

EVENTS/CAUSES

IWC supports global marathon to prompt thoughtful water consumption

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Mina Guli in middle of 7 Deserts Run

By SARAH JONES

Swiss watchmaker IWC Schaffhausen is raising awareness for the global water crisis by sponsoring an activist's grueling grassroots feat.

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Thirst CEO and founder Mina Guli has set off on an expedition, aiming to be the first person to complete 40 marathons across seven deserts on seven continents in seven weeks. This initiative is aimed at getting a mass audience, particularly millennials, involved, enabling IWC to help make an impact by leveraging its own network of followers as participants.

"The goal of every company and brand is to establish an emotional connection with its customers and they are elevating their commitment to corporate social responsibility to achieve this goal," said Karen Kreamer, president of [K2 Brand Consulting](#), Overland Park, KS.

"IWC's commitment to the environmental and social responsibility is prominently featured on its Web site and is demonstrated through partnerships and sponsorships of events like the 7 Deserts Run," she said. "IWC has aligned the brand with this worthy cause to engage and inspire their customers."

Ms. Kreamer is not affiliated with IWC, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

IWC did not respond before press deadline.

H2O to go

"7 Deserts Run" kicked off on Feb. 1 in Tabernas, Spain. From there, Ms. Guli will make stops in Jordan, Antarctica, Australia, South Africa and Chile, ending in the Mojave Desert in the United States on March 22, World Water Day.

Throughout the 1,040-mile journey, she will be facing extreme climates, including temperatures as low as -9.4 degrees Fahrenheit and as high as 113 degrees Fahrenheit.



7 Deserts Run itinerary

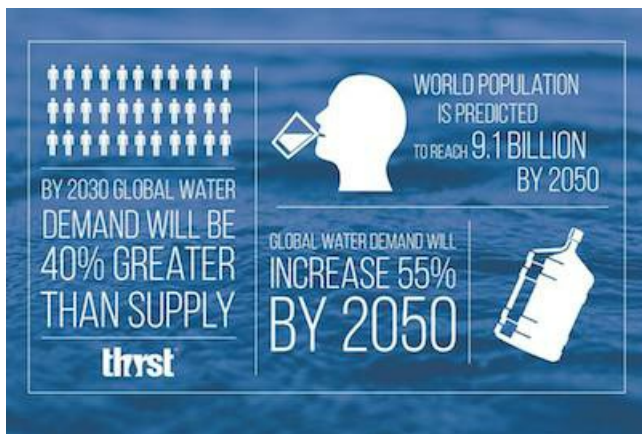
The World Economic Forum pinpointed a water shortage as the number one threat to society in 2015. Ms. Guli's 40 marathons stem from the 40 percent higher demand than can be met by water by 2030.

Ms. Guli's route will take her through some of the areas most affected by water shortage. She plans to document the difficulties they face due to insufficient water and bring back the footage to share with millennials, a generation that could be heavily impacted by lack of water.

Water scarcity affects both established and developing nations. In 2009, Barcelona ran out of water and had to be importing the resource from other cities in Spain and France.

Another issue is that only .007 percent of the water globally can be used to feed or fuel people, since the rest is either unsafe or unavailable.

On the Web site for the 7 Deserts Run, consumers can pledge their support of the initiative. The numerous marathons are meant to get 1 million people to make lifestyle changes that will equal 1 billion liters of water saved by World Water Day this year.



Thirst infographic

So far, 50,000 pledges have equaled 5 million liters. On the pledge page, an individual can select choices they are comfortable with, whether giving up chocolate, eating chicken instead of beef or buying cotton instead of leather handbags, and then indicate how long their changed activity will last.

Consumers can also share their pledge on social media, creating added awareness for the cause.

On the Web site for the marathon, IWC is listed as a sponsor, linking the brand with the cause. Consumers can follow Ms. Guli's journey on social media, keeping up with her cross-continent tour.

"Great partnerships are based on common vision, shared values and specific goals," Ms. Kreamer said. "IWC can have a positive impact through promotion of the 7 Deserts Run across all brand communications.

"Most importantly, IWC can raise awareness and inspire others to take action toward water conservation as part of their daily lives."

Cause and effect

With access to safe water a prime concern globally, a number of brands have pitched in to do their part.

Italian label Giorgio Armani continued to champion UNICEF's Tap Project in 2015 through special beauty products.

Throughout the month of March, the brand donated proceeds from sales of particular fragrances to the cause, which

seeks to provide clean water and sanitation to children globally. Through its multi-year partnership on this campaign, the brand has raised at least \$2.3 million, which translates to 92 million days of clean water ([see story](#)).

Also, Starwood Hotels and Resorts is furthering its efforts to reduce water usage across all its properties.

Efforts to conserve water will include more efficient irrigation, low-flow faucets, collecting and recycling water and an option for customers to request reduced housekeeping services in exchange for Starpoints, a voucher or a charitable donation. The initiative cements Starwood as a leader in water conservation efforts, emphasizes its global awareness and is likely to appeal to a younger, more environmentally-conscious demographic ([see story](#)).

"It is easy for a brand to sponsor an event or a cause, but it takes passion, consistency and action to truly make a difference," Ms. Kreamer said. "Consumers know when a company is 'good at doing good' and they respond accordingly with their trust, loyalty and wallet."

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