

Labeling their stories: Owater bottles now feature the everyday athlete

By Patrick Ball/Staff Writer

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CONCORD - At [Owater](#), the mission is all about offering health-minded athletes a tasty alternative to the syrupy sweet sports drinks of the world, but you won't hear that from them.

Not anymore, that is. The Concord-based beverage company has decided the message might sink in a little better if they let the customers do the talking,

and this spring unveiled a new line of drink labels featuring Owater athletes and their stories.



In the first batch of labels, which hit the shelves at several local supermarkets a few months ago, Red Sox centerfielder [Jacoby Ellsbury](#) is joined by several athletes from Concord, a softball league from Wayland and dozens of other ordinary athletes with inspiring stories for the everyman.

Take, for example, the paraplegic bobsled hockey player from Brockton. Or the triathlon team from Boston.

"I don't think Gatorade is going to put them on the label, but you read the stories and it's really inspiring," Owater co-Founder Tom First. "I want to go out and tell a story that this is better than Gatorade, and to go on the radio with the Boston Triathlon team is so much better than to say it myself. There's no way for me to tell it better than to have the athletes say it. And it's more believable to hear it from an unknown triathlete than paying Derek Jeter \$10 million-a-year."

Owater is not paying the 90 or so ordinary athletes, most of whom the Owater team encountered while traveling to triathlons, yoga studios and health food stores to hand out samples.

This kind of organic brand expansion has worked for First in the past, with his other beverage company, Nantucket Nectars, where telling stories (remember, they're Juice Guys) was considered a strength.

"One of the challenging things about building a brand like this is that, as much as people talk about eating well and being healthy, people are stuck in their ways," First said. "It's ritualistic.

That's why it's so important to find a way to tell your story."

This time around, it's like storytelling 2.0 — real stories with an online component suited for a world in which, as First says, "word of mouth has become word-of-Twitter." On its Web site, the company encourages anyone who loves Owater and has an inspirational athletic story to share it, and began receiving e-mails as the new line of labels popped up in the marketplace. "In today's world, there are so many avenues to communicate the stories out to the public," First said. "Now we have all these great ways to tell stories of local athletes to people across the country."

First expects Owater will keep athletes on the labels indefinitely, perhaps rotating images and updating stories over time. In most cases, the athletes were put on their favorite flavors, or on whatever label most closely matches the colors in their images.

In addition to several labels featuring First and other Concordians, there is another local connection to the Owater campaign. Concord artist [Edgar Stewart](#) created the illustrations that accompany the "Firststories" printed on the labels and also on the Owater [Web site](#) (www.owater.com).