

Catching the Wave: the Next Generation of Surf Simulators

“If everybody had an ocean, Across the U.S.A., Then everybody'd be surfin', Like californ-I-A....”

Well what can you do if you don't have an ocean and endless summers? You can easily get some “baggies” and “Huarachi sandals” too, and it's a matter of personal choice whether you feel you can get away with the “bushy, bushy blonde hairdo”, but once you've got the look then catching that wave can be a bit more challenging, especially on a rainy day in Manchester. Bloolooop looks at the new breed of surf simulators.



Surfing has its own culture and enthusiast tribe.

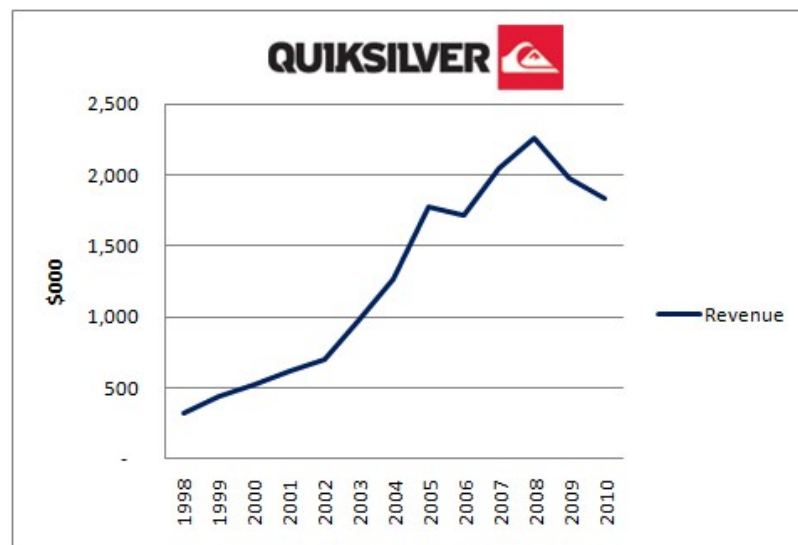
The image of beautiful people in beautiful places living the dream inspires us to shake off our real lives, if only for a day, and grab a board. We can't all be **Kelly Slater**, 10 time ASP world champion recently voted one of **GQ's** 25 'Coolest Athletes of All Time' (*see image above*), but over the last decade there has been a surge in interest in extreme sports including surfing, as we spend our leisure time engaging in experiences that help reinforce our values and self image.

Surfing is now big business: the Surf Industry Manufacturers' Association (SIMA) estimates in its most recent survey that the surfing industry in the US was worth \$7.2bn in 2008. The baby boomer surf dudes have taken their sport to the boardroom , creating strong brands like **Animal**, **Quiksilver** and **Rip Curl**

that have staked their place on the high street offering a promise of a cooler you with every purchase.

China

With strong brands and potential for huge revenues, it was only a matter of time before China got into surfing. In 2009 the first international **Surfing China** summit was held in Hangzhou where the Silver Dragon tidal bore on the Qiantang River was first ridden 800 centuries ago. Surfing China was founded in 2008 to promote the sport of surfing and the



related lifestyle industry in China. Mr. Chen Xiaoping, Deputy Mayor of Hangzhou Municipal Government said “We are expecting surfing on the Qiantang River will bring the City of Hangzhou a wonderful, exciting

and fashionable experience. At the same time, it also can improve city exposure and boost city tourism and develop other related industries.”

With its new generation of affluent thrill seekers and untapped potential along its Pacific coast, China could become the final frontier, with Hainan being tipped for a surge in tourism development. However, China’s waves will never rival those in Hawaii or California and concerns about water pollution, a vast inland population and a cultural antipathy to beach sports may mean that the Chinese will ultimately prefer to catch their waves away from the sea.

Innovation in simulation

Little wonder that the scarcity of perfect waves and our busy lives have led to a demand for an accessible, reliable surf experience away from the ocean. Surfers with their “go for it” attitude and passion for the sport are becoming creative in seeking that holy grail. Nothing can beat the real thing but when you can’t catch a perfect wave then surf simulators can fill the void and are now seen in theme parks, cruise ships, shopping malls as well as at dedicated surf parks and extreme leisure zones.

“Our brands represent a casual lifestyle for young-minded people that connect with our boardriding culture and heritage. People are attracted to ... the values they represent, including individual expression, adventure and creativity....Quiksilver awakens the spirit of surfing that lives in everyone. It’s a spirit that everyone can identify with and wants to be a part of.” Quiksilver Annual Reports

Blooloop talks to Bruce McFarland and Kyle Dent about making waves

One surfer who is intent to bring their sport out of the sea and to the masses is **Bruce McFarland**. His approach to offering a boarding experience is very different and Blooloop talks to him about how to make waves.

SurfStream®

Bruce McFarland (American Wave Machines, Inc. [AWM]) created SurfStream®, the world’s first true standing wave machine that delivers an authentic surf experience enabling surfers and body boarders of all abilities riding adjustable waves on real boards. SurfStream® has been installed all over the world at surf parks, water parks, hotel/resorts and retail locations. In August 2010, AWM signed a strategic partnership agreement with Polin Waterparks and Pool Systems.



How did you get started?

I spent my teens surfing and making surfboards then went to engineering school. Those things came together in my first venture developing sheet flow surf simulators. The standing waves were a revelation first shown to me in context of a potential waterpark product by inventor Ken Hill. The business was started with backyard R&D and shed based office. Sales began after showing photo and video of our prototype at our first booth at IAAPA 2004. Our first customer, Sandals/Beaches Resorts immediately recognized that SurfStream® was the best fit for their customers.

There are other surf simulators around. What makes yours unique?

Well, it's more a surf machine than a surf simulator. One can actually surf on it. That means using a surfboard and not a simulated surfboard. Also, surf in the ocean has many types and sizes of waves; SurfStream® typically works in four different wave modes covering beginning to advanced surfing and body boarding. No simulator does that. Only SurfStream® delivers both the authentic quality experience and the provenance of being developed by avid ocean surfers.

What does Surf Stream offer an operator?

The operator has the flexibility to operate SurfStream® in three primary business modes:

- A waterpark attraction with open lines and constant throughput as they do at Pirates Cove, Beaches TCI Resort and Spa. There are two entry points and up to 5 to 10 riders allowed simultaneously. Groups can also ride together.
- Pay per use mode. For example a 20 minute session can be sold to 10 riders at a time. Sessions can be scheduled ahead by an appointment desk, or over the web with our web interface software.
- Events and exhibitions. These can be scheduled during the day, or planned ahead as an entry cover charge party with music and libations.

How have you made the ride extreme enough for professionals but safe enough for younger kids?

Our patented modular wave system and fully variable stream conditions guarantee that the waves can be optimized not only for skill levels, but also adjusted for lower power usage when minimum operating costs are desired. We've found that for small kids, slowing the wave down helps them learn and speeding the wave up helps the bigger riders. This is a simple keypad button push which activates our preset programs.



Isn't surfing all about getting in the sea?

It is if you have the opportunity and we hope that people who surf for the first time on a SurfStream® will have an opportunity to transfer their skills to surfing in the ocean. But beyond that SurfStream® is a sports facility and attraction. It is fun and rewarding for anyone. It's also a training opportunity. The possibility of such a long ride is rarely found in the ocean. Balance and repetition can enhance personal fitness and health.

Is the current level of interest in surfing a passing fad or something longer term?

Some suggest that surfing has documented participation for over 2,000 years starting with reed surf boats ridden by Peruvians. Regardless, the sport has grown to nearing a saturation point of primary surf spots in developed countries and has spread outwards to every coastline, many large lakes, and in rivers from Amazon to Zambezi. It is so much fun that I can't imagine that any fad in interest wouldn't be replaced by people already waiting in the wings for shorter lines.

Are you seeing any key trends in the "surf simulator" industry?

We are seeing the growth of the SurfStream® based business in whatever opportunities entrepreneurs can exploit. We are seeing the SurfStream® added as upgrades to parks in separate pay schemes and planned into new parks all over the world. The other trend we are seeing is desire for larger SurfStream®s with more waves and new shapes.

China is being tipped as a growth market for everything including extreme sports. Are you seeing any demand from Asia?

We did our first installation in Taiwan. They had 20,000 visitors on opening day and the lines were 100's long. They also have a surf culture and some of their own videos made on SurfStream® can be seen on youtube. After that AWM was invited to the first China Surfing Summit. The government indicated that it valued the sport and sought support to bring it to China. While there is some coastline with surf only machine and wave pool based surfing would reach the interior.

What's your target market?

Our target operators are waterparks, hotels and resorts, and surf/sport parks. The small footprint allows indoor placement, so there is no geographical limitation. We are currently as far North as Sundsvall Sweden where the sun barely rises in the winter and as far South as Peru which is our first in the Southern Hemisphere.



Where have you installed SurfStream® and what has the response been like?

I mentioned a range of types of installations above. The response is uniformly enthusiastic. We literally have been told “thanks for inventing this” and “Before this resort had SurfStream® my son would read almost a book a day while on vacation, now he is riding the wave all day”.

How important is it to get your product endorsed by “faces” in the surfing community?

If its primary function were for competitive surf training or surf contests, then this would be critical. Right now endorsements are coming naturally when the facilities are built near surf populations and the industry gets a chance to use it and participate in the business. Our business model is

“open” meaning that there is opportunity for a wide range of participation from sponsorship to gear supply to training camps. I had one ex champion say before his first ride on the biggest barrel we have made so far “I’m a little bit scared”. I didn’t seek that, but it’s an endorsement of the power you feel in the air when you are so close to a real barreling wave.

AWM recently announced their partnership with Polin. What are the benefits of the partnership?

AWM and Polin share the same core business values: technology, innovation, quality and integrity. Beyond that, the benefits are a worldwide network providing SurfStream® sales into waterparks, installation support, and super high quality components for SurfStream®.

Sohret Pakis, Marketing Manager, Polin Waterparks & Pool Systems says:

As of August 2010, Polin became a global distributor of SurfStream® outside US. Since AWM offers a unique surf machine system that can offer many waves with one machine, and since Polin has a very widespread network all around the World with over 50 distributors globally, this agreement has been a perfect fit.

Polin introduced AWM personally to its dealers in January 2011 during Polin's Dealer Convention in Antalya, Turkey. Bruce McFarland made a presentation that was greeted with excitement by our dealers worldwide. Plus, AWM and Polin Co. also have a manufacturing agreement, with Polin producing the fiberglass parts of the product. This arrangement will allow AWM and Polin to deliver SurfStream® unique patented technology with

competitive pricing and fast turnaround, also improving service and expanding product offerings for AWM and Polin customers. Moreover, this alliance will enable both companies to share best practices in lean manufacturing, quality systems, and product development. Furthermore, the agreement will position AWM and Polin to capture market share in new regions and industries looking to integrate high-quality, advanced technology, unique artificial wave/surf products into their facilities.

AWM and Polin are working together to assist customers with the development of dedicated surf parks and surf zones within waterparks and resorts. The combination of AWM's unique technology with Polin's unmatched business and technological expertise in composites manufacturing and strong partner network across the globe will bring added value to our partners and customers.

Finally, a word of caution.....

So whether we make it to the ocean or not, maybe we should finally note these words of wisdom from Kelly Slater, regarded by many as the greatest surfer of all time, about the perils of catching not just a wave but also the surfing bug: *“It's like the mafia. Once you're in – you're in. There's no getting out.”*

Header and image of Kelly Slater kind courtesy of surflines.com