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Why do we drink so much bottled water?



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© How we used to drink water/ Hulton Archives/ Getty Images

The Convenience Industrial Complex figured out how sell us something that we don't need at a price that's too high.

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In her wonderful book Bottlemania, (https://www.treehugger.com/culture/book-review-bottlemania.html) Elizabeth Royte quoted a Pepsico marketing VP who told investors back in 2000: "when we are done, tap water will be relegated to showers and washing dishes." Or as the Attorney General on Idiocracy wondered, "Water? Like out the toilet?"



And then there are all those plastic bottles. How will they deal with that problem? Royte quotes a Coke exec: "Our vision is to no longer have our packaging viewed as waste but as a resource for future use." – anticipating the circular economy by two decades.

Bottled water has been around for a long time, but the business exploded with the development of the Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET) bottle in 1989, which was cheaper and lighter than glass or older plastics. So now there was a way to supply bottled water profitably, but what about the demand side? This is where the true marketing brilliance came into play.



Deer Park bottled water/Promo image

(/) My spouse Kelly tells a story about standing in the coat check line at the Art Gallery of Ontario when the woman ahead of her is told that she has to check her water bottle, it's not allowed in the gallery. The woman cried "but how will I stay hydrated?" We have been trained that we have to have water constantly, as if our body can't actually hold it. I am surprised that we don't see people with Camelback packs, walking with the sipping nozzle in their mouths. We are all told that we have to drink according to the 8x8 rule, 8 full 8 ounce servings of water per day. And of course, that we have to carry it with us. And it is not true.



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“The control of hydration is some of most sophisticated things we’ve developed in evolution, ever since ancestors crawled out of sea onto land. We have a huge number of sophisticated techniques we use to maintain adequate hydration,” says Irwin Rosenberg, senior scientist at the Neuroscience and Ageing Laboratory at Tufts University in Massachusetts [to the BBC (<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20190403-how-much-water-should-you-drink-a-day>)].

Obviously if it is 108° in a heat wave, you are going to drink more water. We are not being doctrinaire here. But as Jessica Brown writes on the BBC, (<http://www.bbc.com/future/story/20190403-how-much-water-should-you-drink-a-day>) our bodies are pretty sophisticated at telling us how much water we need.

(/) “If you listen to your body, it’ll tell you when it's thirsty,” says Courtney Kipps, consultant sports physician and principal clinical teaching fellow of Sports Medicine, Exercise and Health and UCL, and medical director of Blenheim and London Triathlons. “The myth that it’s too late when you’re thirsty is based on the supposition that thirst is an imperfect marker of a fluid deficit, but why should everything else in the body be perfect and thirst be imperfect? It’s worked very well for thousands of years of human evolution.”  (https://www.facebook.com/TreeHugger)  

But the marketing! We have to hydrate constantly or our skin will fall off. Elizabeth Royte notes that when she was a kid she drank from the tap at home, and when you went out you used public fountains or waited until you got where you were going. "Today's youth have grown up thinking that water comes in bottles, taps aren't for drinking, and fountains equal filth."

There are obviously places in North America where bottled water is a necessity. And if you are thirsty, a bottle of water is a lot healthier than a bottle of pop. But nobody needs to buy so much of the stuff, and we can't forget that the plastic bottle is essentially a solid fossil fuel. According to an article in LiveScience, (<https://www.livescience.com/3406-energy-footprint-bottled-water.html>)

An estimated total of the equivalent of 32 million to 54 million barrels of oil was required to generate the energy to produce the amount of bottled water consumed in the United States in 2007, according to the study, detailed in the January-March issue of the journal Environmental Research Letters.

(/) The bottled water industry has convinced us that we have to drink far more water, more often, than is necessary for our health and beauty. They have conveniently packaged it so that we can carry it around all the time and buy it wherever we want.

The Convenience Industrial Complex has also made our lives less convenient, by conspiring to remove water fountains; Even though there is actually an international building code requirement for them in public spaces, they often don't exist. For example, the International Building Code (but not the Ontario code) requires one water fountain for every thousand seats in stadiums, yet the 49,000 seat Rogers Centre in Toronto has 12 in total. Meanwhile, they charge \$6.00 for a bottle of water.



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Elizabeth Royte published *Bottlemania* in 2008 but since then, the situation has just gotten so much worse. The recycling rate of PET bottles is higher than most other plastics but is still at just 28 percent.

In 92 percent of the USA, the drinking water is just fine. In some cities, it is better than bottled (which is mostly filtered tap water anyway). The industry has convinced us that we have to stay hydrated, and then conveniently packaged it in plastic for us so that we could carry it around.



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But there is such a high price to that convenience, in dollars, in CO2 from making and shipping, in plastic waste in our oceans and landfills, all so that the Convenience Industrial Complex can sell us something that we don't even need.

[Bottled Water \(/tag/bottled-water/\)](/tag/bottled-water/)

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[Plastics \(/tag/plastics/\)](/tag/plastics/)



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