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Chat: Jon Dee

Monday, April 13, 2009

Interviewer: 60 Minutes presents a live interview with founder of Do Something, Jon Dee.

Interviewer: Jon thank you for talking to us tonight, in our live online chat room.

Jon Dee: Hi, I am Jon Dee the founder of Do Something whose bottled water campaign is trying to reduce bottle water usage by 20%. Website is www.bottledwateralliance.com.au Thanks for having me.



BigGulp asks: Why are we 'mugs' to buy bottled water, isn't the price of any product based on what the consumer will pay?

Jon Dee: I think we are "mugs" to spend up to \$3 a litre for bottled water when you can get such high quality water straight from the tap virtually free of charge. In saying that, you have to give credit to the bottled water industry for making us believe that we need to spend so much money on bottled water when you can get something that's best for you straight out of the tap. It's very clever marketing.

Bottled_H2O asks: We are in drought, water bottlers are pumping it out - where are they getting the water? My guess is that they are using precious tap water - why are the governments allowing them to do this?

Jon Dee: Up to 90% of bottled water comes from ground water that has to be trucked to factories so it can be put into bottles. There is real concern amongst environmentalist about the sustainability of extracting that ground water. Especially as we enter a period of climate change and potential extended droughts. Environmentally people need to learn that we must drink our water from the tap and not from bottled water and if you are in one of the few areas where there is concern about tap water quality, a far cheaper alternative is to simply filter your water.

morison asks: Where in public places can you re-fill water to drink safely? Public bathrooms are dirty, business wont allow you to use taps.

Jon Dee: Do Something has been working with Manly Council to put in place revolutionary new water bubblers that have filters in them, that have been supplied by Culligan Water. These filters give free filtered water that is a good, if not better than bottled water. We are currently communicating with every mayor and waste officer at every council in Australia and are asking them to copy Manly Council by putting these filter bubblers into every community. I would strongly encourage you to ask your local mayor to following the Do Something bottled water campaign.

Aqua1 asks: The issues of plastic bottles was raised, but this is not unique to water-most milk is now in plastic bottles. Should we also suggest that people do not buy milk to get rid of the bottles. Just like plastic shopping bags, why are governments not demanding those who use plastic bottles to find an alternative?

Jon Dee: The better environmental packaging alternative for milk is the Tetrapak packaging. As regard the usage of plastic for bottled water, the better environmental

packaging. As regard, the usage of plastic for bottled water, the better environmental alternative is to get a refillable bottle. As for other types of soft drinks, PEC plastic is extremely recyclable and governments need to put pressure on to maximum the recycling of those bottles as they can be recycled time and time again.

michael asks: Hi. Can I please have more details on the comparisons of bottled vs tap water?

Jon Dee: Yes, we have those comparisons in detail at the Do Something bottled water campaign website: www.bottledwateralliance.com.au. This website also has more information and details on Manly Council's filtered water bubblers.

adamshields asks: Where we live the tap water tastes so full of chemicals even Coke seems a better alternative. Another observation is when you go to buy a drink of water it is as expensive as buying a sugar filled soft drink, aren't we supposed to be promoting healthy living?

Jon Dee: Absolutely, and the best way to do that is to drink tap water and not fall prey to the marketing campaigns of the bottled water companies. At no point in tonight's story did we suggest that the better alternative was the drink soft drinks. We were extremely clear in that people should save money and switch back to tap water. Indeed, the story pointed out that when bottled water was tested there were concerns about the quality of water in some of the bottled water brands.

iceywynters asks: Can bottled water left in a hot car then drank the next day lead to cancer, or is this in any way dangerous?

Jon Dee: The key issue about drinking water that has been left in a hot environment is that bacteria levels that increase as a result of the increased temperature. This is an issue especially if the bottle has been opened. Once you have opened the bottle of water, it is safer to keep it in the fridge. That is the main health concern with bottled water that has been left in a warm environment.

cloncurrygal asks: If Australia has a standard on water supply I would like to know who is policing it and if the public has any forum to complain or have the water supply tested. Cloncurry water is barely drinkable?

Jon Dee: In Australia tap water is required to follow with the Australian Drinking Water guidelines and water companies have to test water regularly for any bacteria and chemical contaminates. Having looked into this issue in some detail I have very comforted by the high standards required and can say without doubt that Australia has one of the highest quality tap water in the world. As consumers we need to be aware of that, because once we are I'm confident that people will buy less bottled water, saving our wallets and environment at the same time.

Shift asks: Hello, from what you know, does the bottled water contain fluoride or heavy metals?

Jon Dee: No it does not, when it comes to bottled water many Dentists have gone on the record stating their concern about tooth decay in teenagers. One of their concerns has been that younger people in particular are drinking bottled water that does not contain fluoride. As most people know, fluoride is added to tap water to protect our teeth and it is done an extremely good job of doing that. This negative health issue about bottled water is one of the key elements of our campaign, particularly when it comes to the issue of children drinking bottled water. With regard to heavy metals, bottled water is regulated as a packaged food standard to follow food standards in Australia and New Zealand and heavy metal contamination in bottled water is not permitted. The testing by 60 Minutes does however show some results which are potentially of concern and I would like Food Standards of Australia and New Zealand to look into those results to confirm that those brands in question do not pose any threat to public health.

damecello asks: Would you agree fluoride is a toxin?

Jon Dee: Not at the levels that are permitted in the Australian water supply. Indeed the public health benefits at the currently levels have been beneficial with regard to a reduction in tooth decay.

Eedra asks: John, is there a chance of the LGSA or perhaps a national org (OR THE GREENS) to back this campaign? One council out of 700 isn't going to cut it.

Jon Dee: We are getting tremendous indications of support from a number of councils

Jon Dee: we are getting tremendous indications of support from a number of councils from around Australia. But you always have to start with one role model that everyone else can copy. With my plastic bag campaign, I got the town of Coles Bay to come together to ban plastic check out bags. We are not in a position where many communities have banned plastic bags. I think the bottled water campaign has even bigger potential than the plastic bag campaign, because when people stop using bottled water they are saving a lot of money. As I pointed out with Charles Woolly, we are often spending more on bottled water per litre than we are on petrol. That makes no sense!

yorn asks: Tap water is privatised. We pay for water whether it is in a bottle or whether it is from the tap. Why does it matter where we get our water?

Jon Dee: You need to compare the price of bottled water to the price of water that comes out of your tap. There is no comparison. You can buy bottled water for \$2.5 or more a litre, for that same \$2.5 you could refill that same bottle once a day for many years for the same price. Simple fact is, bottled water is an overpriced rip off that people will do well to avoid.

kramulous asks: Hey John. Could you please talk about purified recycled water?

Jon Dee: I was brought up in the UK and for 25 years I drank recycled water. In Australia we need to come to terms with the fact that we live on the world's driest inhabited continent. The sooner that we accept recycled water, the better. As such a move could reduce stress on our water supply. Having said that, we also need to find ways to significantly improve the water efficiency of the agricultural sector, which uses approximately 67% of water in Australia.

Steve asks: Do you think there are situations where we can't drink tap water that warrant people buying bottled water?

Jon Dee: It depends. For most instances tap water will suffice. However if you have concerns about your local water supply for whatever reason, the far cheaper alternative is to get a water filter for your home. There are situations when people are travelling where bottled water is an appropriate source of water.

the_waterboy asks: Is there a serious lack of standards for bottled water versus tap water?

Jon Dee: Both standards are good, but if I had to choose once standard to back, when it comes to the water my children drink, I would choose Australian tap water standards every time.

andrewmac asks: Hi Jon. I much prefer tap water here in Melbourne, even with water restrictions, but the worry i have is using the same P.E.T bottle over and over can be harmful . Is there any fact to this?

Jon Dee: You're perfectly safe to use your P.E.T bottle a number of times, in fact you should question who is behind the rumour campaign to stop you using your single use bottled water. If you are going to reuse bottles on a regular basis, I would strongly encourage you to get a high quality refillable bottle as this by far and away the cheapest way to go.

michaelm asks: Hi John, I have read that due to calcification in our pipes (pre 80's housing) as well as lime and other small mineral deposits that build up over time, tap water may not be as healthy as when it is tested at distillation plants, is this true?

Jon Dee: With the testing that we have been involved with this has not been in issue, however there are houses that may be affected by this. If you are one of those houses then the easiest route for you to take is to get a water filter to your house. This will cost your 1-3 cents vs up to \$2.5 per litre for bottled water.

camo81 asks: Hi Jon, how does Australia compare with other countries in terms of bottled water consumption?

Jon Dee: We are amongst the biggest users of bottled water in the world. Despite the fact that we have some of the best tap water in the world. One of the results behind the Do Something campaign is that we want to expose this fact and save people money whilst saving the environment at the same time.

traceyjess asks: Hi, I have a question, I have been buying bottled water believing it is better to make my 9 month old sons formula with, am i wrong?

Jon Dee: Tap water is perfectly suitable for infants. However if you have any concerns about your tap water, than the cheaper and better alternative is to get a filter for your home. Personally I have two children and we let them drink tap water as we strongly believe this is better for their teeth.

Kkimberly asks: In schools they sell bottled water and encourage the children to buy it by putting vending machines around why isn't there any filtering machines, shouldn't this be the place to start?

Jon Dee: We are currently talking with a number of schools to get them to put filtered water (bubblers) into schools where children can refill bottles free of charge. Not only will this save families money, it will also reduce the impact that these children have on the environment. Telling children that tap water is better for the environment is a good environmental lesson for them to learn.

blenzo asks: If I use a filter, does that remove the fluoride from tap water?

Jon Dee: You can get filters that remove fluoride from tap water, these tend to be more expensive than the other filters which people commonly use. You can find more information about this at the www.bottledwateralliance.com.au

greg12 asks: Why don't the other states implement the bottle return refund that SA has it would encourage people and allow kids to earn some pocket money

Jon Dee: In South Australia the container deposit scheme that they have in place means that the recycling rate for soft drink bottles and bottled water is double that of other states outside of SA that do not have a container deposit scheme. The government have to look closely at this issue and industry and councils need to work together to improve the recycling rates of states that do not have the container deposit scheme.

mr-indo asks: Do you think campaigns should be set up, to 'advertise' the use of tap water instead of bottled water?

Jon Dee: Absolutely, that is the reason why Do Something launched this campaign to promote tap water over bottled water. And this is tremendous scope for people to save a lot of money while helping the environment at the same time. The Australian Government could be doing a lot more than it is currently doing to show people the many ways that they can save money while by reducing their day to day environmental impact. Bottled water is only one example of reducing food waste, energy use and the use of petrol are just some of the many ways where people can save money and help the environment without impacting on their quality of life. The sooner the government does more to do that, the better.

vin111 asks: I have been the biggest sucker in this because I'm a bit of a health buff. Your segment was really interesting to me as it will save me heaps of money. Do you recommend water straight from the tap, or is it healthier to have a filter? What do you recommend for the healthiest water?

Jon Dee: I would always recommend water in the first instance, unless you find information about your local tap water supply that proves otherwise. In the event that you have any concerns about your tap water supply, then your best option is to get a filter for your home. There are water filter jugs available in your local supermarket, however if you want the best filter as you have indicated then an under the sink filter is by far the best way to go. There are many brands on the market you should research.

Benjo asks: I missed the story, hope this wasn't covered. Do you feel government's must step in to stop this, or are you just hoping the public wakes up?

Jon Dee: We are trying to get the public to wake up to the fact that they are wasting a huge amount of money when they buy bottled water. There is a very strong argument that the water which comes out of your tap in many cases is better for you and it costs a fraction of the amount. One of the great things about doing this story on 60 Minutes is that Do Something is able to get this message out to a very wide audience. And as a result we hope that bottled water usage will go down. It is time we woke up to the fact that bottled water is tremendously over priced for that it is.

MiCCAS asks: Do you believe 'vitamin' water provides any benefits over tap water?

Jon Dee: When I talked to Charles Wooly about this issue, I said that we should expect to see an increasing number of brands that try to convince you that their brand of bottled

water is somehow better than other bottled waters. And image of a mountain of a pristine environment on their label will only get bottled water companies so far and I said I would not be surprised to see a growth in the bottled water market where vitamins are added as this will give companies a different marketing edge. Would I personally buy this kind of water over tap water? Absolutely not! I think it's just another type of marketing which is aimed to part us with our hard earned cash.

Steve asks: But what about situations where people need bottled water? Like events and music festivals?

Jon Dee: There are an increasing number of events where bottled water is not used and where refillable bottles are given out instead. Do Something will be campaigning to get major music festivals and other outdoor events to include a refillable bottle within the ticket price and to supply water to people free of charge or at a rate that is significantly lower than the price of bottled water. That way we can reduce the environmental and cost impact of bottled water, whilst insuring people are properly hydrated at major events. This will also save event organisers money with regard to the recycling or disposal of the empty water bottles.

Shane asks: What will people buy their children when they're out if there wasn't cold bottled water?

Jon Dee: What we do for our children is we take a number of refillable bottles when we go on a trip or go to events. This ensures that my children are properly hydrated. In the event that we run out of our own water supply and an alternative source of water is not available, then obviously bottled water is a fall back position. However I'm glad to say that we have organised ourselves well enough that it is very rare that we buy bottled water. This enables us to save money and the environment whilst also setting a good environmental example for our children. After all saving the environment for our children is a moral duty that all adults must have.

BigGulp asks: What about using filtering systems on our home water is this necessary and beneficial?

Jon Dee: It's not always necessary; in fact for many Australians our home tap water is perfect as it is. People should use filtered water when they have a concern about the quality of tap water. Companies who want to help the environment should get rid of the big bottles of water that are delivered to offices and should move to filtered water as the best option. This is the route that Westpac took in all of their offices when they got rid of the big bottles of water and switched to filters instead, in their 100s of branches and offices. Not only has this helped the environment, but it has saved them money too. Again, there is more information about this case study at www.bottledwateralliance.com.au

Interviewer: Unfortunately, we are out of time, do you have anything else you would like to share before we finish tonight?

Jon Dee: On behalf of Do Something and 60 Minutes I would like to thank everyone for the many questions that we had tonight, I'm sorry that we did not get a chance to answer all of them, however I will ask 60 Minutes for all of the questions that you gave us and we will answer those questions on our website at: www.bottledwateralliance.com.au. It would be great if everyone who took part tonight could get in touch with their local councils to get them to adopt the Manly Council filtered water bubblers and it would be wonderful if all of you could spread the message that stopping bottled use can save your money, it saves the environment too. Jon Dee, founder of Do Something! Interviewer: Once again thank you and goodnight.

Interviewer: This concludes our chat with Jon Dee, Sunday April 12, 2009. 2009
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