



Watershed: Lauren Baker, of St James, takes a bottled water shower at City Beach yesterday. Bottled water sales are growing at close to 19 per cent a year. However, marketers admit it is a triumph of packaging over content. PICTURE: NIC ELLIS

Message – and profit – in a bottle

■ By Nick Miller

BOTTLED water is one of the fastest growing drink products.

This summer sees another handful of new brands, including one from Coca-Cola Amatil, most featuring funky

packaging and sports sipper tops aimed at the young market.

And even the salesmen admit it is the triumph of packaging over content.

In the past year, Australians bought 86 million litres of non-tap water, for \$200 million.

Bottled water sales are growing at close to 19 per cent a year.

This growth was a global trend driven by health concerns, Cadbury-Schweppes food and beverage marketing director Andrew Nowicki said.

But the key to sales was the packaging.

"It is the ultimate manifestation of a convenience society," he said. "People are paying for what is essentially a free commodity. They are really paying for the convenience of delivery in a bottle."

The core market was young, from teens to 30-year-olds, and slightly biased to females.

"The older consumer finds it more of a stretch to pay for something you can get out of a tap for free," Mr Nowicki said.

"But parents are now giving their children a bottle of water

when they used to give them a flask of cordial." A marketing executive from another company said the key market was the 16-24-year-old female. "That is where the smart brands are," she said. One of the factors driving sales was young women's body image concerns.

Coca-Cola recently introduced a new water brand called Pump, designed for active young men with the slogan: "This is bottled water with attitude, so get pumping!"

Coca-Cola Amatil corporate affairs manager Alec Wagstaff said there were a lot of new entrants in the water market.

"These days you don't see many drinking fountains around," he said. "People are increasingly reluctant to use them."

There was also a lot of profit to be made, with big retail mark-ups and a good margin for manufacturers.

Companies were developing more products to exploit new water niche markets.

Schweppes is about to introduce a series of flavoured waters — water with a slight twist of lemon or lime.

After that comes a new Evian water bottle with a handle.

And after that "sports water" — water with added minerals, like Gatorade without the sweetness and calories.