

■ JAPAN BUSINESS REPORT ■

O'WILL EXPLORES ASIAN OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH ONE-STOP TRADE SERVICE

In any industry, working with a multifunctional, quality-conscious trading company has numerous advantages. By dealing with one source, clients reduce transaction costs and time spent looking for new suppliers. Trusted by scores of top Japanese food brands, O'will is a one-stop service that combines a general trader's extensive variety with a speciality retailer's careful precision.

Along with environmental equipment, cosmetics, water treatment systems and packaging materials, O'will offers agricultural, dairy and processed products, beverages, food additives and more. Having expanded its main business in the wholesale food and beverage (F&B) industry for more than 30 years, the Japanese corporation

has garnered clients such as ITO EN, Suntory and Kirin.

Further intensifying its local stronghold, O'will aims to champion its niche markets within the F&B industry.

These markets include foods for specified health use (FOSHU); food additives such as sugar, vitamins, calcium, emulsifiers and flavourings; milk-derived products such as pasteurised milk, condensed milk, butter and cheese; various tea products; and tropical fruits, vegetables, juices and purées.

Beyond its F&B products, O'will provides waste water purification systems using ozonation, helping reduce sewage for food factories. The company also plans to develop its environmental equipment segment

over the next two to three years, offering large high-volume, low-speed (HVLS) ceiling fans for warehouses, which O'will hopes will soon account for 20 per cent of its total sales.

Keen to extend its legacy abroad, O'will aims to form synergies with partners equipped with infrastructure and logistics in China and Southeast Asia, particularly in Vietnam and Thailand. The company also seeks suppliers of FOSHU ingredients and potential partners to help expand its HVLS fan product portfolio.

"We prioritise the formation of trusting relationships with our suppliers and buyers," says Kazuki Date, president and chief operating officer. "As a growth-oriented company, it's not a matter of size or sales amount. If



Kazuki Date, president and chief operating officer

our potential business partners have a strong passion to grow, we'd love to collaborate with them."

NIPPON MOLDING TAKES ECO-FRIENDLY, HIGH-QUALITY PACKAGING SOLUTIONS ACROSS ASIA

While most manufacturers and consumers are content with containers that are sturdy, safe, well-designed and affordable, packaging can tell stories beyond that. Nippon Molding blends its ecologically sound narrative with premier production standards, developing high-quality recycled pulp packaging solutions for various industries in Japan and overseas.

"Our narrative is about giving back to the local communities and contributing to society by treating paper waste disposal issues," says Akira Ishihara, president and CEO.

"It is not our objective to maximise profits. It's to strike a balance." For more than half a century, Nippon Molding has been highly acclaimed for its expertise in utilising paper waste to create shock-absorbent,



Akira Ishihara, president and CEO

durable, lightweight rigs for securing and containing food and technology products. Nippon Molding's quick lead times, reasonable prices and

customisable options have drawn many notable brands to work with it, including Hewlett-Packard, Sony, Panasonic, Mitsubishi and Canon, to name a few.

Nippon Molding also prioritises research and development efforts with its latest innovations. Having been the first in Japan to create new concept pulp-moulded frozen food containers, the company also produces sophisticated paper packaging to aid cosmetics companies in switching out from using common plastic.

Additionally, Nippon Molding produces water-repellent and oil-resistant medical products, cushioning materials for automotive parts, and many more.

While it enjoys its success in the private sector, Nippon Molding is focused most on achieving its strict sustainable development goals by

collaborating with local governments to reduce garbage output. Through these initiatives, the company sources its own raw materials, collecting truckloads of the city's discarded papers.

With factories in Thailand and Mexico, Nippon Molding seeks collaborations with more companies with similar sustainable development goals. It is also open to e-commerce opportunities and partnerships with logistics systems companies and distributors.

"Our gates are open to new partners and opportunities," says Takehiro Ishihara, executive managing director. "We are developing our factories in Vietnam and the Philippines to satisfy increasing customer demands and fulfil our vision of covering the entire Asian continent."

FUNDODAI PAVES WAY FOR NEW FUSION CUISINES WITH KYUSHU-STYLE SEASONINGS

Japanese cuisine unfolds an elegant narrative of how cooking traditions passed down through generations bring out the perfect balance in the choicest ingredients and spices to build one of the world's most unparalleled food cultures. For FUNDODAI, sharing this food culture to the world is one of its greatest visions, and it aims to start with the fundamental elements of Japanese cuisine.

FUNDODAI has been spicing up Japanese cuisine with its Kyushu-style soy sauce, miso and other seasonings for 153 years. Kyushu-style soy sauce is known for its sweetness – a distinguishing characteristic that requires high technical skills to bring out naturally.

"We practise the traditional way of fermenting ingredients for six months before extracting the distinctly coloured and flavoured *kiage*. Only around 8 per cent of companies have been doing this traditional process in recent times. We combine tradition and technology to create a large variation of flavours in our products," says Osamu Yamamura, president and CEO.

FUNDODAI banks on technology to cater to changing tastes. It has developed a no-alcohol soy sauce – an ideal product for Islamic markets such as the Middle East, Indonesia and Malaysia. It even created the colourless variant Tomei Shoyu for its 150th anniversary in 2019. International sales make up 15 per



Osamu Yamamura, president and CEO

cent of the company's revenues, and from this figure, 80 per cent comes from

China and 10 per cent is from Hong Kong. Aiming to raise these numbers, FUNDODAI envisions expanding its distribution scope outside Japanese groceries in these countries to include partnerships with local groceries and markets.

FUNDODAI also welcomes partnerships with like-minded soy sauce producers such as those in Singapore and the Philippines to create flavours that would match local cuisines and even strengthen the foundations for fusion cuisine.

"We do not want to just sell products. We want to be the window through which people can see Japan's food culture," Yamamura says.

TECHNO TAKATSUKI PUMPS UP EXCITEMENT FOR PNEUMATIC SOLUTIONS BEYOND WASTE WATER MANAGEMENT

Fundamental to ecological and human health, waste water management is increasingly becoming a pressing concern worldwide amid booming populations and declining resources. For so long, removing contaminants from waste water and yielding effluent or directly reusable water has been an intricate, expensive process – until Techno Takatsuki revolutionised the industry.

When Techno Takatsuki invented the electromagnetic linear diaphragm pump in 1967 under the HIBLOW brand, it paved the way for more efficient waste water treatment using energy-saving, longer-lasting and low-maintenance air pumps. These were so easy to use that they became the benchmark for the small-size waste water treatment market.

The company has since produced more than 19 million air pumps, cornering the largest market share in the United States and supplying major industry players in about 70 countries.

Holding its originality patent for the linear diaphragm pump, Techno Takatsuki continues to lead innovations in pneumatic solutions. This pursuit gave rise to its new technical solution, Airtronic, which fuses air pump

technologies with electronics – allowing the development of sophisticated, intelligent products that require variable and precise control over air flow, pressure and timing.

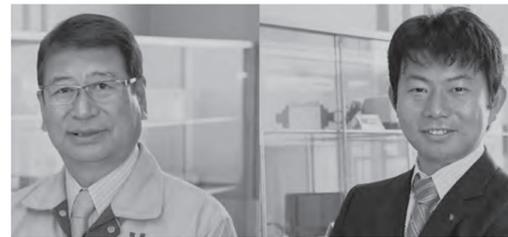
"My father started the Techno Takatsuki legacy in 1947 by being a motors supplier to Panasonic. I pioneered linear diaphragm pumps and expanded worldwide under the HIBLOW brand, and my son is leading the extension into medical equipment and diverse industries ranging from food to hobby, home and healthcare," says Nozomu Kawasaki, chairman of the board.

Masayuki Kawasaki took over the

helm in 2020 as the third-generation president and CEO. With a target to increase international sales by 15 per cent in the next five years, he hit the ground running with a line-up of new categories and expansion plans, particularly in Asia, the US, Europe and China, where a joint venture addresses the local demands.

"We seek partners who can help acquire medical certifications in our markets," Masayuki Kawasaki says.

"We look for individuality, in-depth knowledge, long relationships and a shared commitment towards enriching the environment and people's lives."



From left, Nozomu Kawasaki, chairman of the board, and Masayuki Kawasaki, president and CEO

DAI-NIPPON MEIJI SUGAR SWEETENS DEALS ACROSS ASIA WITH MANAGEMENT MERGER

When sugar (*SA-to*) is combined with salt (*SHI-to*), vinegar (*SU*), soy sauce (*S-hoyu*) and miso (*mi-SO*), described as *sa-shi-su-se-so* in Japanese syllabary, it yields an authentic flavour that is characteristic of Japanese dishes. Yet despite being a fixture in Japan's culinary scene as a fundamental part of *sa-shi-su-se-so*, the sweetener has seen a drop in popularity with the country



Yu Sato, president and CEO

consuming less and less of it. Adapting to these new market conditions, Dai-Nippon Meiji Sugar stirs hope within the local industry by forming a management merger with Mitsui Sugar. Through this arrangement, Dai-Nippon Meiji forecasts a boost in the manufacturing and processing of its sugar products, seasonings and functional foods.

"If Japan continues to decrease its sugar consumption, we'll need to restructure our production facilities," says Yu Sato, president and CEO. "To have a healthy business model, we aim to increase our presence in the non-sugar sector."

Acclaimed as Japan's first modern sugar company, Dai-Nippon Meiji continues its 126-year-old legacy by following its philosophy of creating a globally rich food industry. The company plans to do this by broadening its product lines in collaboration with Mitsui Sugar. After the management merger in April

last year, the new company was listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange as Mitsui DM Sugar Holdings.

While Dai-Nippon Meiji specialises in sugar variations, the company has already successfully diversified with quinoa and seasonings added to its portfolio. It is most excited about its milk enhancement seasoning, which is highly cost-effective for business-to-business customers who use large amounts of butter, milk and cheese in their goods.

"Sugar consumption in the world is increasing about 2 per cent annually, driven mainly by Asian and African markets," Sato says. "We will create a newer, brighter future for the Japanese sweetness market through Mitsui Sugar's existing operations in Thailand, mainland China and Singapore. We seek long-term partners and customers in Asia who are open to innovation and have an established story and culture, much like Dai-Nippon Meiji."

BHI FOSTERS INNOVATION IN COSMETICS INDUSTRY AS TOP ENABLER OF BILATERAL TIES

Surging demand in China for Made-in-Japan cosmetics is intensifying industry collaboration among the two nations' enterprises, triggering a market shift towards high-quality yet affordable products catering to the upwardly mobile middle class. The shift is remarkable considering China's 500-million strong middle-class population, and fostering innovation in the cosmetics industry.

Biken Soshin (BHI) is a prime mover in this space. Based in Kobe, the company has influenced the trend by serving as the top enabler of Japan-China collaborations since 2010.

Backed by a strong research and development team, its technology and trading services have been bridging varying market approaches and business philosophies between the two cultures, with Chinese companies comprising about 80 per cent of BHI's private labelling clientele.

"We are the bridge not only for our

ability to speak Japanese and Chinese, which a lot of people can do, but because of our in-depth understanding of the two cultures and the connections we have on both sides," says Dr Yang Jianzhong, president of BHI. "More importantly, we have established the reputation, which is valuable to anyone doing business in Japan."



Dr Yang Jianzhong, president

Born and raised in China, Yang has lived for 30 years in Japan while maintaining close ties to his homeland. Noting the strong need in China for information and technology exchanges, he founded the Japan-China Cosmetic Exchange Association in 2012. The group has accumulated 150 members from Japan and China, and established an advisory committee whose members are experts from the Japanese cosmetics industry.

"Some of the Chinese companies want to sell their products and establish their brand image in Japan," Yang says. "I see more and more of these brands succeeding in the future because they can control costs more efficiently than the traditional Japanese brands."

BHI welcomes collaborations universally, specifically to open more resource and sales channels for affordable mid-tier and high-end cosmetics products that are made in Japan.

ADDING VALUE TO RICE IS KEY TO AKITAKOMACHI'S EXPANSION

There is nothing like the slight chewiness and sticky texture of Japanese rice to complement the taste of well-loved foods such as sushi, *onigiri*, *chahan*, and *omurice*. As rice is a staple in Japanese cuisine, the cultivation of this versatile grain is one of the most important industries locally.

Ogata Village Akitakomachi Rice Producers has endeavoured to continuously elevate the agricultural business to offer consumers the best value rice Japan has to offer. A company built and fuelled by the passion of farmers, Akitakomachi is a product of several rice farms combined to optimise producing, harvesting, processing and selling rice under one roof.

"We wanted to offer something more with our rice. We wanted to increase its functionalities to make our consumers choose our products," says president Toru Wakui.

Digging deep into its agricultural roots, Akitakomachi expanded its rice offerings to meet the demands of various consumers. Aside from different rice varieties – white, brown, and glutinous – Akitakomachi developed ready-to-heat



Toru Wakui, president

porridges, allergy-friendly rice and porridge sets, retort rice, gluten-free pasta, and even *amazake*. Akitakomachi has even made strides towards manufacturing its microwaveable packed rice, which was introduced last year.

Enforcing stringent safety and quality measures, Akitakomachi has acquired certifications such as kosher, non-GMO (genetically modified organism), gluten-free, and ISO 22000 to guarantee the reliability of its products.

Akitakomachi products are widely available in supermarkets across Japan. Setting its sights beyond Japan, the company has established its own supply chain to directly export its products to countries such as mainland China, Singapore, Vietnam, Taiwan and the United States. To ease its entry into new markets, Akitakomachi seeks on-the-ground partnerships with companies with extensive histories in the food industry.

"This generation of Akitakomachi is spent focusing on Japan. I feel like the next generation is for extending our reach abroad and we are looking forward to working with companies that understand what we are all about," Wakui says.

Multifunctional Trading Company

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