

WORLD WATER HUB SUCCESS STORY

JOSE RAMIREZ, CEO
MIKROFLOT TECHNOLOGIES
AND OPTIKTECHNIK



IMMERSED IN WATER TECHNOLOGY

Jose Ramirez, the CEO and driving force behind both Mikroflot and OptikTechnik, found his love for the environment while working to receive his M.S. and Ph.D. in chemical engineering from the University of Colorado-Boulder. After graduating, he refined that dedication toward finding technological solutions to environmental problems at a small startup in Toronto. As the startup grew and licensed its technology to more and more companies, Ramirez took a new job at Racine-based JohnsonWax Professional, one of the licensing companies. In just 12 years, he worked his way up through the company, and eventually oversaw the Global Research & Development division. At this point, Ramirez realized he missed being close to the technology and working in a smaller environment, so he left his position in JohnsonWax's Chicago facility and struck out on his own—leading him to Milwaukee and The Water Council's BREW (Business Research Entrepreneurship in Wisconsin) Accelerator.

“For early stage companies in this space, being located in the Global Water Center greatly maximizes your chances of success, because it will help you focus and adjust your business plan in accordance to reality,” Ramirez said. “If you can make it into one of the BREW Accelerator programs, even better.”

-Jose Ramirez

COLLABORATIVE ATMOSPHERE AT THE GWC YIELDS 12 STARTUPS

Ramirez first heard about The Water Council (TWC) and the Global Water Center from a BREW Accelerator advisor who was interested in some of his technologies. He liked what he heard and ventured from Chicago to Milwaukee to see the space. On his first tour of the Center with TWC President Dean Amhaus, he was introduced to University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee biological sciences Professor Rudi Strickler, and the two began discussing possible ways to solve technical challenges faced by his start-up, Mikroflot Technologies. The company specializes in a wastewater treatment technology for small companies lacking on-site treatment options looking to avoid expensive services that haul wastewater away or have their municipalities treat it. Combining Ramirez's knowledge of industrial applications with Strickler's experience in aquatic biology accelerated product development for Mikroflot Technologies.



Mikroflot Technologies uses tiny bubbles to reduce industrial wastewater



Despite living in Illinois, Ramirez said the collaborative environment TWC has created at the Global Water Center is far too special not to make the one-hour drive each way, every day. This environment paid even more dividends as Strickler and Ramirez put their heads together again to spin the idea for a second startup, which further addresses issues that some of Mikroflot's customers were facing.

The duo tapped the labs and talent resources available from the Global Water Center to launch OptikTechnik, which aims to simplify and streamline the on-site water treatment process. To help OptikTechnik reach its full potential, Ramirez also applied and was selected for the BREW Accelerator program created by TWC. The program helped Ramirez hone in on his business plan, and encouraged him to apply for the Governor's Business Plan Contest (GBPC), in which he went on to become a semi-finalist for both of his companies.

The increased exposure, from both the BREW Accelerator and GBPC, led to interest from local companies looking for partnerships and trials with the duo. Going forward, Ramirez said he hopes both companies will penetrate the U.S. and international markets as planned, while creating more partnerships that strengthen Milwaukee's collaborative water cluster.