

Memories

Water Purification «as a Service»

*By Uwe Draabe, former proprietor and managing director of
DRAABE, Hamburg*

Uwe Draabe is the son of Hans-Jürgen Draabe, who in 1949 founded the DRAABE company in Hamburg. With its exclusive marketing and sales rights for Defensor, DRAABE grew into the leading source of air humidification systems in Germany. In 1982, Uwe Draabe introduced the company's first own innovation: a transportable purified water container with reverse osmosis, which DRAABE sold in an innovative rental package.

After DRAABE's acquisition in 2002 by Walter Meier Holding, Uwe Draabe pursued his passion, establishing Draabe Technologies GmbH, a small, exclusive company, with which he today engineers and markets audio record-cleaning machines worldwide.

My father had already been the exclusive importer for Defensor in Germany when I was born. So I grew up with air humidifiers, in fact, I had a Defensor Junior in my nursery.

Early on, I began working for my father's company. There was much to do, since the Defensor business was thriving. The 505 product lines sold especially well for us. While I was a student, I got around quite a bit for DRAABE in conjunction with Defensor, putting air humidification systems into operation, performing service on existing systems, etc.



At the end of the 1970s, however, a problem with Defensor atomizers appeared. Back then, most of the units sprayed untreated tap water, which led to the unwanted deposit of fine mineral particles on surfaces. This posed a significant problem

for the textile and printing industries in particular, because their manufacturing processes were becoming increasingly cleaner.

For this reason, Defensor took up the challenge to design a system for the purification of water. The devices, however, were susceptible to failure, which became a problem for me. Increasingly, I was spending my evenings and weekends on the road, replacing pumps or membranes in the water purifiers at our customers' facilities.

My father and I traveled several times to Switzerland where the former Defensor managing director Mr. Hans-Heiri Hürlimann received us kindly. He was an impressive, tall man. We tried to convince him of the merits of our idea to use reverse osmosis. But Mr. Hürlimann decided already to outsource the engineering of the water treatment.

'Well my son, looks like we'll have to do it ourselves,' my father told me.

I knew from experience what the main problem was: the membranes attract bacteria, which makes them permeable. So I experimented with new materials, and requested the manufacturer to produce polyamide membranes instead of cellulose acetate. This largely resolved the contamination problem.

The second key change we implemented was a new way of

marketing the product. Instead of selling the systems, we decided to lease and replace them in a regular cycle. That way, we could keep the technical maintenance of the products in our hands. That way, we could control all technical aspects, the customer would have no initial capital investment, yet would always have well-maintained systems of the latest generation. Today, we would say water purification ***'as a service.'***

DRAABE

To simplify the products' replacement, I designed an aluminum box, a transportable container, in which our equipment had sufficient space to perform reverse osmosis purification. In 1982, our first self-engineered innovation, the transportable pure water container UO, was market-ready.

We accomplished our goal and made Mr. Hürlimann from Defensor happy, too. We continued to sell Defensor and started renting DRAABE, as well, which was a win-win situation for DRAABE, for Defensor and for the customer. By 1990's, we had hundreds of rental clients. As they say in Hamburg *'it sold like sliced bread,'* the English equivalent of *'selling like hotcakes.'*

