target market, the company focuses on community immersion. With a sound understanding of local issues, TWI works with a "carefully selected representative" or groups of locals to co-create the products for market.

Accomplished by mobilizing the “BoP” population through forming and supporting local businesses focused on the water technology at hand, TWI calls this TWI’s BoP Protocol. In the company’s words, BoP Protocol is “co-creation—the integration of the capabilities of the local community and the sponsoring company (in this case TWI) to develop a business that neither alone could develop and that addresses the community’s expressed needs.”

Partnering with local citizens in this fashion not only fortifies the local economy, it’s also a sound investment for TWI. As many governments and corporations focus on the ToP, or “top of the income pyramid” for the seemingly available dollars, TWI has found that in fact the buying power and influence of the bottom pyramid segment is substantial; to the tune of five trillion dollars annually. The company says, “Indeed, while per capita incomes may be low at the BoP, taken as a whole, there is substantial purchasing power.”

Once these local relationships are formed and the businesses thriving, TWI looks again to social networks for business expansion both within the region and to neighboring areas also in need. The goal is to create new local companies in all areas where water issues occur, thereby placing the health of the local water supply, citizenry and a section of the local economy squarely in the hands of the local people. “Entrepreneurial engagement is essential to implement sustainable unclean water solutions,” says McGovern.

In addition, upgraded versions of WATERCURA® will be marketed to middle class markets and home-developers to generate increased cash flow for TWI’s sustainability.

### **Future Movement**

Mexico has proved an exemplary place for the company to start, providing strong political support, grant money, and a population facing many of the same issues as others in need of clean, safe drinking water. From here The Water Initiative plans to bring its process to Africa, China and other countries where the need is great.