

Championing *monozukuri* and sustainability

Faced with a dwindling domestic market due to Japan's aging population, Japanese SME manufacturers have focused more attention on expanding overseas. While championing *monozukuri*—the Japanese manufacturing craftsmanship philosophy that underpins the high-quality products for which Japan is renowned—these Nippon SMEs are also strongly advocating sustainability, which is an especially pertinent topic for those engaged in the manufacture of fast disposable goods.

These virtues have given Japan the edge over regional competitors, as emphasized by Daichi Hayashida, president and CEO of packaging maker Mikasa Industry. "There are several reasons why Japanese companies have innovated and become competitive in the global market. One reason is the innate spirit of *monozukuri*," he says.

"Mikasa's spirit of craftsmanship means we constantly strive to perfect our products. Our quality control and product development capabilities have been forged in the *monozukuri* spirit of pursuing

quality. We are confident that our expertise will enable us to play an active role in the global market."

Naris Cosmetics is also focusing on expanding its global operations and its eye is firmly on Southeast Asia, where it is working with local distribution partners. "We are trying to go to local areas and work with local sales agencies," says company president and CEO, Hiroyoshi Muraoka. "In Thailand, for example, we have a joint venture with a local company doing direct marketing sales and in Vietnam, we have an agent that distributes our product. In Indonesia, we collaborate with a drug chain company. We are manufacturing in Japan and exporting products to those countries and either the local agents or a joint venture company takes care of the sales."

Meanwhile, Suzuran Medical's approach to overseas expansion focuses on the implementation of a "Value Proposition Canvas" in order to identify and meet local consumer needs. "Aside from mainland China, we are targeting countries with growing productive populations in

Southeast Asia, Africa, and India, and have begun sales activities in Europe and North America. Our main products vary depending on the country or region. We have medical products in Japan, cosmetics in China, and baby products in Hong Kong. We respond to our customers' needs and provide what they need most," explains president Yasuhiro Kunieda.

Sustainability has long been a priority for Suzuran Medical, which manufactures cotton products for the cosmetic, sanitary and medical industries. "Globally, 50% of all pesticide use is for cotton cultivation. If we do not grow cotton, we can cut pesticide use by half and thereby contribute to the environment by eliminating soil pollution, which also affects human health," adds Mr. Kunieda.

"The global population continues to grow, which means that we should designate large areas of land to food instead of cotton production. Based on these concerns, we have been researching a way to produce cotton without growing it in a field, but in our production

plants. In a nutshell, we are trying to find sustainable solutions."

A leader in rubber-based materials used in areas such as sports apparel, health and aerospace, Yamamoto Corporation has been at the forefront of sustainability for decades, with its latest efforts focused on the development of technology to re-utilize recycled rubber. "We started this project of recycling rubber in 2010, and it took three years to develop the machinery with the machine manufacturing company. Since we have been continually doing the prototyping and testing, we now have achieved substantial success," says president and CEO, Tomizo Yamamoto. "However, we will try to improve the sustainability and performance of the recycled rubber as much as possible because our goal is to enable production of wetsuits from recycled rubber without changing the quality."

Championing *monozukuri* and sustainable manufacturing, Japan's SMEs continue to push for global growth with their high-quality products bearing the renowned 'Made by Japan' brand.

Innovative packaging for mutual sustainable growth

With almost a century of experience, offering a diverse range of cutting-edge packaging solutions to meet specific client needs continues to be the driving force behind forward-thinking company Nitto Pack.



"Through communication with our customers, people are acting as mediators to pass on ideas in an efficient, solution-oriented system."

Atsushi Gomi,
President,
Nitto Pack Co., Ltd.

"We continuously grow together with our clients and suppliers." This is the underlying philosophy behind Nitto Pack, according to company president, Atsushi Gomi.



Nitto Pack typical packaging

This focus on customer growth is a key for Mr. Gomi, who explains that Japanese packaging companies like his aim to create long-term sustainable businesses, something that Nitto Pack demonstrated throughout the challenging COVID-19 pandemic, managing to maintain overall sales volumes.

The company constantly strives for efficiencies, especially in its bestselling food-related packaging. For example, reducing the width of the already very thin film for mayonnaise bottles saves on plastic use and cost. Innovation plays an important role, says

Mr. Gomi, referencing Wide Open Cut (WOC), which won the 2006 Japan



Nitto Pack typical stand-up pouch Packaging Contest and was "developed in response to communication with our clients." It's clear that collaboration is king.

"You cannot just develop new products by yourself; you must work with customers and suppliers with foresight. Three years ago we introduced digital printing and we predict huge demand in the future." Mr. Gomi envisions this future with more environmentally friendly solutions to packaging, and with growth further afield.



"We are looking for partners domestically and overseas," he states. "We are open to working with foreign companies, and have welcomed visitors, most recently from Indonesia and the Philippines, to our 'open factory' and online tours to learn about us and work with us."



WOC® pouch

With digital printing expertise and ambitions for contributing to new packaging cultures, a shared, bright future lies ahead.

NITTO PACK
www.nittopack.co.jp

MIKASA INDUSTRY: Cutting-edge caps that customers can count on

A specialist in plastic caps, Mikasa embraces Japanese *monozukuri* to create high-quality products that also include bottles and other packaging materials. The century-old company is focused on global growth and a greener future.

Founded over a century ago, in 1912, Mikasa Industry chiefly specializes in plastic caps, with leading-edge designs that reflect the firm's motto 'originality and ingenuity'. The company's portfolio of expertly-crafted

Such is Mikasa's dedication to delivering well-made products that, while competitors might offer lower prices, the level of quality the company achieves simply cannot be ignored. "Let me give you

of their functionality and quality. The number of such success cases is increasing."

Mikasa's customers benefit from the proven problem-solving ability of its product designers, Mr. Hayashida adds. "For example, when shipping over the equator, the inside of the container may become hot, and the cap may be blown off due to the increase in pressure inside the bottle," he explains. "Olive oil brand owners had given up on solving the phenomenon, as there was no solution. However, Mikasa had the know-how to remedy the problem. We manufactured a cap that can protect the sealed state even if transported across the equator."

Mikasa's devotion to finding solutions for its customers is also behind the development of the New Revo Cap, which offers the same airtightness as a pull-open cap, but screws off for easier use. "We noted that the pull-open cap, which is popular in Japan, is difficult to open for the elderly," Mr. Hayashida says. "To solve this problem, Mikasa has created a new opening method in which the screw cap is rotated and the parts that contribute to sealing can also be opened at the same time."

Mikasa's notable creations additionally include its New Ton Cap, which is tamper-resistant without the need for a shrink seal. The cap was a prize winner at The World Packaging Organisation's 2021 Worldstar Global Packaging Awards. "The New Ton Cap allows for easy confirmation that it has been tampered with," Mr. Hayashida says. "In Japan, shrink seals are often used on caps to prevent tampering, but it's difficult for older people to open thin shrink seals. Without a shrink seal, the amount of plastic used is reduced."

The shrink seal-free New Ton Cap is an example of Mikasa's commitment to playing its part in a greener future. This is also evident in the firm's efforts to make its caps easily recyclable. "We've developed a structure to facilitate the removal of post-use



"Overseas markets are expanding rapidly and we have great expectations that our caps are beginning to penetrate those markets."

Daichi Hayashida,
President & CEO,
Mikasa Industry Co., Ltd.

caps from bottles," Mr. Hayashida notes. "The caps are structured for easy sorting and disposal by consumers. If separated and recycled, plastic waste is reduced."

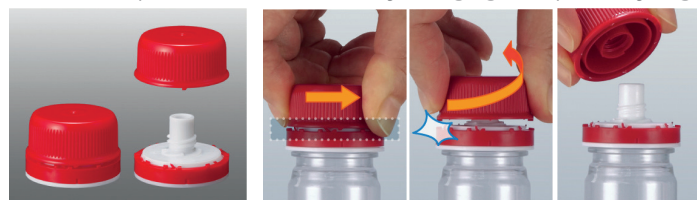
With domestic demand declining due to Japan's aging and shrinking population, Mikasa is working to expand its international presence. The company established Mikasa Thailand in 2014, and is targeting growth both in Southeast Asia and further afield. "The Japanese market is unlikely to expand in the future," Mr. Hayashida says. "However, overseas markets are expanding rapidly and we have great expectations that our caps are beginning to penetrate these markets. My main goal is to enter foreign markets and make them more profitable than the Japanese market."

"In the future, the company hopes to expand sales to Vietnam, the Philippines and Singapore, and then to more countries. The next focus is on the American and European markets. We feel that now is the time for further market entry."



New Revo Cap

Easy-to-segregate cap for recycling



Winner of the Worldstar Global Packaging Awards (New Ton Cap)

products also includes other plastic packaging materials, such as bottles and pouch spouts.

A company trait that complements Mikasa's 'originality and ingenuity' pledge is its commitment to *monozukuri*, the pursuit of perfection that's integral to the success of Japanese manufacturing. For Mikasa president and CEO Daichi Hayashida, *monozukuri* is all about listening carefully to clients' needs and fulfilling their exacting quality requirements. "We strive to meet the specific demands of customers," Mr. Hayashida says, "and we constantly look to perfect our products. Japanese clients are very demanding when it comes to quality."

an example of a client company that had initially purchased caps from both Mikasa and another manufacturer," Mr. Hayashida says. "While using caps from both companies, the client understood the advantages of Mikasa's products in terms of the ease of use of the hinge structure and pull-open mechanism, protection of contents and leakage prevention."

"If we can propose the exact function the customer wants in its caps, our products will be recognized. Our caps look very simple, but they have high functionality. Companies that previously said they could not use Mikasa's products because they were too expensive are now using them because

Monozukuri quality meets Japan's paper making tradition

As a company grounded in *monozukuri* excellence, Toyo Paper responds to a wide range of paper needs, having achieved excellence in the major paper functions of "Wipe", "Record" and "Wrap".



"We are adapting our legacy of quality and innovation for foreign countries' paper needs."

Ryozo Nagano,
President & CEO,
Toyo Paper MFG Co., Ltd.

Japan has a storied history in the art of papermaking, and companies such as Toyo Paper are bringing this age-old practice into the modern era.

Since its founding in 1949, Toyo has been one of the pioneers in the paper industry, becoming the first company to invent a mechanized technique to manufacture Japan's traditional washi paper. Not content with this innovation alone, the company switched its attention to paper towels, coffee filters and non-woven papers, spearheading their production in Japan starting from 1957. Its line of paper towels remains a cornerstone of its sales to this day.

As company president Ryozo Nagano explains: "Our *monozukuri* strategy is not only to provide the paper itself, but also to bring comprehensive solutions to minimize clients' overall running costs. As an example, bowling was very popular in the 1970s and people used lots of paper towels at bowling alleys. Toyo developed its original dispenser which decreased paper use to save building owners from

incurring the costs of procuring and disposing of the paper. In the end, many clients were able to reduce their running costs by using Toyo's paper and dispenser. This holistic approach has allowed Toyo to gain client trust nationwide."



Toyo Paper products

Like many industries, the paper sector is working hard to shift towards the realization of a sustainable society, and Toyo is no exception. The company has increased use of solar power in its factories and is planning to shift away from fossil fuels to LNG as it

approaches its 75th anniversary in 2024. However, Toyo has long embraced sustainability as company policy, starting as early as the late 1950s. For example, its paper towels minimize waste because they are aimed at smaller Japanese hand sizes. In addition, Toyo's materials are mostly sourced from recycled paper.

For its international growth, Toyo is always looking for overseas technology and distribution partners with in-depth knowledge of local markets, especially in East Asian and Southeast Asian countries such as Thailand, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea, and China. With this expansion, the company plans to bring the ancient principles of *monozukuri* in papermaking to the world.

株式会社 トヨ
www.toyo-paper.co.jp

YAMAMOTO: Material for all industries

With its unique technology, YAMAMOTO has been offering a diverse range of products, including its quality, eco-friendly and people-friendly rubber material, for over 50 years.



Spearfishing Wetsuits

Innovation can be judged on whether it benefits society or not, and Japanese material creator YAMAMOTO Corporation shows its commitment to pushing society forward in all of its creations.

Founded in 1964, the company's lineup of high-performance, rubber-based materials have applications in professional sports, health, aerospace and apparel, among others. YAMAMOTO's dedication to innovation can be seen in its BIO ESPERANZA material, which can generate heat without an external

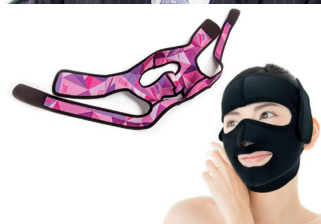
"We are always looking for partners who share the same aspirations, with whom we can work together to develop sustainable and innovative products."

Tomizo Yamamoto, President & CEO,
YAMAMOTO CORPORATION



Recycled Rubber

source. Company president Tomizo Yamamoto reveals that the driving force behind BIO ESPERANZA was the mission to improve customers' quality of life by keeping body temperature at or above average, which is important for medicines to be effective, for example.



BIO ESPERANZA Facemask

After the Fukushima disaster of 2011, the company developed within 40 days radiation shield material to protect workers from gamma rays, something no other manufacturer had managed. These lifesaving suits contain lead and other metals blended into the material.



Freediving Wetsuits

YAMAMOTO was a forerunner in the shift towards sustainability, moving from using petroleum to limestone to create its rubber products in the 1970s, and it continues in this vein, developing machinery to allow it to create wetsuits out of recycled rubber.

World champions of triathlon and freediving have been breaking records with YAMAMOTO SCS hydrophilic technology, which minimizes drag in the water to less than 1/100 compared to conventional materials.

YAMAMOTO is always looking for innovative collaborators, especially those who understand the importance of quality, performance, and sustainability in their practices.

XX YAMAMOTO
www.yamamoto-bio.com/material-e/

Naris Cosmetics closes in on a century of cosmetic excellence

Led by the firm's skin care range, Naris Cosmetics' high-quality products with natural ingredients have become a fixture of beauty regimes in Japan and beyond.



"Since the company's inception, we at Naris have always used our high-level technological expertise to search for a variety of materials from among nature's many unknown substances that possess latent possibilities."

Hiroyoshi Muraoka,
President & CEO,
Naris Cosmetics Co., Ltd.

Naris Cosmetics, which this year celebrates its 90th anniversary, is one of Japan's most experienced cosmetics manufacturers. A specialist in female skin care, Naris also boasts a host of hair, body and makeup products for women, plus a men's care range. The company additionally sells health food items and aroma oils.



CONC

At Naris, the aim is to harness natural ingredients to help bring health and happiness to its customers. "Since the company's inception, we at Naris have always used our high-level technological expertise to search for a variety of



Majesta

materials from among nature's many unknown substances that possess latent possibilities," says the firm's president and CEO, Hiroyoshi Muraoka.

Naris' major product lines in women's skin care are the Luque, Majesta, Rejuarna and Selgrace series, each of which comes complete with a range of serums, foams, washes, lotions, creams and massage packs that incorporate natural extracts and serve to protect and pamper the skin.



Overseas products

An integral element of each of these lines is the CONC exfoliating lotion, whose release early in Naris' history proved a significant milestone for the company. "It was our breakthrough product," Mr. Muraoka explains. "CONC was developed by Mitsuyoshi Muraoka, the founder of Naris Cosmetics, who was also heavily involved as a researcher. The goal of CONC is to remove dead cells from the stratum corneum, the outermost layer of the skin, so that cosmetic products can better penetrate it. Our research on this has been going on for 85 years, and Naris now has the largest share of the domestic sales of exfoliating lotions."

On CONC's beginnings, Mr. Muraoka adds: "While larger

firms started using a unique Japanese style of selling called OTC, where salespeople were dispatched to work in the actual retail outlets to do direct sales, smaller companies like ourselves went door-to-door to inform people about the correct way to use the exfoliating lotion."

Selling door-to-door remains a key part of Naris' business to this day. Indeed, revenue from this sales channel has not decreased even in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Muraoka notes. "Door-to-door sales is very effective, because we can provide the correct products through direct communication with end users, together with 'how to use' guidance," he says. "If we want to maintain profits, we should continue doing door-to-door."



Factory

However, Naris must also keep pace with evolving shopping habits, Mr. Muraoka says. "Looking at the future, people are changing the way they purchase items in general, so we have to be flexible in adapting ourselves so it's easier for the customers to buy, and e-commerce is a part of that," he says. "We are now trying to diversify into e-commerce and other sales channels. Although it may incur extra cost, it's an investment for the future."

In addition to being available via door-to-door sales, by online and offline mail order, and at retail outlets, Naris' products can be found at any of its approximately 400 *De I'm* beauty salons across Japan, where the company's cosmetic experts are on hand to offer customers the ideal treatment for them.

On top of its nationwide network of salons, the firm also runs the Naris Beauty Creation College Prindage, an educa-



Head office

tional facility established in 2010 with the goal of training beauty professionals for all areas of the industry.

Outside of Japan, Naris has over the past decade launched joint ventures with enterprises in Thailand and Vietnam, with a view to selling its products in those countries and elsewhere in Asia. In total, the company currently exports to 18 nations worldwide.

"We are putting effort into exporting to Europe, which is a very hard market," Mr. Muraoka says. "I don't think that any Japanese company has been successful in that market. We are also looking into the Middle East. It's a very interesting area because women use more cosmetics and they can still understand the quality of Japanese beauty products."

NarisCOSMETICS
www.naris.co.jp/english

Suzuran Medical: The quality cotton company embracing sustainability and the latest technology

A firm that has been working with cotton for the past 190 years, Suzuran Medical's commitment to *monozukuri* sees it create industry-leading products for cosmetic, sanitary and medical care.



"Suzuran Medical aims to be a company that continues to thrive by responding to the changing needs of consumers."

Yasuhiro Kunieda,
President,
Suzuran Medical Inc.

Why do Suzuran Medical's products have the top share in the medical materials category in Japan?

We have a more than 50% share of the medical-use absorbent cotton and gauze category in Japan. These products are used in many medical institutions and drugstores. There are two reasons for this: first, our 190-year history in business is highly regarded as proof of our technology and quality. Secondly, I think it is because we are developing and improving our products based on information obtained from the needs and complaints of doctors, nurses, and consumers by implementing our philosophy of "placing consumer interest above all else".

Cotton products are said to be difficult to stabilize in quality because they are made from natural raw materials; what is the reason for adopting a unique refining and bleaching process called "refining and bleaching method in the final process"?

Suzuran Medical's cosmetic cotton brand LilyBell is manu-

factured in the same environment and with the same quality standards as medical cotton, which is a medical device. Our manufacturing employs a unique refining and bleaching method unmatched anywhere in the world. Specifically, we perform refining and bleaching at the end of the process, which is the most hygienic way to produce cotton spunlace without the growth of bacteria derived from the raw materials or from the spunlace water.



Cosmetic cotton rounds

The world is facing many unprecedented challenges such as environmental protection, climate change and infectious diseases. How is Suzuran Medical planning on tackling these challenges?

The unique manufacturing method of refining and bleaching mentioned earlier is not only hygienic, but also significantly reduces the amount of water and energy required for production. In other words, it is a manufacturing method that is friendly not only to people but also to the environment. Currently, the entire Suzuran Group is working to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. In recent years, robots have been introduced into the manufacturing process to eliminate human errors. In addition, we are promoting the shift away from plastic in our products. For example, more than 1.5 billion non-woven masks were thrown into the sea in 2020. These discarded masks without proper treatment were made of plastic. We aim to reduce

the amount of plastic material in our masks as much as possible. We have already launched a product in which the non-woven fabric used for the mask has been replaced with 100% cotton spunlace, reducing the ratio of plastic in the mask body to two thirds. In the future, we aim to develop a mask in which all non-woven fabrics used in the mask are replaced with cotton.



Automated alcohol pad production

What are the reasons and advantages of developing not only products but also production facilities in-house?

The reason is that we can flexibly and speedily produce prototypes, which is necessary to commercialize unique ideas in the field of research and development. This year, we developed the world's fastest cotton spunlace line using the most advanced technology in the industry. We will be supplying this line to cosmetics, medical device and household product manufacturers around the world.

Any final words for our readers?

We always manage our company with an awareness of what we must not change and what we must continue to change. One thing that must *not* change is our decision-making standard of putting consumer interests above all else. All our decisions are based on whether or not they are in the best interest of the consumer.

There is one more thing that we have not changed in 190 years and that is the drive to keep changing.

We must respond to changes in the products and services

demanding by the dynamic environment, consumer lifestyles and advancement in medical technologies. We have developed a high-performance cosmetic cotton made of 100% cotton that saves lotion, environmentally friendly masks by reducing plastic content, and robot-assisted unmanned production systems. We believe that these are the culmination of the drive to innovate by all employees through the annual innovation competitions held throughout the Suzuran Group.



Suzhou factory (China)

Half of the pesticides used in the world are used for cotton cultivation. Pesticides are harmful to both the human body and the soil. To grow all cotton organically would require a huge amount of money and land. Therefore, we are continuing to research the technology to grow and harvest cotton in factories using biotechnology. If this technology is developed, the amount of pesticides used on the planet could be cut in half, and the vast amount of land needed for food production could be increased.

Suzuran is the name of a flower, "lily of the valley" in English. The flower also symbolizes the coming of happiness.

Thus, Suzuran Medical aims to be a company that continues to thrive by responding to the changing needs of consumers to contribute to the health and happiness of people around the world through its products, services and state-of-the-art technology.

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SUZURAN MEDICAL INC.
www.suzuran-corp.com