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Y Water inventors find blow molding answer

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SAN FRANCISCO — Thomas Arndt wanted to create a line of children's waters with healthy, organic and sugar-free supplements.

Designer Yves Behar wanted to package those waters in something that was not just the typical water bottle, but that also would serve a second life as a toy.

Eastman Chemical Co. and machinery maker Bekum America Corp. are making both of those ideas possible, and Arndt's Y Kids water hits the store shelves later this year, in the jack-shaped copolyester bottle that Behar's company designed.

"We wanted the bottle to be the icon for the brand," Behar said during an Oct. 19 discussion on the project at the Industrial Designers Society of America's annual conference in San Francisco.

To make it possible, though, the firms had to come up with new ways to think about how to make and market water and water bottles — and the designer and entrepreneur had to learn more about plastics at the same time.

"I was completely naive about the plastics industry when I started this," said Arndt, who founded SmartKids LLC to create Y Water. "I thought you made a drawing, entered it into a machine, pushed a button and a bottle came out."

Arndt began with an idea — that someone should make sugar-free water drink with organic health supplements for children.

He came to Behar, whose San Francisco-

based Fuseproject design firm has been getting press attention for new approaches in old markets — including its participation in One Laptop per Child, a program to develop a \$100 laptop — and presented him with his proposal.

Behar was convinced that Arndt had a good idea and wanted to rethink the bottle so it would have a second life. The four-pointed bottle Fuse created can be linked and stacked to other bottles, building new shapes and turning it into something children can use again and again.

Fuseproject also looked at the marketing angle, promoting the health benefits in terms that children could understand. One blend aimed at boosting kids' immune system points out that, "sick days are only fun if you're not really sick."

But then the teams ran into a problem.

Because there are no preservatives, the bottle must be filled and capped while still hot —eliminating PET from the material list. And blow molders the companies consulted told them they could not make the bottle



Thomas Arndt and Yves Behar hold Y Water bottles.

Plastics News photo by Rhoda Miel

that Fuseproject designed.

"As we were showing the bottle, we had a lot of people who just didn't get it," Behar said. "We had several bottlers who saw it, and recognized what it could be, but said it couldn't be done."

Just as they hit a dead end, though, they heard about extrusion blow molding, which could provide just what Y Water needed.

Eastman, based in Kingsport, Tenn., had the clear copolyester resin blend that could take the heat and provide the structural support the shape needed, Bekum, with U.S. offices in Williamston, Mich., was able to come up with equipment that could produce it.

"Most people didn't want to take risks," Arndt said. "I was so glad to find partners like Eastman and like Bekum that did."

The first bottles of Y Water will be sold at Whole Foods stores in California this year, with a rollout set to the chain's stores nationally next year.

"There's always an opportunity to be creative," Behar said. "Most of the time, the naysayers can be proven wrong."