

# From Concept to Form

## Bringing New POU/POE Products to Life with Michael T. Baird

By Nate F. Searing

There's a process that is really fascinating to me," says Michael T. Baird, president of TST Water LLC. "Going from an idea on a napkin to having a physical product in your hand. That's what I like to do and that's what I do best."

Baird has a long history in the POU/POE industry. He began working with Hydroflow in its infancy in the mid-1980s, creating water treatment components, typically POU and small POE technologies. He spent more than a decade helping that company grow from an 800-square-foot office to its sale to Sta-Rite Industries in 1997. Since then, Baird has worked with, "nearly every company in the industry," developing new products and marketing existing lines in innovative ways.

Baird remained with Sta-Rite through 2003 when he decided to take his expertise in a new direction. Opening TST in January 2004, Baird now focuses on providing consulting services to POU/POE manufacturers, particularly their new product development and marketing programs.

While the specifics of TST's consultancy are not public because of proprietary concerns, the two-person company based in Oceanside, Calif., has quickly become a driving force in the industry.

"We have identified various new media technologies that we feel will be exciting for the water treatment industry," Baird says. "We are currently pulling together detailed marketing plans on how we will get this information into the hands of the right people in the right places. We've also had about three or four different projects where we've helped develop new proprietary type filters or systems. Those systems are almost ready to be introduced into the

marketplace, though they'll sell under their own names and not TST's."

For now, the company is setting its sites on modest growth through the remainder of this year and plans to have a booth at WQA Aquatech USA 2005 in Las Vegas this coming March. "The TST name will likely appear on the new medias that it will sell itself, however the true impact TST will have on the industry is in product development for other companies," Baird says.

The ultimate goal is to remain a small, focused operation that can fill the voids created by massive consolidations in the industry over the past two years.

"Bigger is not always better. There are a number of smaller niche opportunities in the industry that have been passed over with these recent consolidations. We hope to shape our services to take maximum advantage of those niche opportunities," Baird says.

It's a role that has grown out of his experiences watching small companies such as Hydroflow evolve into a much larger operation like Sta-Rite. And while he gained expertise in design and marketing while building small companies into large ones, Baird states TST will make an impact in a different, yet refreshing way. ♦



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**Employees:** 2

**Quote:** "You don't have to have 100 employees to be a player, and I think we are definitely a player."

—TST President Michael T. Baird