

Blue Tech Forum 2011 Provides Game Changing Ideas and Perspectives on Water Industry and Technologies

Water and sanitation represent the greatest threat to the environment and human health. The pressures of water scarcity – a top threat to business – and rising energy costs and population growth are driving the need for across the board innovation.

Uniting key stakeholders involved in the development and commercialization of emerging water technologies, the recent [Blue Tech Innovation Forum](#) held in San Francisco featured radical and game-changing ideas for the water industry and fresh perspectives on familiar issues, and a speaker line-up that included thought leaders, seasoned water entrepreneurs, leading innovators, and venture capitalists.

Organized by [O2 Environmental](#) and [IBF](#) (International Business Forum) and described as a “[gathering spot for creative water technology as people strive to create solutions for the world’s water problems](#),” this water technology conference, now in its second year, was established to address industries’ growing need for new water strategies and technologies.

Key-noted by [NASA Chief Scientist Dennis Bushnell](#), a leading thinker on science and energy, the extremely well-organized event provided a venue for broad slate of water technology companies, corporate and municipal customers, researchers, and water industry thought leaders to discuss and learn about commercialization, investing, market trends, and challenges.

In addition to defining the challenges and the enormous investment opportunity, the Forum showed where and how water technology can penetrate markets and generate significant revenues, and featured success stories, lessons learned, innovative technologies, and panel discussions.



The Technology Showcase comprised presentations from CEOs of sixteen companies with each presenting for 8 minutes outlining their technology, target market, business strategy and company stage.

In this article, I will highlight some of the key themes and messages of the event.

The rate of adoption of new solutions is likely to accelerate. With heightened market interest in water technologies, it is an exciting time to be working in this industry. Scientific research and patent filings for disruptive, enabling technologies have increased and the rate of adoption of new solutions is also expected to increase in the coming years.

Innovation needs to be flipped on its head. It’s important to challenge conventional approaches, determine where value can be derived, re-evaluate systems’ efficiency, and come up with new ways of doing things. To embrace innovation, not surprisingly, you have to embrace change. Every organization should have a change agent at the executive level to transform ideas into reality and drive innovations in product development, financing, commercialization, distribution strategy, business plan execution, expediting growth.

Establish effective partnerships and alliances. Businesses need to leverage all partner relationships, including government, and establish alliances that help to dramatically change the economic and technical value proposition for customers. Build a network of collaborators. Define models for engagement and how all parties can profit from the collaboration. Determine if you can access or further penetrate your market through strategic partners or marketing partners.



Key partners can assist a company’s growth and development. Partner with others like suppliers and consulting engineers to execute on the growing sales demand for new water technologies, to explore alternative

uses of your technology, or to determine new markets or applications. New technology companies also need to work effectively with engineering firms for application and rollout of new products. Major water companies need to work closely with delivery partners.

Use high value market segments and aggressive marketing. Accurately define sales channels and market segments with high value. Evaluate manufacturer's representatives, strategic distribution partners, general sales representatives, direct sales, and Internet sales channels. Be creative in your distribution strategy.



[Paul O'Callaghan](#) gives [Pastuerization Technology Group](#) the award for best go-to-market strategy.

Initiate strong brand, communication and marketing strategies to position the new technology. This may include technology papers, trade articles, blog postings, trade shows, direct mail and other customer communication channels. Don't underestimate the power of a strong communication and marketing strategy. Done right, they can appropriately position your company.

Venture capitalists add value, not just money. Venture capitalists, who were described as “the most optimistic pessimistic believers who say no all the time,” can introduce you to partners if they can see and understand your vision. Make sure to ask what connections they might have in the water ecosystem that can help your company drive strategic growth and achieve its goals.

Be able to showcase for a venture capitalist your team make-up, the top five things your company needs to accomplish in the next twelve months, and the advantages you bring to the marketplace. Be ready to answer the following questions:

- Can you make a difference?
- Is your company differentiated?
- Do you have a highly disruptive technology?
- Do you have value-added execution capabilities?
- Do you have access to high quality relationships?
- Can you define where you want to go?
- Are you and your team committed and passionate?
- Do you have the people with the energy to do something great?

Put the venture capitalists on the spot. Ask for names, connections, and partner opportunities (e.g., supply chain, licensing opportunities, acquisition targets, etc.).



Seller beware...while the water market is huge, it's a difficult market. Engineering firms are not incentivized to adopt new technologies, and managers may be indifferent to adopting new technologies. Rep networks are not clamoring to adopt new technologies for their value chain. Utility owners are more discerning about change and adoption of new technologies. Thousands of calls a week to city managers or public works officials may yield little.

Some final thoughts... Work on shortening and compressing the sales cycle for greater success. Move technology into a scalable platform more quickly. Think more creatively about how to structure deals. Fast track your proof of concept and your first paying customer. Keep simple the technology and your business model. Be able to quantify the value proposition. Make sure that you have some skin in the game and are able to stand by your disruptive innovation. Have faith that your idea is good, and be the bridge between innovation and the marketplace.



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