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# The Story of Bottled Water

By Louis Fox

this is a story about a world obsessed with stuff  
it's a story about a system in crisis.  
we're trashing the planet  
we're trashing each other  
and we're not even having fun  
the good thing, is that when we start to understand the system  
we can see lots of places to step in and turn these problems into solutions  
[music]  
one the problems with trying to use less stuff  
is that sometimes we feel like we really need it  
what if you live in a city like, say cleveland, and you want a glass of  
water  
are you going to take your chances and get it from the city tap?  
or should you reach for a bottle of water that comes from the pristine  
rainforests of  
Fiji?  
Well, Fiji brand water thought the answer to this question was obvious  
So they built a whole ad campaign around it  
it turned out to be one of the dumbest moves  
in advertising history  
the city of cleveland it like being the butt  
of fiji jokes  
so they did some tests and guess what?  
These tests showed a glass of Fiji water is lower quality  
it loses taste tests against Cleveland tap  
and costs thousands of times more  
this story is typical of what happens when  
you test bottled water against tap water  
is it cleaner?  
sometimes, sometimes not  
in many ways bottled water is less regulated  
than tap  
Is it tastier?  
In taste tests across the country, people consistently  
choose tap over bottled water.  
These bottled water companies say theyre just meeting consumer demand  
but who would demand a less sustainable  
less tasty, way more expensive product  
especially one you can get almost free in your kitchen  
bottled water costs that two thousand times more than tap water  
Can you imagine paying 2000 times the price of anything else?  
how about a \$10,000 sandwich?  
yet people in the US by more than half a billion  
gallons of water every week

that is enough to circle the globe more than five times  
how did this come to be?  
well it all goes back to how our materials economy works  
and one of its key drivers which is known is manufactured demand  
if companies want to keep growing  
they have to keep selling more and more stuff  
in the 1970s giant soft drink companies  
got worried as they saw their growth projections  
starting to level off  
there's only so much soda that a person can drink  
Plus it wouldn't be long before people began  
realizing that soda is not that healthy  
and turned back to [gasp] drinking tap water.  
well the companies found their next big idea  
in a silly designer product that most people laughed off  
as a passing yuppie fad  
"Water is free," people said back then.  
"what will they sell us next, air?"  
so how do you get people to buy this fringe product?  
Simple. You manufacture demand  
How do you do that?  
Well, imagine you're in charge of the bottled water  
company  
Since people aren't lining up to trade their hard-earned money  
for you unnecessary product  
you make them feel scared and insecure if they don't have it  
and that's exactly what the bottled water industry did  
one of their first marketing tactics was to  
scare people about tap water  
with ads like Fiji's Cleveland campaign.  
"When we're done," one top water exec said,  
"tap water will be relegated to showers and washing dishes."  
Next, you hide the reality of your product behind  
images of pure fantasy  
Have you ever noticed how bottled water tries to seduce us  
with pictures of mountains streams and pristine nature?  
But guess where a third of all bottled water in the U.S. actually  
comes from?  
The tap!  
Pepsis Aquafina and Cokes Dasani  
are two of the many brands that are really filtered tap water  
But the pristine nature lie goes much deeper.  
In a recent full page ad, Nestl said:  
Bottled water is the most environmentally

responsible consumer product in the world.

What?!

They are trashing the environment all along the products life cycle.

Exactly how is that environmentally responsible?

The problems start here with extraction and production

where oil is used to make water bottles

Each year, making the plastic water bottles

used in the U.S. takes enough oil and energy

to fuel a million cars.

All that energy spent to make the bottle

even more to ship it around the planet

and then we drink it in about 2 minutes?

That brings us to the big problem at the other end of the life cycle

Disposal. What happens to all these bottles when were done?

Eighty percent end up in landfills,

where they will sit for thousands of years,

or in incinerators, where they are burned, releasing

toxic pollution.

The rest gets collected for recycling.

I was curious about where the plastic bottles

that I put in recycling bins go.

I found out that shiploads were being sent

to India.

So, I went there.

Ill never forget riding over a hill outside Madras

where I came face to face with a mountain

of plastic bottles from California.

Real recycling would turn these bottles

back into bottles.

But that wasnt what was happening here.

Instead these bottles were slated to be downcycled,

which means turning them into lower quality

products that would just be chucked later.

The parts that couldnt be downcycled were thrown away there

shipped all the way to India just to be dumped in

someone elses backyard.

If bottled water companies want to use mountains

on their labels,

itd be more accurate to show one of these

mountains of plastic waste.

Scaring us, seducing us, and misleading us

these strategies are all core parts of manufacturing demand

Once theyve manufactured all this demand,

creating a new multibillion dollar market,

they defend it by beating out the competition.  
But in this case,  
the competition is our basic human right to  
clean, safe drinking water.  
Pepsis Vice Chairman publicly said,  
The biggest enemy is tap water!  
They want us to think its dirty and bottled  
water is the best alternative.  
In many places, public water is polluted  
thanks to polluting industries like  
the plastic bottle industry!  
And these bottled water guys are all too happy  
to offer their expensive solutions  
which keep us hooked on their products.  
Its time we took back the tap.  
That starts with making a personal commitment  
to not buy or drink bottled water unless the water  
in your community is truly unhealthy.  
Yes, it takes a bit of foresight to grab a  
reusable bottle on the way out, but I think we can handle it  
Then take the next step  
join a campaign thats working for real solutions.  
Like demanding investment in clean tap water for all  
In the US, tap water is underfunded by \$24 billion  
partly because people believe drinking water  
only comes from a bottle!  
Around the world, a billion people dont  
have access to clean water right now.  
Yet cities all over are spending millions of dollars to deal with all  
the plastic bottles we throw out.  
What if that money were spent improving our water systems  
or better yet, preventing pollution to begin with?  
There are many more things we can do to solve this problem.  
Lobby your city officials to bring back drinking fountains  
Work to ban the purchase of bottled water  
by your school, organization or entire city  
This is a huge opportunity for millions of people to wake up  
and protect our wallets,  
our health  
and the planet.  
The good news is: its already started.  
Bottled water sales have begun to drop while business is booming  
for safe refillable water bottles. Yay!  
Restaurants are proudly serving tap

and people are choosing to pocket the hundred of thousands of dollars they would otherwise be wasting on bottled water

Carrying bottled water is on its way to being as cool as smoking while pregnant.

We know better now.

The bottled water industry is getting worried because the jig is up.

We are not buying into their manufactured demand anymore.

We will choose our own demands,

thank you very much, and were demanding clean, safe water for all

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