THE LIST

Female founders of water tech start-ups

With International Women's Day approaching, GWI highlights 25 water tech start-ups founded and led by women.

120Water
Megan Glover *(CEO/Co-founder)*   USA

Cloud-based software and digital sampling
kits for water quality monitoring

Aquacycl
Orianna Bretscheger *(CEO)*   USA

Packaged bioelectrochemical
treatment technology

Aqua-Q
Ulla Chowdhury *(Co-founder)*   Sweden

Optical water quality monitoring and ozone
polishing system

AquaSeca
Nancy Hartsoch *(CEO/Founder)*   USA

Non-intrusive smart flow sensors

AquiSense Technologies
Jennifer Pagan *(CEO/Co-founder)*   USA

UV-C LED disinfection systems

Cerahelix
Susan MacKay *(Founder)*   USA

DNA-based ceramic nanofiltration membrane
technology

Colifast AS
Helene Stenersen *(General Manager)*   Norway

Real-time automated microbial
testing for water

FeelIT
Meital Segev-Bar *(CTO/Co-founder)*   Israel

Printed sensing technology for structural
and performance monitoring

Fibracast
Diana Mourato Benedek *(CEO/Co-founder)*   USA

FibrePlate flat sheet membrane
bioreactors

Fido Tech
Victoria Edwards *(CEO/Founder)*   UK

Software-as-a-solution for leak
reduction

Fluid Robotics
Nidhi Jain *(Co-founder)*   India

Digital pipeline mapping and condition
assessment

FREDsense Technologies
Emily Hicks *(President/Co-founder)*   Canada

Biosensors for monitoring
wastewater contamination

Fyld
Shelley Copsey *(CEO)*   UK

Digital platform creating analytics and work flows
from video for site workers

Ketos
Meena Sankaran *(CEO/Founder)*   USA

Automated real-time qualitative and
quantitative water monitoring

microTERRA
Marissa Cuevas Flores *(CEO/Founder)*   Mexico

Microalgae-based fish feed from wastewater

Mycometer
Lisa Rogers *(President)*   USA

Rapid microbial contamination detection

Nala Systems
Sue Mecham & Judy Riffle   USA
(CEO/CTO & Co-founders)

Chlorine-resistant RO membrane coatings

Noria Water Technologies
Sivan Cohen *(Founder)*   USA

Reverse osmosis membrane performance monitoring

Real Tech
Jodi Glover *(CEO/Co-founder)*   Canada

Remote water quality monitoring
with AI analytics

Scinor
Wu Hongmei *(CEO/Founder)*   China

Low-pressure membranes

SoLED

Hadas Mamane & Dana Pousty *Israel*
(Founders)

LED-based off-grid water disinfection

StormSensor

Erin Rothman *USA*
(CEO/Founder)

Manages stormwater overflows with networked sensors and analytics

Vapar

Amanda Siqueira & Michelle Aguilar *Australia*
(CEO & CTO/Co-founders)

Cloud-based automated pipe assessment

WaterShed Monitoring

Sonja Behmel *Canada*
(CEO)

Storage and analysis of water quality monitoring data

WeCo

Cécile Dekeuwer *France*
(President)

Closed-circuit flush toilets with onsite filtration and disinfection

EVENTS DIARY

IN FUTURE EDITIONS...

FROM THE PUBLISHER

Can these start-ups change the future of water tech?

Nearly two thirds of the companies highlighted on this spread are pushing digital technologies. Christopher Gasson asks if they can succeed in a hostile market.

Our list of female water tech entrepreneurs turned out to be a lot easier to put together than I had expected. In fact I am sure that the list could have been ten times longer if we had taken more time over it. The thing which surprised me most about it, however, is how it is dominated by digital technologies. Of the 25 companies listed, only seven of them could be said to be based on treatment technologies. 16 offer some kind of digital proposition, and seven of these focus on some aspect of digital water quality monitoring.

This could be no more than a reflection of the fact that it is easier to set up a digital analytics company than a physical water treatment equipment business. The former just needs a link to the cloud, and someone to supply a chunk of data to prove the concept. The latter requires much more physical investment in plant and machinery, as well as access to untreated water and wastewater streams.

Nevertheless, I think it is significant that digital technologies outnumber treatment technologies by nearly two to one. When we published our first Water Technology Markets report back in 2008, there were no digital technologies included. My main concern, however, is that digital technology is a notoriously difficult sell to the utility sector. If the 25 start-ups listed are representative of all water sector start-ups, then it seems to me that either a lot of entrepreneurs are going to lose money, or that the water sector is going to have to become a lot more open to digital propositions.

Back in 2019 we researched the reasons why digital propositions have proved such a difficult sell into the water sector, and we discovered that there were problems on both sides of the customer/vendor divide. On the customer side, there was often a lack of good data systems for digital service providers to build on, and there are a number of other obstacles inherent in the process of assessing, procuring and implementing digital projects which made it difficult to close sales to the water utility sector.

On the vendor side, the main problem was the tendency to develop new technologies on the assumption that utilities would want them, without really taking the trouble to understand the actual problems that their potential customers needed solving.

Obviously none of the new wave of digital start-ups is going to be successful if they don't take account of what their customers actually need, but can we expect them to overcome the problems on the utility side on the basis of enthusiasm alone?

I think there is good reason to be optimistic, and our list of female tech entrepreneurs is part of the reason why. Historically the utility sector has had quite a narrow business culture. It was led by engineers, whose career progression unfolded slowly over thirty years of stepping into dead men's shoes. On the one hand, this meant it took a long time for the water sector to reflect the broader changes which have happened in the workplace over the past thirty years. On the other hand, it created institutions which did not have the skillset to manage change when it came. This is reflected in the obstacles to digital procurement mentioned above: the lack of investment in IT systems, and the inability to assess, procure and implement digital projects.

What we have seen in the industry over the past 20 years has been a steady broadening of the leadership culture. The challenges that the world has thrown at the water sector have required a much wider skillset than environmental engineering. This has created opportunities within leadership teams for expertise in communications, marketing, information technology, creative finance, and sustainability. It has also engaged a much broader base of talented young people in addressing the problems of the water industry. You can see many of them smiling out from the page opposite. They are being the change they want to see in the water industry. Greater diversity is a sign that the water sector is learning to manage change. ∎