

# Finland - Japan Brand Story Creation Online Session

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KOTETSUDO CO., LTD.



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MAA- JA  
KOTITALOUSNAISET  
ITÄ-SUOMI



POHJOIS-KARJALA  
Maaseutialiitto



UNIVERSITY OF  
EASTERN FINLAND



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LUONNONVARAKESKUS



Itä-Suomi

# Quick Intro!

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## Keiko Ichikawa

- I have worked for the largest advertising agency in Japan, Dentsu, for nearly 20 years.
- My main business field is content business, such as sports and music, promoting international content in Japan.
- My recent projects include the Tokyo 2020 Olympic & Paralympic Games, where I worked as a partner sales specialist for the organising committee.
- I left Dentsu five years ago and started my enterprise, Kotetsudo. I offer services to promote content and brands and to facilitate partnership engagements.
- I have worked with Business Finland since 2020, managing showroom projects, hosting events, and writing promotion materials for its mission of matching Finnish companies with potential Japanese partners.

Lifestyle Finland Showroom 2021  
 @ Metsa Pavilion  
 (Embassy of Finland, Tokyo,  
 during the Olympic years)



Tenho Design, Pure Waste, Havu Cosmetics,  
 Rimita Green, Jokipiin Pellava, Viaminnet,  
 Inari Arctic Cosmetics, Dream Circus, Moi Forest

Finland Sauna & Wellbeing  
 Showroom 2023  
 in Harajuku



Pure Waste, Sees, Rento, Avantopool,  
 Osmia, Hukka Design, Moi Forest, Cariitti

Finland Wellbeing Digital Library

09  
**Lapuan Kankurit**  
ラプアンカルクリット

涼しい風から守ってくれること、暖かい風合いのウールや夏の風を纏うような爽やかなリネンは日本の気候・ブランドともコラボレーションし、素晴らしいデザインを持つ。

2019年にフィンランド政府の海外展開支援事業「国際流通支援プログラム」が日本で初めて受け入れられた際には、日本の気候のことも考慮し、ウールやリネンを使用して日本の気候にも馴染みやすいデザインが実現しました。また、この製品は、輸入された原料や素材をしっかりと選別し、国内での生産も、環境に優しい方法で行われます。

【特徴】

- 気候別の服装提案が簡単に実現されたリネンにもなる素材「メックスアタラシ」を使用
- 日本のデザインへの馴染みも高く、企業や店舗での採用にも対応可能
- ウールやリネンのような天然素材、素材の持つ自然な香り、特別な存在感もあふれるデザインも豊富
- 品質やデザインへのこだわりが、メックスアタラシなどの素材にも高い品質を追求していることも <https://lapuankankurit.jp/>

LAPUAN KANKURIT  
Lapuan Kankurit, Finland

Avanto Architects, Avantopool, Cariitti, Harvia,  
 Hukka Design, JKMM, Jokipiin Pellava, Lapelland,  
 Lapuan Kankurit, Lovi, Luin Living, Moi Forest,  
 Narvi, Nikari, Osmia, Pentik, Pes Architects, Pure  
 Waste, Rento, Sees, Studio Puisto, Woodnotes

# Brand Story Creation

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## Why Brand Story?

- Japan is the **third largest economy in the world** after the United States and China.
- Japan's consumer economy is **large, broad-based, and sophisticated**. Per capita income of about \$35,390 underpins its strength as a consumer market.
- Japan is **highly dependent upon the import** of natural resources. It has been the world's largest net buyer of food.

Source: International Trade Administration published on 2024-01-02

- The Japanese market is **already flooded** with a wealth of home-grown brands and products, plus attractive offers from a number of neighbouring countries.
- Giant brands with global presence offer **added value** through branding, gaining competitive advantage in pricing.
- Finland and Japan have many elements that can be shared and are mutually attractive markets, but there are also barriers, such as **market size and economic differences**, that make it challenging for Finnish companies to enter the market.

When talking about how great and valuable a product is, how do you create a brand story that strikes a chord with Japanese businesspeople and consumers? How can we add value to a product that is great enough as it is?

# Key Points

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## Hokuo

- It has a very broad meaning. It literary means Northern Europe.
- But it's conceptual rather than geographical.
- The definition of Hokuo is quite comprehensive, and the countries included aren't fixed.
- However, the term 'Hokuo' is very popular in Japan, and many Japanese people associate it with Finland.
- For many Japanese people, Hokuo gives a mixed impression of Finland, Sweden, and Denmark.
- Finland generally has an excellent impression: happiest country for many consecutive years.
- The general impression of Hokuo includes **simple yet thoughtful design, modern yet nostalgic patterns, nature-themed motifs, and natural materials such as wood and linen.**



## Sauna

- Sauna became popular in Japan in the 1980s.
- Public baths and hot spring resorts are a part of Japanese people's lifestyle.
- Sauna rooms were added to the public bath facilities – mainly for men first.
- Saunas for women became widespread after 2000.
- Like everything else, things become “culture” as soon as women start using them.
- In Japan, sauna culture is strongly associated with Finland.
- Many people believe that it's a secret of Finland's happiness.



### Hokuo Sauna

- ◆ For men only
- ◆ Ladies' day is available once a year!

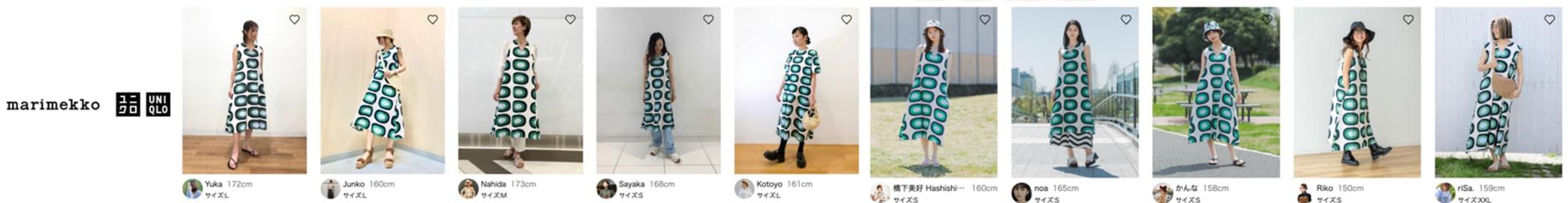


### Sauna Ikitai

- ◆ Largest Sauna portal in Japan
- ◆ Sauna database
- ◆ Community
- ◆ EC
- ◆ Loyalty programs

## Conformity

- Rather than being unique, many Japanese people feel comfortable when their choices are similar.
- School friends tend to choose similar clothes and bags, even haircuts.
- People's choices depend on **who's using it**.
- Many Japanese people don't hesitate to copy someone's style.
- If someone you like uses it, you'd believe you'll like it, too.
- Of course, there are exceptions, and many people want to dress differently, but the majority want to "blend in."
- Monogenic origin: Japan is genetically less diverse than other markets. Diet, skin type, appearance, etc., are less varied in Japan than in different markets.



## Genre

- Japanese people feel uncomfortable if they can't determine which genre something belongs to.
- It can be anything – music, fashion, skincare, movies, actors... anything!
- There are **charts and tests** to determine which genre you fall into.
- Even if something in store looks good, we don't choose it if it's not my genre.
- Monogenic, again: **less variety, easier to categorise.**
- Things are more diverse in other markets, and it's too hard to draw lines.



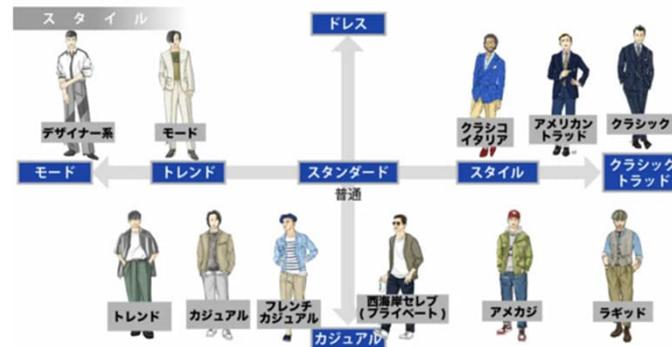
### Yona-Yona Brewery

- ◆ Local craft beer brand in Karuizawa
- ◆ Leader of craft beer community in Japan



### Suzuki Herb Laboratory

- ◆ Natural-based body hair remover made from pineapples and soybeans

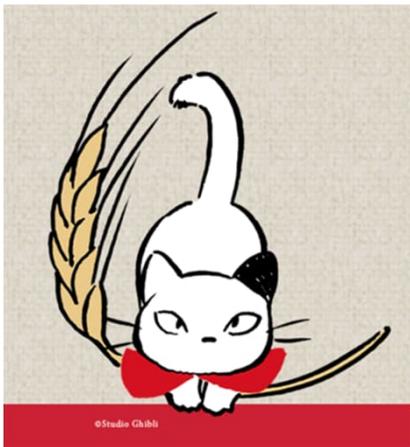


### Men's Fashion

- ◆ Fashion guidance for men
- ◆ Database-driven analysis to determine which style suits you best

## Characters & Mascots

- Japan is an empire of characters.
- Many major companies have **original characters to represent their philosophy.**
- They tell the company's story on their behalf.
- Popular characters have extensive merchandising opportunities.



Nisshin Flour

- ◆ Japan's largest flour brand
- ◆ Konyara created by Studio Ghibli



Yamato Transport

- ◆ Domestic & international transport / logistics
- ◆ Kuroneko means "black cat"



JR East (Japan Railway)

- ◆ Former national train service, now private company
- ◆ Suica is IC rail card



New Zealand Kiwi (Zespri)

- ◆ Original characters for the Japanese market

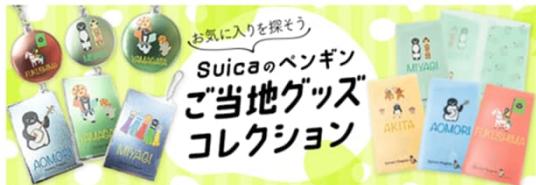
## Limited Edition

- Japanese people are **obsessed with limited editions** – limited **season, quantity, design**, etc.
- **Four seasons** are national pride – there are limited products for every season.
- **Local gourmet** – seasons x local features = variations are limitless.
- Ekiben (station **bento boxes**) – ultimate limited gourmet!

You have to take trains to eat these bento boxes.

Train journeys are not just for transportation or train spotters. They attract foodies.

- **Collectables and commemoratives** – seasons x local features x characters = limitless.



### JR East stations

- ◆ Suica penguin goods at each train stop
- ◆ Collectable, local community support, home town love!



### Kumamon (Kumamoto Pref.)

- ◆ Local character – copyright free



### Ekiben Festival

- ◆ The best Ekiben from all over Japan are curated and sold at department stores
- ◆ Extremely popular gourmet event

## Omiyage (small gifts/souvenirs)

- Omiyage is an integral part of Japanese socialising.
- Japanese people give omiyage;
  - When we return from holiday, we buy local sweets and snacks for friends, family and colleagues.
  - When we visit a friend's house.
  - When we want to say thank you. etc.
- Sweets and snacks for omiyage are **individually packed** and put in one large box or bag for sharing purposes.



This is a typical Omiyage section of a souvenir shop. Each box is concealed, but there are **samples showing the interior** of the boxes.

## Graphics

- Japanese people gain assurance through written texts.
- Other markets prefer to make their products speak for themselves and try to minimise text.
- If you visit Japanese brands' websites, you'll be surprised to see that they are full of texts and explanations that are graphically designed and incorporated with pictures to make a composite "story".
- Rather than writing long texts and placing them adjacent to photos, we've devised a method to **transmit brands' stories and product descriptions graphically**.
- It almost leaves no room for imagination – everything is explained.



DHC

◆ Japan's largest-selling health products company

VS



NOW

◆ America's largest-selling health products company

## Word of mouth (kuchikomi)

- This is common to the Japanese market but equally important and also tricky.
- It's better to treat it as a benchmark of the growing process.
- Internet literacy is relatively high in Japan, and **people know the insider trick of paid word of mouth.**

## Respect & courtesy

- Being **polite and respectful is a social currency.**
- Writing stories that focus too much on product advantages and compare them with local products in Japan can result in a negative impression.

## Definitions of Mottainai Spirit (quoted from Japan Living Guide)

### 1. Shame to waste ...

When there is something that can still be used and you feel it is a shame.

e.g.) It's a shame (mottainai) to throw it away when you've used it only once, so let's reuse it!

### 2. Consumed too much ...

When something is consumed too much.

e.g.) I've forgotten to switch off the lights yet again. What a waste (mottainai) of electricity!

### 3. When you have missed something (an opportunity, chance)

e.g.) This food has passed its expiration date (you missed the chance to eat the food), what a waste (mottainai)!

### 4. Wasting talent, abilities

When a person has talent but they're not making use of it.

e.g.) You will pass the exam if you study harder. It would be a shame (mottainai) if you don't try!

### 5. Too good for / to do ...

When something is too good to do something or for someone.

e.g.) It's a pity (mottainai) to serve such a pricey steak to a child who can't tell the difference in taste.

This candle was so expensive (mottainai) that I cannot use it.

### 6. Hesitant to accept something because it's too good

In this case, Mottainai is used for humility.

e.g.) Receiving such compliments is too good (mottainai) for me. I don't deserve that

# Summary - Dos & Don'ts

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## DO

- ❑ Give your product a specific role in Japanese people's lives.
- ❑ Focus on added values.
- ❑ Specify genre (intuitive genre is perfectly OK – no need to be data-driven).
- ❑ Specify TPO – Everyday use? Personal gift? Corporate gift?
- ❑ Add charts and tests if suitable.
- ❑ Add graphically incorporated texts.
- ❑ Add FAQ – to give the impression that other people are already interested in the product.
- ❑ Add Hokuo features – design, functionality, wellbeing, people-centric product design, etc.
- ❑ Create cute characters (optional) – think of the founder's pet, or local animals, flowers, trees, fairies, etc.

## DON'T

- ❑ Imply that your product is better than a Japanese product - this is a rule of thumb and can be tackled case by case.
- ❑ Go too deep into the corporate history and founders' stories – save these as side-stories or the origin of the corporate character.

# Mini-Workshop

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## GOOD EXAMPLES

Lapuan kankurit – successful localisation

- <https://www.lapuankankurit.fi/>
- <https://lapuankankurit.jp/>

Blueair (Sweden) – effective use of the original material

- <https://www.blueair.com/gb>
- <https://www.blueair.jp/>

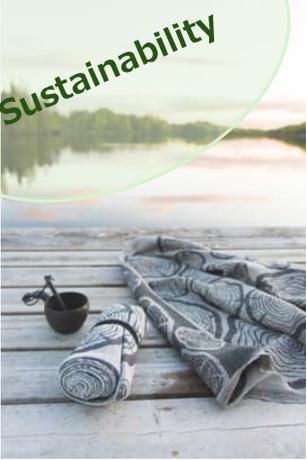
**LAPUAN KANKURIT**  
*weavers from Finland*

 **Blueair**



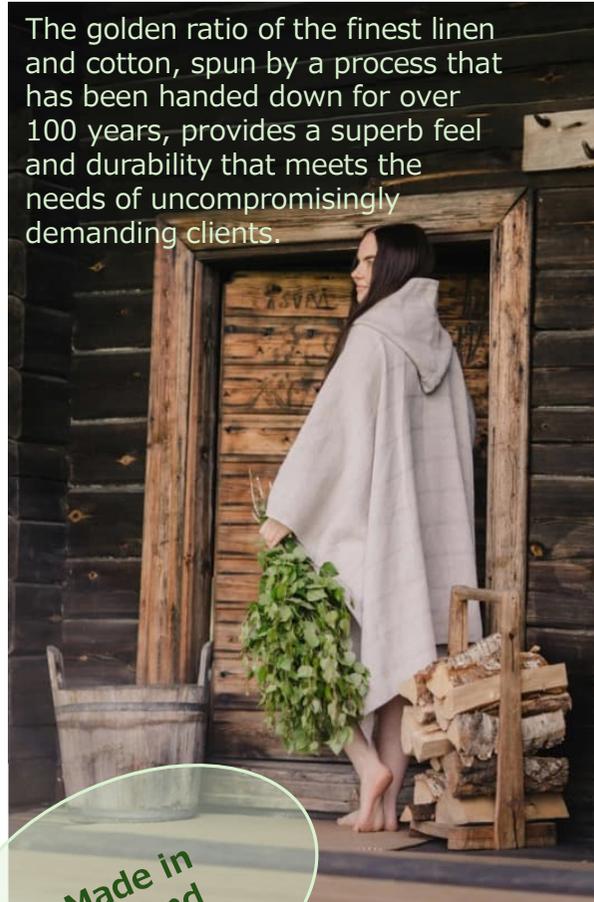
Jokipiin Pellava is a family company running for over 100 years and 4 generations, manufacturing linen textiles from start to end, from yarn into packaging in the same place as it started 1920. Main product domestically is customized textiles as corporate gifts and the largest export product is sauna pillows. The roots and traditions shape the way we manufacture textiles – key to sustainability is to avoid waste and create products that have long lifespans. We combine the customer brand into the linen textile and make it stand out.

## Sustainability



Jokipiin Pellava has maintained a thorough standard of strict environmental protection in the production area for the linen and cotton used as raw materials at its factory in a small village in central Finland called Jokipii.

The golden ratio of the finest linen and cotton, spun by a process that has been handed down for over 100 years, provides a superb feel and durability that meets the needs of uncompromisingly demanding clients.



Made in Finland

## Gift Ideas



The products are so popular that they are also chosen as employee gifts for corporate welfare programs.

The high quality and durable nature of the products have made them a perennial favourite in Finland, both at home and in public sauna facilities.



SAUNA

- ✓ Excellent water absorbency and quick-drying properties.
- ✓ Custom orders available.
- ✓ Machine washable and easy to maintain, used in salons and hotel spas and as hotel room amenities.



KIITOS!

ありがとう！

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