

ECO INNOVATION POWERS JAPANESE BRANDS

JAPAN'S COMPANIES ARE EMBRACING SUSTAINABILITY LIKE MARATHONERS CHASING THE FINISH LINE. STEADY, INNOVATIVE STRIDES ENSURE RESILIENCE, GROWTH AND LASTING IMPACT IN A CHANGING GLOBAL MARKET.

By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson

Awaiting the starting gun, the tension is palpable. Marathon runners are arranged in rows, each intensely focused, ready. The gun fires, and the response is an explosion of movement as competitors fiercely battle for the front of the pack. Much like a marathon, longevity for businesses is tied to their ability to manage and adapt to changes in market conditions.

In 2025, driven by environmental challenges, sustainability is becoming a key focus for both manufacturers and consumers. At the same time, established markets are ripe for technological transformation. Japanese companies, long renowned for their innovative spirit, are facing these challenges, proving to the world that they have not lost their creative edge.

Sustainability as a Focus, Rather Than as an Afterthought

For ASICS, sustainability is a pillar of its business. Alongside the CEO, President Mitsuyuki Tominaga reviews the company's progress on sustainability every quarter. "Climate change is not just a global issue—it directly affects our business. Extreme heat impacts outdoor sports, so CO₂ reduction is a priority," he says.

The most significant opportunity for ASICS lies upstream, where a shoe redesign can slash CO₂ emissions through a reduction in its components, optimized materials and construction. Furthermore, the company actively works to improve the recyclability and material sustainability of its products.

ASICS exemplifies Japan's attitude toward innovation and corporate responsibility, continually striving to improve operations through strategic planning and investment. The company is collaborating with institutions to accurately record and label the carbon footprint of each product while moving to digital sampling to reduce waste.

Despite the costs, Tominaga believes that becoming a sustainable business is a necessary investment and a learning process. "Over time, we aim to make our production more ef-

ficient and cost-effective while minimizing environmental impact," he says. While ultra-light, single-use shoes are becoming increasingly prevalent in elite competition, ASICS clearly delineates what each level of athlete, from casual runner to elite athlete, needs, centering innovation and balance at the heart of each runner's needs.

Diverting Away from Landfill

For BOOKOFF, sustainability is built into the business model. From its inception, the company has resold used books, expanding its inventory to include a wide range of items, such as books, toys, electronics, and clothing, thereby diverting usable goods from landfills. Even more importantly, President and CEO Yasutaka Horiuchi says the company's philosophy centers on local communities. He explains, "Local customers bring in items to sell, and other members of the same community purchase them, so the benefits stay within that area."

BOOKOFF aims to bring its local focus to its overseas operations, with locations in the United States and France, as well as its Jalan Jalan Japan (JJJ) stores in Malaysia and Kazakhstan. JJJ synergizes well due to the contrasting climate between the two regions. "Malaysia's warm weather makes it an ideal market for summer clothing, while Kazakhstan's colder climate allows us to sell winter apparel," Horiuchi says.

Creativity that Pushes Innovation Boundaries

Innovation is a key component of meeting sustainability challenges, and Japan continues to uphold its reputation as a hub of agile and innovative companies.

That innovative spirit is also carried by Base-ment Factory Design, as seen in its CARE PRO and non-heated hair irons. CARE PRO leverages ultrasonic waves, rather than heat, which causes shampoos and active ingredients to penetrate and be absorbed by the hair quickly and effectively. "Our iron makes it possible to offer highly profitable premium services while customers enjoy better results—longer-lasting

effects and a memorable experience," President and CEO Taiji Nakamura says. Nakamura aims to confront long-standing dynamics by applying innovative solutions to age-old challenges.

Evolving with Decades of Manufacturing Expertise

Pearl Musical Instruments remains a leader in instrument manufacturing, particularly in the production of drums. It has spent decades perfecting its Superior Shell Technology, which has become the cornerstone of its approach to professional drum manufacturing, according to CEO and President Max Iishi. "Frankly, our longevity isn't the result of luck or a miracle," he explains. "It stems from our continued efforts and unwavering commitment to our goals."

Now, the company is venturing into the world of digital drums with its e/MERGE series, leveraging a partnership with KORG, which combines digital expertise with its own acoustic mastery. "The result is an innovative drum product that has resonated well with the public."

Japanese textile processor Sotoh is redefining the industry with proprietary technologies, including its NeoStretch and deep-black formal fabrics, while advancing in synthetic fiber innovation. Founded more than a century ago, Sotoh has evolved from a dye house into a vertically integrated producer with B2C ventures. The company has weathered world wars and economic crises, remaining agile and adapting with the times. President Yasuhiro Ueda stated that the company's edge stems from "flexibility, customizability, and a relentless focus on value-enhancing processing." With its brands MOVE, Jenio, and G Stage, the company today is shifting its focus to product development and B2C, continuing its evolution.

Much like runners enduring mile after mile, businesses that commit to sustainability pace themselves for long-term success. The race is not won in a single sprint, but through steady strides, resilience and innovation. By adapting to change, companies can help ensure that the finish line is not survival, but lasting impact.



ASICS NIMBUS MIRAI



You can buy second-hand manga from any BOOKOFF across Japan



MOVBY Luxury Jersey Wear



BOOKOFF leads reuse revolution



"Our core philosophy is to operate as a store rooted in the local community."

Yasutaka Horiuchi,
President and CEO,
BOOKOFF GROUP
HOLDINGS LIMITED.

Stepping into a BOOKOFF store is akin to entering a gallery of the lives of friends you have never met. On the shelves of Japan's leading reuse retailer, you may find books that changed lives, a dress worn on a first date or figurines from someone's favorite anime. It's intimate, exciting and a profoundly insightful look into the lives of the people you pass on the street each day.

This connection to the community is intentional and woven into the fabric of the business. President and CEO Yasutaka Horiuchi says each BOOKOFF store's operations

Reuse retailer BOOKOFF is closing the loop and reducing waste by finding a second life for people's beloved possessions. *By Daniel de Bomford and Bernard Thompson*

are rooted in the local community, and goods bought within the local community are sold in that same place. "Local customers bring in items to sell, and other members of the same community purchase them, so the benefits stay within that area," he says.



Figures in a showcase at BOOKOFF USA

The group strives to nurture this local focus in its international stores, found in the United States, France, Malaysia and Kazakhstan. Initially targeting Japanese expatriates in overseas cities like New York, the group experienced a surge in international interest during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Japanese culture gained popularity as people began watching Japanese programs through social media and streaming services like Netflix.

The group isn't targeting specific cities in the United States; instead, it aims to open anchor stores in major metropolitan areas and establish

specialized satellite stores in their vicinities. "Ideally, we would open an anchor store in each large city—stocked with books, figurines, video games, and the full range of items we buy and sell," Horiuchi explains. BOOKOFF launched Jalan Jalan Japan (JJJ) in Malaysia in 2016. What started as an effort to manage surplus inventory in Japan has evolved into a thriving business, now operating more than 23 stores in Malaysia and Kazakhstan, including franchised locations, as of the end of fiscal year 2025. Items that might otherwise have been discarded find new life in bright displays. The group meets these two countries' demands by selling winter clothing for Kazakhstan's cold climate and summer clothing for Malaysia's warm climate.



Apparel display at Jalan Jalan Japan

The group meets demand created between these two countries by selling winter clothing for Kazakhstan's

cold climate and summer clothing for Malaysia's warm climate.



Main entrance of Jalan Jalan Japan

Where possible, the group repurposes common items such as CDs and DVDs into new products like trays. But for more difficult-to-recycle items, BOOKOFF is developing a method of recycling plastics into new materials. "The idea is to repurpose old plastic into new plastic products, and we're actively working on that initiative now," Horiuchi says.

Through BOOKOFF and JJJ stores, the group is aiming to contribute to a society where nothing is discarded. By finding a second life for people's beloved possessions, BOOKOFF will help close the loop and help realize a greener, better society.

BOOKOFF
GROUP HOLDINGS

www.bookoffgroup.co.jp/en

INSIDE PEARL: CRAFTING ICONIC INSTRUMENTS

THE LEGENDARY INSTRUMENT MAKER CONTINUES TO PUSH WHAT'S POSSIBLE IN MUSIC BY MARRYING INNOVATION WITH DECADES OF EXPERTISE. *By Daniel de Bomford, Arthur Menkes and Paul Mannion*

In a stadium filled with the screams of dedicated fans, some of whom arrived at first light to secure their spot on the center stage, the mood is one of anticipation, and as the lights dim, it can be felt in the air. A drumbeat pierces the silence; the rhythm builds the energy of the crowd, which swells until they are ready to burst into an explosive frenzy when the ensemble joins the fray.



Pearl Musical Instrument President and CEO Max Iishi describes the relationship between instrument maker and musician, the expertise and the creativity, as having an impact on lives. Attaining that level of trust from musicians has been an effort almost 80 years in the making.

The company manufactures a variety of instruments, with its iconic drums being renowned worldwide and favored by some of the world's most renowned drummers. Founded in 1946, the company expanded into drums and other percussion in 1953 and began exporting internationally as an OEM manufacturer. 1968 was a significant milestone for the company with its Pearl President Series, which was released to acclaim from professional musicians.

Pearl Musical Instrument continued to push the boundaries of innovation over the following decades, from which the iconic Pearl drum sound was born. The company's Superior Shell Technology is created through a unique, innovative process that uses a proprietary adhesive and heating the wood while putting it under immense pressure..

"This results in an exceptionally strong and perfectly round shell that allows for a high level of resonance, giving rise to the iconic Pearl drum sound," Iishi says. Today, the company continues to push the boundaries of what is possible with digital and hybrid drum kits. Furthermore, the

is strengthening its investment in the classical musical segments and further expanding its presence in flute making and sales.

Recalling the launch of the new Reference and Masters series in 2023, the company worked with some of the world's most beloved drummers, Omar Hakim, Dennis Chambers and Mike Mangini.

Iishi says they were blown away when they tested the kit. "I saw their reactions firsthand, and it felt like a crowning achievement for us at Pearl Musical Instrument," he says.

The reaction from the audience was just as profound, and Iishi believes that everyone went home inspired. "To me, artists are more than collaborators—they are our most valuable partners."

The company's goal is to reach customers all around the world. It maintains a robust global distribution network and evaluates partnerships based on its ability to engage with potential customers effectively.

The United States remains Pearl Musical Instrument's number one market, while various business environmental shifts in China have resulted in sales contraction. In response, the company is looking to emerging markets, such as South America and Southeast Asia, where demand for high-quality instruments is increasing.

Like a drum solo played to a roaring crowd, Pearl Musical Instrument continues to push the boundaries of sound with innovative instruments of unmatched quality.



"Our strength lies in our dedication to exceptional design and outstanding sound quality of our instruments."

Max Iishi

CEO and President,
Pearl Musical Instrument Co.

Pearl®
<https://pearldrum.com>

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INSIDE SOTOH'S 100-YEAR LEGACY

SOTOH, A CENTURY-OLD JAPANESE TEXTILE LEADER, DRIVES INNOVATION IN WOOL, SYNTHETICS AND FORMALWEAR FABRICS, POWERING LUXURY FASHION AND EXPANDING GLOBALLY THROUGH ITS MOV B BRAND. *By Daniel de Bomford and Cian O'Niell*

In Japan, textiles are canvases upon which culture and artistry are expressed. The *shitateya*'s deft hands shape the kimono; each thread carries both beauty and purpose. This reverence for fabric has endured through centuries, evolving into a modern mastery where reliability, precision and innovation are part of the fabric of the manufacturing process. Japanese textile company Sotoh carries on this spirit as the company continues to weave its legacy.

With more than 100 years of history, Sotoh has evolved from a dye house into an integrated producer specializing in wool, synthetic and blended fibers. Sotoh's innovations include proprietary finishes such as Aqua-Off and NeoStretch, as well as its signature deep-black formalwear fabrics. "Japan's greatest advantage lies in reliability—in the repeatability and consistency of quality," says president Yasuhiko Ueda.

Sotoh has endured world wars, oil shocks and the Lehman collapse by adapting to shifting markets. In 1978 the company reached a significant milestone by adding machinery for producing cellulosic fibers, such as cotton and linen, thereby widening its reach beyond wool.

In the early 2000s, Sotoh perfected its deep-black processing, revolutionizing Japan's formalwear market. The 2009 acquisition of Iwanaka's textile division marked its transformation into a vertically integrated manufacturer.



The company has invested significantly in perfecting black fabrics. "Achieving that ultra-deep black requires a carefully coordinated combination of washing, dyeing and finishing processes," the president says. Now, around 70 percent of formal black Japanese suits use Sotoh's textiles.

"While wool remains at the center of our expertise, we also process a wide variety of blended and synthetic fabrics—polyesters, cellulosic fibers, and more," Ueda says. "This versatility has naturally expanded our range of finishes."

Sotoh's portfolio spans specialized processing technologies that enhance textiles for durability, comfort and performance. Its Aqua-Off finish enhances water resistance, while NeoStretch provides natural elasticity without the use of polyurethane, making it ideal for tailored garments.

The company also pioneered "The Ultimate Black," a fabric finish that achieves exceptional depth of color for formal wear. By applying wool-



"Our core mission is to meet the needs of our textile-manufacturing clients."

Yasuhiko Ueda
President, Sotoh Co., Ltd.

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MOV B 

<https://sotoh.co.jp>



processing equipment to synthetic fibers, Sotoh develops niche, high-value products that set it apart from larger competitors, reinforcing its reputation for precision and reliability.

The company now is supplying European luxury brands, expanding into China, and reaching consumers directly through its MOV B apparel brand. Launched in 2020, MOV B marks Sotoh's entry into the B2C market with a focus on knitwear and menswear. By acquiring apparel labels Jenio and G Stage, the company gained design expertise to complement its processing strengths.

MOV B products are sold online, at Ginza Six in Tokyo, and through Hankyu Department Stores. The brand offers Sotoh valuable consumer insights to guide future textile innovations.

Sotoh's journey reflects Japan's enduring marriage of artistry and precision. From its origins as a dye house to its role today as a trusted partner for luxury brands, the company has preserved the spirit of craftsmanship while embracing innovation. Its mastery of finishes, reliability and expansion into consumer fashion through MOV B are a legacy woven with tradition and modernity. In every fabric, Sotoh carries forward Japan's devotion to textiles as both a cultural and a craft tradition.





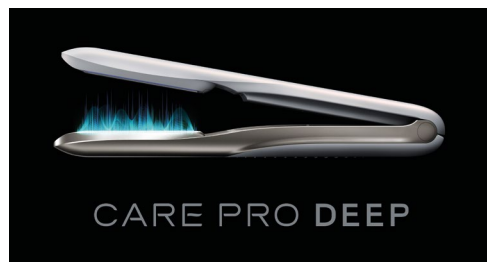
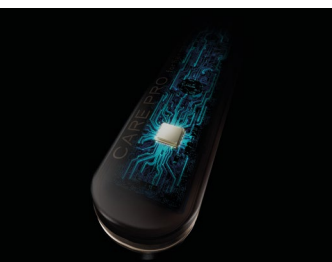
BASEMENT FACTORY DESIGN REINVENTS SALON HAIRCARE

BASEMENT FACTORY DESIGN'S INNOVATIVE CARE PRO PRODUCTS HAVE REINVENTED THE SUCCESS FORMULA FOR SALON HAIRCARE. NOW, THE COMPANY SETS ITS SIGHTS HIGHER, FOR NEW PRODUCTS AND NEW MARKETS. *By Daniel de Bomford and Kyann Edouard*

Some industries have been around for so long that it feels as if there is nowhere left to innovate. Hair salons are one such place, the formula having been thought to have been perfected decades ago. Basement Factory Design has proved that assumption wrong. The company launched its professional beauty brand, CARE PRO, in high-end salons in 2017. Today, 45,000 beauty salons throughout Japan are using CARE PRO Professional alongside a rapidly increasing number of salons around the world.

of CARE PRO apply treatments quickly and effectively, leading to longer-lasting results. "Previously, professionals relied heavily on manual techniques," Nakamura says. "Now, our CARE PRO makes it possible to offer highly profitable premium services while customers enjoy better results."

The company offers both a professional model and a consumer-grade model that uses the same patented technology. Inside the devices is a chip programmed to



The CARE PRO line consists of non-heated hair irons that use ultrasonic technology to improve the penetration of the active ingredients in hair treatments, allowing them to be absorbed by the hair more effectively. This innovation was born from President and CEO Taiji Nakamura, who looked at the innovative stagnation of the hair care industry and asked a simple question: "What would happen if we added strategy and creativity?"

Traditionally, hair treatments required 10 minutes of manual massage. The ultrasonic vibrations

deliver ultrasonic output. Nakamura compares the technology to giving a massage. "Applying the same pressure to the same spot doesn't work," he explains. "Results come from variations in strength and movement."

Basement Factory Design's products already are widespread in Japan, so the company is looking to new markets abroad. It has already begun introducing its CARE PRO products into salons in China and Southeast Asia, replicating its Japanese strategy of partnering with major distributors that have ties to local salons. While the company focuses on Southeast Asia, it has its sights set on the European and U.S. markets. With such a positive response, Nakamura hopes to continue innovating. "Seeing people's joy is my reward, my *ikigai*."

"Rather than creating a new service, our device enhances all existing hair treatments – a key strength."

Taiji Nakamura

President and CEO,
Basement Factory Design Co., Ltd.



