

The Future of Bottled Water: Waiakea Hawaiian Volcanic Water



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Interview conducted by:
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CEOCFO: *What is the vision behind Waiakea and Hawaiian Volcanic Water?*

Ryan Emmons:

Our vision is to create a powerful lifestyle brand that can inspire dramatic industry change for not only bottled water and beverage, but all of CPG. We want to provide a beverage brand [that people can feel good about](#) in a category that lacks any engagement or resonance on a deeper level.

CEOCFO: *Where did the idea for Waiakea originate?*

Ryan Emmons:

When I was in the Entrepreneur program at USC, I saw an opportunity in the beverage and premium bottled water world. Every premium water was differentiated solely through an exotic source origination story and design. These are obviously important, but I was surprised no one had attempted to address consumer trends towards environmentally friendly packaging, social causes, functionality (minerals, electrolytes, alkalinity), and powerful lifestyle brands. I had tasted some amazing water from my family's well a few years before that, and thought even though it was a long shot, that the mineral profile and smooth taste of the [volcanic water](#) was fantastic and unique. I had also been very involved in a few clean water NGO's in SubSaharan Africa at the time, and knew that whatever company I would start, regardless of the industry, its focus and mission would have to be on conservation and education at home in Hawaii, with significant clean water initiatives in Malawi Africa, where they have the lowest per capita consumption and accessibility of water on the planet. When you live in Hawaii and you don't stay at a resort, you can't help but see the unemployment and poverty in some areas that is directly related to need for better education programs.

So I started to put together [the Waiakea brand](#) with my Hawaiian cousin and my cofounder Matt over the next 3 years focusing on these 3 pillars of Health, Sustainability, and Ethics/Charity, and we finally launched in 2012.

CEOCFO: *Why do we need another water?*

Ryan Emmons:

The truth is that bottled water isn't going away. Waiākea was founded on the premise that we could offer [a better option](#) for consumers—something that was eco-conscious, healthy, and gave back to the community. Better to light a candle than curse the darkness.

Our goal was to create a transformation within the bottled water, beverage, and greater CPG industry, moving away from singular profit and towards a triple bottom line model that emphasizes people and planet. Waiakea has done just that by offering the first premium American bottled water that is certified CarbonNeutral, giving over 2% of revenue to nonprofit partners in Africa and Hawaii, as well as diligently working towards being the first bottled to be biodegradable in aerobic and anaerobic states.

We realize that these industries are only growing larger, their products multiplying, and in order to create positive, real and systemic change, it had to come from the inside-out.

CEOCFO: *What makes Waiakea healthy?*

Ryan Emmons:

Waiakea is loaded with [naturally occurring electrolytes and minerals](#), including silica, magnesium, potassium, and calcium. This mineral composition makes it a great source for fast hydration as well as providing the recommended daily-intake of silica.

Waiakea is naturally alkaline meaning no lab processes or decreased pH over time compared to other artificially alkaline bottled waters on the market.

“We have continued to work diligently on bioplastics and environmentally friendly polymers as well, and will be announcing our launch of the world’s first patented 100% recyclable and degradable bottle later this year, with our partner Timeplast... We have also created a fund that invests both our revenues and our employees time (paid in full) in various non-profit projects and events we feel strongly about that will kick off later this year. I think we can start to make a really big impact in education for children on the Big Island, and I’m excited to see what follows.”- Ryan Emmons

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about the 3 pillars - Health, Sustainability, and Ethics/Charity? When did you realize the importance of giving back?*

Ryan Emmons:

Originating in Hawai’i through both snowmelt and rain on the pristine snowcapped peak of the active Mauna Loa volcano, Waiākea® is [filtered](#) through thousands of feet of porous lava rock before re-emerging at its source, located at the eastern base of the Mauna Loa volcano in a secluded area surrounded by rich and bio-diverse forest preserves.

Through this natural process of filtration, Waiakea is infused with minerals and electrolytes, giving it a naturally alkaline pH of 8.2. Waiākea lacks any sour or acidic taste that lower pH waters offer. This unique, naturally alkaline pH is most likely what gives Waiākea its very slight “hint of sweet” aftertaste that loyal Waiākea drinkers praise it for.

In accordance with the Hawaiian practice and notion of “malama i ka ‘āina”, Waiakea is also proud to be first premium bottled water in the U.S. to be certified CarbonNeutral® for its variety of sustainability initiatives. Waiakea is the first premium water in the islands and the mainland to use 100% RPET bottles that have a 90% smaller CO2 and water footprint than competitors. Waiakea also actively participates in regional reforestation projects to offset the entirety of its shipping and operations to net zero. Lastly, the bountiful aquifer we are grateful to source from has a sustainable yield of hundreds of millions of gallons per day. In addition, in the next 12 months the innovative brand will launch the first fully recyclable and naturally biodegradable bottle of its kind. Normally it takes 1,500 years for a plastic bottle to biodegrade. But, Waiakea is ready to announce it has engineered its bottles in such a way that degradation is accelerated by nearly 98 percent.

Waiakea prides itself on its award-winning platform of social initiatives, the most significant of any major premium water and beverage in Hawaii and the entire U.S. Over 2% of Waiakea’s revenue goes towards local community programs and non-profits fostering education and environmental stewardship. Additionally, [for every liter bought](#), Waiakea donates a weeks supply clean water to people in need in Malawi through its clean water projects [in partnership with Pump Aid](#), which have already positively transformed the lives of thousands since 2012.

CEOCFO: *How has the company grown and evolved?*

Ryan Emmons:

Waiakea has grown to sell over 300,000 cases throughout the country, available in almost 10,000 stores. We have continued to focus on our digital marketing platform as we see Ecommerce continuing as the fastest growth segment in

F&B over the next decade, while we have seen most of our growth and profitability in the c store business. We are thrilled for our hospitality expansion as well.

CEOCFO: *What changed in your approach over time? How is the company and perhaps the product better today?*

Ryan Emmons:

A huge part of our success has been recruiting people and partners that make everyone around them better. When we were first starting we were extremely stingy with our cash and made some short term shortcuts that really affected us and cost us a lot more in the long run. This included people, but also included cap ex for production. With the right people, and the knowledge that we have to make the right investments, we now have systems in place to consistently take advantage of the opportunities ahead.

CEOCFO: *Would you tell us about recognition on the Inc.5000 list?*

Ryan Emmons:

It means a lot. My team works so damn hard and has gone through so much. Its nice when you are [recognized](#) in the middle of intense growth and issues abound. It lets you take a step back briefly and take it all in, before running head first into the battle that is business.

CEOCFO: *What is on the drawing board for Waiakea?*

Ryan Emmons:

We have continued to work diligently on bioplastics and environmentally friendly polymers as well, and will be announcing our launch of the world's first patented 100% recyclable and degradable bottle later this year, with our partner Timeplast. Another big focus for us will be improving the user experience for our online store to take advantage of the high traffic we have been seeing. Regarding our traditional brick and mortar, we will be adding another 10,000 stores in 2018, so we have to make sure we continue to maintain and improve our systems and production to handle such growth.

CEOCFO: *What is ahead for you?*

Ryan Emmons:

I'm really excited about our social initiatives at home in Hawaii, especially our work with Keiki Steps and Kama'aha Foundation. We have also created a fund that invests both our revenues and our employees time (paid in full) in various non-profit projects and events we feel strongly about that will kick off later this year. I think we can start to make a really big impact in education for children on the Big Island, and I'm excited to see what follows.

