

The environmental perks of DIY soda machines

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22 February 2010 04:00

When Sodastream was founded a century ago, it was a luxury device for the upper class. Today the DIY soda company rides high again, thanks to fizzy-drink lovers' eco-consciousness.

"It's great when a company has a reason to exist," says Sodastream CEO Daniel Birnbaum. "Every time we sell a machine, we think 'we just saved the world from a thousand bottles.'" That's not what Sodastream focused on in 1903, when it presented its first soda-making machine.

"For the first decades, our machines were pretty much just used by the aristocracy," concedes Birnbaum.

"In the 50's they became a household item. But three years ago, we realized that we're an extremely green company."

Sodastream's realization came at the right time.

Today Sodastream sells its soda-machines and 180 different-flavored syrups in 32 countries, including the United States, Mexico and most of the EU.

It remains the market leader in DIY soda machines, and for the past three years, sales have increased steadily.

"People are realizing that they can make their own Coke in 10 seconds and help the environment, too," says Birnbaum. "But we can't compete with Coca-Cola."

It can't compete with Coca-Cola's price, either: the machine retails for \$60 and up. The syrups and the fizz-adding gas cylinders add to the cost.

While regular consumption quickly makes the it pay for itself, Birnbaum concedes that the up-front cost turns people off.

"The environment alone isn't enough to make Sodastream a mass-market product," he says.

"We have to reduce the price of the machine."

Meanwhile, the Israel-based company is adding cylinder-filling stations in different markets — it's about to open two in Holland and Sweden — to reduce its cylinders' flight miles.

"There's a revolution happening," exclaims Birnbaum. "100 years ago soda-machines were about convenience. Now they're about the environment."

