

The Enigma of Bottled Water

George Carlin used to have a good bit about bottled water...”When did America get so thirsty that everyone had to start carrying around their own bottled water?”

That about says it all. We’re living in a society where we’re surrounded by water fountains, faucets, soda dispensers, coffee houses, and dozens of other drink-oriented outlets, and Americans insist on buying bottled water! I’ve never understood it. Are 300 million people that thirsty?

Bottling water actually began in England at the Holy Well in 1622. The first commercially distributed water in America was bottled and sold by Jackson’s Spa in Boston in 1767. Drinkers believed that such water had therapeutic properties.. In the 1800s, bottled water was seen by many to be safer than municipal water supplies, but its popularity declined in the early 1900s with the advent of water Chlorination, which reduced such public fears.

In 1977, Perrier launched a successful advertising campaign in the United States, heralding a rebirth in bottled water popularity. Today, bottled water is the second most popular commercial beverage in the United States, with about half the domestic consumption as soft drinks.

Just before that, DuPont engineer Nathaniel Wyeth patented polyethylene terephthalate (PET) bottles, the first plastic bottle to be able to withstand the pressure of carbonated liquids. Today, PET has replaced glass as the preferred material for single-serving bottled water containers due to its light weight and resistance to breaking.

Thus, bottled water sales have increased dramatically over the past several decades. U.S. sales reached app. 30 billion bottles in 2008, and that was a slight drop from 2007 figures. More recently, it’s estimated that some 50 billion bottles of water are consumed annually in the U.S. (200 billion, globally). Domestically, it’s a \$60 billion industry.

But, I’m not the only one that thinks this whole thing is a giant scam. Many religious organizations have raised questions about water ‘privatization’ is ethical. They regard the industrial purchase and repackaging at a much higher resale price of a basic resource as unethical.

Also, a recent documentary, *Tapped*, argues against the bottled water industry, asserting that tap water is healthier, more environmentally sustainable, and more ecologically sound than bottled water. Recent research has started to investigate how to reduce the public’s consumption of bottled water.

[en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bottled_water]

