

Engage with Japanese companies your international business



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Report and experience out of the real life

Often I hear from clients that it is very difficult to deal with Japanese companies during international business. At international trade fairs the visit ends after an informative and polite conversation without any commitment. If Western business person are not prepared for Japanese business culture it must be frustrating. Fairs has for Japanese business person a rather informational purpose and are used to set up leads rather than business. Closing deals at trade fairs in Japan is an exception and also the other way around. There is not pressing need to negotiate or even conclude business directly at the fair.

It is also quite surprising for visitors from outside that Japanese trade fairs are sometimes completely focused on Japan and not very used to international customers and participants. There is a great number of leading international trade fairs established in a great variety of industries in Japan, which at least deserve consideration for your schedule. To mention just some of them: For the automotive industry there is the Tokyo Motor Show, semiconductors are covered by SEMICON, CEATEC is focused on consumer electronics, and JIMTOF is specialized on machine tools. You can meet more and more Japanese companies at the major trade events internationally and in your country. Not only the big players from Japan, but also a variety of committed and capable small and medium enterprises, who might be offering the exact opportunity you are looking for.

Japan is known for innovations and setting global trends especially in the field of technology. Therefore Japanese companies exhibiting in your country should be of interest to you if you are at the leading edge in your field or want to get there. Especially if you are in the field such as the automotive industry or of future technologies such as nanotechnology, robotics, energy and environmental technology, you should at least have one eye on potential partners from Japan.

Visiting trade fairs is a proven way to make an impression and establish business contacts with potential international partners. However, trade shows in Japan sometimes follow different rules from those with which you may be familiar in Europe, and Japanese exhibitors in your country might also not be aware of the differences. Therefore careful preparation and selection of the show, as well as the businesses you want to engage with is crucial in dealing with Japanese companies on trade shows. If you are inexperienced and unprepared it might easily happen that you will not get the expected results from your interaction with Japanese companies.



However, it would be a mistake to give up on potentially profitable business at an early stage just because you are not familiar with the rules of the game.

I like to give you some insider tips to avoid the most common pitfalls and beginner's mistakes in interacting with Japanese companies at trade fairs. It will help you to get started successfully with your Japan related projects. There are some very simple guidelines that you can follow to create lasting and mutually profitable connections with Japanese businesses. Than to build trust and inspire engagement is one of the most important key factors.

Be prepared

Dealing with Japanese companies can be a challenge. They have a unique culture and communication can be very complex. It is likely quite hard to achieve trust and deeper levels of engagement. Therefore it is crucial to prepare yourself and learn about these communication issues and show the required intercultural awareness to set-up a smooth discussion with potential leads.

Another important step of preparation is to make contacts before the show and to issue specific invitations to potential clients or partners, and it is at least equally important to have an appropriate follow-up.

Commitment

Japanese companies are generally more risk averse than their western counterparts. As a rule Japanese business people are working hard to avoid uncertainty or risk. There is a general tendency among them to prefer risk mitigation over potential future rewards. For that reason it is of great importance that you communicate statements that underline your commitment to your potential business partner. Staff from all levels of hierarchy in the company is more likely to engage with you once they believe you are committed for the **long term**, and after they are assured your **relationship** with them will be **harmonious and fair**.

Differentiation

Although, preparation and cultural awareness are essential, you also have to be careful to not overdo it and lose your distinctive advantages as a foreign company.

Don't become too Japanese.

Japanese companies realize that their slow decision-making and other features of Japanese business culture can be a problem, and understand that they should be acting faster. Especially the increasing competition from China and South Korea in the past decade has highlighted this painfully. Japan's corporate culture is responding to the new reality and is adapting. However, there is still a long way to go and a committed international partner could be a valuable asset for every Japanese company, that as trying to improve.



Japanese companies are looking for positive differences in an international partner.

They might feel motivated by messages of positivity and hope that might counterbalance their tendency for risk aversion. This may present an opportunity for your company to attract and engage Japanese partners simply by being a source of outside optimism about Japan.

If you are interested in a long-term partnership with a Japanese company, it is important to recognize and embrace the role you can play in helping it progress. As its partner, you can help define and shape a brighter future for the company and Japan in general, and it can be a great advantage to communicate this appropriately.

Make sure you also highlight **your overall vision**, and **maintain a positive outlook**. Share that positive vision with your partner and show them how your cooperation can lead to a brighter future for both of your companies.

Reliable

Japanese business partners are particularly interested in your **long term plans**, and the reputation in dealing with other partners from Japan. For that reason it can be helpful to consider highlighting any **partnerships** you have formed with reputable, well-known Japanese companies. It may also be an advantage if you already have **investments or a local office** in Japan. We are more than motivated to support you to create and build leads in Japan.

It is also important to know that Japanese audiences generally prefer to receive a different type of information, and to be aware of the way in which Japanese companies communicate. **Do not only rely on impressive marketing efforts** such as a big trade show presence to make the right people aware of your products. It might also be possible that your brand is not recognized, even if you are an industry leader in your home market.

Japanese people are generally quite detail oriented, preferring content based on data. Japanese corporate and product communications are usually more detailed than their counterparts in Western countries. In addition, Japan has experienced more than two decades of economic plateauing, which contributes to even more skepticism. This means that Japanese companies are not easily convinced by big marketing claims without much substance. Therefore, you should provide as much proof as possible to support your claims about quality, safety, popularity etc.

Your reliability will be part of the foundation of any relationship with any Japanese company.

Best regards,

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