Bottled water is one of the largest sources of waste in public landfills. Each year over 40 billion plastic water bottles are put in landfills. Only a small percentage of these water bottles are actually recycled. The real question is why consumers are buying bottled water, when many times free water is available a few feet from the water vendor. The water industry is a 15$ billion dollar a year industry. These large companies have become experts in researching and designing their products, but marketing is the main strongpoint of these companies. Convincing people on why they should pay for something that they could get for free seems hard, but is apparently an easy task.

Companies first have to design a water bottle that is familiar to consumers, and is cheap to produce. People become familiar with the bottle design and easy availability. Over time the general shape of each water bottle does not change much. The only time the general shape of the water bottle changes is when they are trying to make it more environmentally friendly. Many companies have reduced the amount of plastic that goes into the caps and make the sides skinnier, reducing the overall amount of plastic used. Even with this reduction of plastic, many resources are put to waste. Water is a simple resource to take advantage of so there is not a lot of effort put into researching new products.
Marketing water to consumers is one of the larger parts of the product life cycle. There are 4 main points in selling water to consumers. Focusing on the image is the first step in marketing. Most companies depict mountains or glaciers on the packaging to make the consumer assume that’s where the product comes from. Even though many times that assumption is wrong.

Convenience is another large part in the marketing process. Bottled water is available if not everywhere, most places consumers would be located. If you’re out travelling, buying water is usually easier than trying to locate a public water fountain. Some consumers complain that bottle water tastes better. In one blind tasting, London’s tap water ranked third among 24 water products; in another, at a high school in Atlantic City, more than a third of students chose tap water over two bottled options. Another large marketing point is by offering your product as a solution to the problem. Bottle water companies don’t sell their products as an alternative to tap water. Instead they sell their products as an alternative to soda and other unhealthy drinks. By turning consumers into connoisseurs, these companies can sell the “flavor” of their water. Back in the 1970’s, ordering a bottle of Perrier was viewed as a symbol of wealth and class. Fiji water sells their product as having “a smooth silky mouthfeel” as told by an executive in the Washington Post.

Plastic water bottles are typically made of PET, or polyethylene terephthalate, due to the durability and practicality of the material. The PET is produced through a reaction of ethylene glycol and terephthalic acid, using petroleum hydrocarbons. One of the by-products of the production that may affect the bottles is acetaldehyde, which may occur during polymerization. This chemical is listed as a Group 1 carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. An advantage of this plastic, however, is that it is recyclable.
Once the PET is made, the manufacturing process of the bottles may begin. The PET is heated to a high temperature and placed into a mold to become a long tube. It is then placed into a separate mold in the shape of a bottle, where it is filled with pressurized air to take the shape of the bottle. A separate piece of plastic is then placed at the base to ensure the bottle keeps its flat bottom. As soon as the bottle fills the mold, it must quickly be cooled in order to keep its shape. There are various methods to do this, including directly pumping cooler air or carbon dioxide into the bottle or flowing cold water around the mold. If the bottles are manufactured in a continuous molding design, the bottles will have to be separated from each other and the plastic connecting them will have to be trimmed. If the bottles are manufactured in a separate molding design, any excess plastic that seeps through the mold will have to be trimmed.

Many companies use natural springs as water sources for their bottles, while some other major companies simply purify tap water sources. In most cases, the water is collected and undergoes filtration processes. Minerals can then be added to the final product, which the companies claim are for taste. The International Bottled Water Association conducted a study to see how much water actually goes into producing the water sold to the consumer. Their results, released in 2013, claimed that it takes 1.39 liters of water in order to produce just 1 liter of bottled water.

In 2013, the volume of bottled water exceeded 10 billion gallons. The lowered prices of bottled water assisted the rise of the volume because the bottled water was a healthier option than soft drinks and now a more affordable option than soft drinks. The home and office delivery (HOD) statistics of bottled water also increased by a significant 1.7%, which accounted for 12.1% of total bottled water volume. The amount of bottled water distributors make it accessible for nearly all citizens of the United States, with a major distributor located in almost every state.
The bottles of water are relocated from the companies to the stores where customers purchase the products. The most bottled water per year is typically purchased in mass merchandiser stores, club stores, or online where the price is noticeably lower than in grocery stores, convenience stores, or drug stores.

China, the United States, and Mexico are the world leaders in the volume of bottled water consumed. In 2013, China led the world in total gallons consumed with 10,418 million (the U.S. was a close second with 10,130 million). Mexico lead the world in gallons per capita, with 67.3 gallons per capita. The trend of bottled water shows that the rate of consumption will continue to rise over the years. It is important to have a plan to sustain the production of bottled water as its popularity and consumption rises.

All bottled water containers, both plastic and glass (although only preferred over plastic in Germany), are 100% recyclable. Unfortunately not all bottles make it to recycling centers and can’t be recycled. With the affordability of bottled water, consumers typically do not refill or reuse their bottles and instead purchase more, which is why recycling plays a major role in the discarding of old bottles. Penn State has taken a very important approach to the lifespan of plastic bottles with the implementations of water bottle fillers next to water fountains in popular places like gyms and commons. With this technology, more people replenish water bottles instead of discarding them because it is accessible, easy, and satisfying.
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