

# INDUSTRYINSIDER

Natalie Locke Milne

## **Kori Chilibeck, founder, CEO and president, Earth Water International**

Spurred into action by the staggering statistic that 6,000 people die each day due to lack of fresh water, university student Kori Chilibeck set out to make a difference. Armed with his unique concept for Earth Water International, a bottled water company based in Canada that would donate 100 per cent of its profits to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, Chilibeck began pitching the idea to the U.N. in 2004. But, he says, "It was a long process," it took over three months to simply get a meeting. "I e-mailed, faxed and phoned, but no one from the U.N. was going to return a call to some university student in Edmonton," laughs Chilibeck. Eventually he was granted 10 minutes with a representative at the Ottawa branch of the U.N., where his novel idea caught the imagination of the organization. Given a trial period of one year, Earth Water started small with one customer in Edmonton. "Within six months we were selling Earth Water coast-to-coast in Canada, and two years later we have offices in San Francisco, Amsterdam and most likely Japan by Christmas," says Chilibeck. With his university career behind him, 29-year-old Chilibeck acts as the company's CEO and president, and manages a staff of 19 worldwide. In its second year in business Earth Water grossed over \$400,000, and is now experiencing growth at a rate of 350 per cent each month.



**Kori Chilibeck**

## Q&A

### **What do you love most about your job and why?**

"The better we do our jobs, the more people we help. A glass of water can save someone, but a pump in a community can literally change the destiny of an entire community and bring them back from the verge of death. Even a bad day here still makes you feel pretty good."

### **What is the most challenging part of your job?**

"Dealing with people. When I started Earth Water I literally ran the company out of my campus apartment. Within two years I went to a staff of 19 and a lot of those people are a lot more experienced than I am. My biggest challenge has been finding the right people and keeping everyone working in a cohesive, happy environment."

### **How would you describe your operational or management style?**

"We have a very open business culture here. It's relaxed, no dress code, and you can bring your dog to work if you want. We're a close office and we do lots of activities together – like going to the mountains, going skiing and going to the lake – to keep things fun and energetic."

### **What are the issues your sector is facing?**

"There's an environmental movement right now, and 99.9 per cent of bottled water is made with PET plastic, which is an environmentally damaging product specifically because it's not recycled that much – or not as much as people think it is. PET is packaged around almost everything we eat, but the bottled water industry definitely takes a great deal of the heat."

### **What about opportunities opening up in your sector?**

"The bottled water sector is really saturated and highly competitive, with three or four of the biggest companies in the world controlling a huge portion of the market. But fortunately some consumers are now looking for independent local companies that are socially and environmentally conscious. I think that's where we fit in."

## INTHE SPOTLIGHT

**FIRST INDUSTRY JOB:** "This is it. I had to learn everything from the very beginning."

**FAVOURITE FOOD:** "I'm a big organic fresh vegetable and fruit fan."

**INDUSTRY MENTOR:** "One of my mentors is Yvon Chouinard, CEO of Calif.-based Patagonia, Inc., a clothing company. I did a lot of research on how he set up his company and I used some of his philosophies when setting up Earth Water."