

HEALTH DRINK COMPANY SPILLING INTO THE ASIAN MARKET

Looking in the mirror at the first few lines around his eyes sent Craig Keeland on a personal quest for the proverbial fountain of youth. His question: Could you have more energy, less aches and pains and live younger longer?

"It was in 1991 and I saw some people who were 65, but they looked 85," said Keeland, now 54 and a Frisco resident. "But, I also saw people who were 65 and looked 50 or 55.

"It was a total curiosity to me. One day, with the good Lord's help, I'll reach that age, too. At 65, I want to look and act and feel like I'm 45."

His answer, after several years of trial and error, is ViaVienté, an antioxidant health drink he launched in 2003. Sales of the tonic made from mineral-rich water and rain forest fruit from a remote area of Ecuador exceed \$100 million now.

But, the Plano-based private company's thirst for more market dominance in the crowded antioxidant drink market is not quenched yet. The company started selling drinks in China a few weeks ago and is awaiting final approval to sell the product in Indonesia. Entry into Thailand also is slated for 2010.

The product has been sold in Malaysia for more than a year. ViaVienté also is available in Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand and several other countries and territories.

"We are looking in the neighborhood of \$30 million (revenue) for 2010 in China," said CEO Keeland, who earned a master's degree in business administration from Wharton School and worked in banking previously. "Into Malaysia, we should sell about \$5 million."

But, expanding into the Asian market also required ViaVienté and its parent company, CK Global, to change the way the whole fruit puree was sterilized and bottled. Some Asian countries' product certifications require no preservatives be used and some of the formula's herbs are forbidden in China.

So, the company adopted an aseptic sterilization process. It removes heat quickly after the microbial load is reduced, so enzymes are not denatured and the product retains its essence. Sterilization occurs in seconds and the product is immediately cooled and bottled at 34 degrees. Then, the drink is poured into new packaging – a high-density, environmentally friendly polyethylene.

So successful, the sterilization process was adopted companywide in 2009. Via-



Craig Keeland, CEO ViaVienté

Vienté, which manufactures the drink in a California pharmaceutical aseptic lab, produces 250 bottles per minute.

Many food and nutritional companies use aseptic sterilization. But, Keeland said few antioxidant companies use it.

ViaVienté will enter the Brunei market soon and has interest from other Middle Eastern countries.

Keeland also is in early talks to bring ViaVienté to Poland, which could be the company's first European market. Columbia is a consideration, too.

"Every day, every week, somebody is calling from another country because they've heard about this product," he said.

An antioxidant is a substance, such as vitamin E, vitamin C or beta carotene, thought to protect body cells from the damaging effects of oxidation. One of the main ingredients of ViaVienté is resveratrol, also an ingredient in red wine

and said to keep people healthier longer.

While specific figures are difficult to attain and the market includes many large and smaller players offering various products, the market for antioxidants has grown substantially worldwide and products are offered in various ways.

ViaVienté, which has 40 employees in Plano, only sells drinks via the Internet in the United States. Rebecca Rice, vice president of marketing and communication, said sales via the Web make sense in U.S., where consumers are tech savvy. However, the company doesn't rule out retail sales in the future.

"Usually, the product is used 55 percent by women and 45 percent by men. Women make 85 percent of the purchasing decisions," Keeland said.

That's fairly consistent from country to country.

In China, independent sellers have retail displays in stores. Malaysian distributors purchase bottles from ViaVienté and sell it to retailers and direct to consumers.

Keeland first read about the antioxidant's health properties while researching at the public library and reading a 1970s National Geographic cover story about villagers in the Andes Mountains. The article stated villagers often lived to be 100, weren't fat and didn't suffer from heart disease or cancer because water has abundant minerals and antioxidants and produces plants rich in nutrients.

His idea was to use the rain forest's fruit as the base of an all-in-one health product.

He enlisted a team, which included Richard Cutler, who was the principal gerontology research scientist for National Institute on Aging; Mark Pedersen, former director of product development for Nature's Sunshine Products Inc.; and Linus Pauling, winner of Nobel Prizes in chemistry and peace, who died in 1994.