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Donald Cooper is respected by clients in over 40 industries as both a "thought leader" and a passionate visionary in the areas of marketing, service and business excellence.

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What the world's water crisis tells us about creating opportunities in any business!

I've heard it said that in Chinese writing the word symbol for "crisis" is made up of the symbol for "danger" plus the symbol for "opportunity". What a great reminder that where there is a crisis, there is usually both danger and opportunity. We are often quick to see the danger...but slow to see the opportunities.

For example, the supply and delivery of fresh, clean water to much of the world's population is currently in a state of crisis...and it's getting worse. But, for businesses that have anything to do with treating, delivering or conserving fresh water, the opportunities are incredible, unless they mess up completely.

Humans can live for weeks without food...but after three days without water, you're dead. Many parts of the world are running out of fresh water. Last year I wrote an article in which I predicted that, in the next 20 years, there will be more wars fought over fresh water than over oil. Now, Egypt is threatening some of its neighbours with military action if they dare to extract water from the river Nile.

Not only is fresh water in short supply in most parts of the world, the pumps and pipes through which it's delivered in most big cities are old, decrepit and falling apart. In some of the world's cities it's estimated that 20% of the water "produced" is lost through underground leaks in water mains. In Mexico City the number is thought to be 27%. It will cost hundreds of billions of dollars to rebuild the water infrastructure and nobody has a clue where all that money will come from. But the work must be done and the related pipe, pump and contracting businesses will boom.

As an aside, the whole of Mexico City, one of the world's largest, is slowly sinking because water is being pumped out of the deep aquifers beneath it at such a rate that the land is literally collapsing.

Then, there's the issue of the treatment and management of waste water...another huge challenge that has serious health and financial implications for much of the world. And that's another big business opportunity for those who develop effective solutions.

In the face of this looming crisis of supply and funding, it's strange that community water utilities generally do not charge their residential or commercial customers for the water they use. Sure, if you live in a municipality you pay a water bill, but that only covers the cost of treating and pumping the water to you. There's no charge in there for the value of the water itself.

That's a bit like buying a box of corn flakes and the price you pay covers the production cost, the packaging and the freight...but nothing for the cost of the corn itself. As preposterous as that sounds, that's exactly what we're doing with our water. When community water utilities come to their senses on this one, or are taken over by private enterprise, you'll see a huge increase in your water bill.

What the world's water crisis tells us about creating opportunities... (Cont'd):

Here's a water conservation lesson that we could all learn from the resourceful Aussies. Every toilet in Australia has a half flush and a full flush button...it's the law! Most of that country suffers from drought conditions and water is a precious resource. In Melbourne, for example, lawn and garden watering restrictions are so severe that it's hurting the business of garden centers and landscape contractors are getting out of the business. Homeowners simply won't spend money on lawns and gardens that are just going to turn brown and die.

So, back to the toilets. If what you put in there just needs a small amount of water to flush it away, you press the "half-flush" button and save water. Only if you need heavy duty flushing do you press the "full-flush" button. How clever is that?

And yet, in desert cities like Phoenix, Palm Springs or Las Vegas, I've never seen these toilets in use. They don't even have to invent them. The Aussies already did. They just have to copy the idea. It ain't rocket science, but nobody has picked up on the business opportunity here.

Much of the world's water, of course, is the salt water in the oceans that is not drinkable...nor can it be used for irrigation. The conversion of salt water into fresh water through the process of desalination is big business...and getting bigger. The Dow Chemical Company supplies the membranes to the world's largest desalination plant, located in Israel and General Electric, one of the world's smartest companies, has created a separate Division to build, equip and manage massive desalination plants around the world. One such plant in Algeria, North Africa will produce 53 million US gallons of fresh water a day.

Bottled water is also big business! How big? Globally, it's up to \$35 billion...and growing fast. Swiss based Nestlé S.A., the world's largest food company, is also the largest bottled water supplier. In second place is the DANONE Group, the French company best known in North America for yogurt.

But here are a few facts about bottled water that you may want to consider...

- About 30 percent of bottled water has chemical and bacterial contamination above the levels considered safe by state and industry regulators
- Some bottled water contains levels of arsenic that pose a potential health concern.

Your best bet for safe, clean drinking water is to put in an under-sink purifier. The reverse-osmosis type is very reliable. If you don't want to invest the money to do that, a simple \$30 pitcher with a charcoal filter is better than most bottled water. This creates more business opportunities in the supply of in-home water systems.

So, clearly, where there is a crisis, there are also opportunities. What are the crises or challenges facing your community, your industry, or your customers...now and in the future? And what huge opportunities could they bring?

For more information on how Donald Cooper can help you redefine and reinvent your business to create, deliver and communicate compelling, customer-owning Value, visit our website at www.donaldcooper.com , email us at sharen@donaldcooper.com or contact us by telephone in Toronto, Canada at 1-(416) 252-3704.