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How one agency plans to change the world one glass at a time

BODY:

New York City restaurant-goers often pay upwards of \$10 for imported bottled water. For one day next year, spending \$1 for what comes out of a tap can help buy water for people around the world.

The pseudo brand the dollar will buy is called NY Tap, and as of press time at least 60 of the city's best eateries have said they'd offer it to their customers on the designated day, March 22 (which is also known as World Water Day). The dollar being shelled out for a usually free glass of water will be donated to **Unicef's** global efforts to help alleviate the deepening water crisis around the world.

(The United Nations estimates that 1.1 billion people around the world do not have access to something that most of us take for granted: clean drinking water.)

"We decided to give water a label, give it a value and use it to make people aware of the issue," says David Droga, founder of Droga5, the New York agency behind the campaign. "It illustrates that a great idea can come out of the everyday. This has the potential to be a global property that happens every year."

The idea stemmed from a challenge issued by Esquire. Droga, who is featured in its "Best & Brightest" article in the December issue, now on newsstands, was asked to demonstrate Droga5's abilities using the magazine's pages. In the issue's Editor's Letter, David Granger explains that "a few of us met with Droga to see if he could come up with a way to demonstrate what his company is all about-- new forms of advertising and branding."

"My first question," recalls Droga with a laugh when explaining his initial meeting with Granger, was, "Can I change everybody's ads?"

But as he and his team grappled with the assignment, it slowly turned into a far larger project. "We wanted to create a brand out of nothing, [one] that was actually for good, something that we believed in," says Droga. (When forming Droga5 earlier this year, he adds, he wanted the Publicis-backed company to involve itself in pro bono efforts.)

A month later, the agency returned with a plan for a new project, as well as a charity (and partner) that would receive the proceeds, and a board of directors that includes New York chefs Eric Ripert of Le Bernardin and Tom Colicchio of Craft, and celebrities such as Pharrell Williams, Mary-Louise Parker, Rosario Dawson and Peter Sarsgaard.

The New York culinary community is the first to join the Tap Project, but the goal is to take the fundraising initiative national and then to cities around the world. Droga, who says he doesn't want the idea to "be owned by Droga5," is reaching out to 30 or 40 agencies to localize the campaign in each of their cities. Corporate sponsorships, still to be determined, will help cover costs like label production.

"From a fundraising perspective it was a really simple idea, water for water," explains Stevan Miller, director of partnership development at the United States Funds for **Unicef**, who admits he had a "Why didn't I think of that before?" moment when he first heard Droga5's idea. "It's golden," he adds. "The energy is around that one day, it doesn't take a lot of the restaurant's time to implement and from the donor part, it's a night out and a donation."

The Tap Project launched with two ads in the December Esquire and a Web site that was up and running as of last week (tapproject.org). One ad -- featuring water-filled glasses, each with the name of different city, a bottle with the NY Tap logo, and copy explaining the effort -- asks, "What if every glass of water quenched someone else's thirst?" The other pictures a NY Tap bottle with the line "Now with added karma."

Benjamin Palmer, president of The Barbarian Group in Boston, worked with Droga5 to create the Web site. "I'm really into the idea," he says of the shop's pro bono participation in the launch. "I drink tap water in my house. And on a certain level I think it's silly that we truck bottled water in from a tap in France to Massachusetts and yet there are people who don't have drinking water in vast parts of the world."

At participating restaurants on March 22, New Yorkers will find postcards on their tables featuring water-themed images donated by Droga5 client Magnum Photos and a NY Tap sticker that can be placed on checks to signal to the restaurant staff that a dollar should be added to the bill for the charity.

"It's a simple idea that everyone can get behind," says Maggie Meade, director of creative innovation at Droga5. "It's a dollar, and everybody goes to restaurants."

The international observance of World Water Day grew out of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Uniced) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The theme for next year is, "Coping with water scarcity."

Unicef's Miller says there is great potential for expanding this effort and he will work with the U.S. Funds for **Unicef's** international partners to create a global movement. "From a growth potential," he says, "it's just the tip of the iceberg."

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