

In pursuit of Yoki-Monozukuri

Packaging contributes to society in Japan perhaps more than in any other country. **Dominique Huret** finds out how the 'Yoki-Monozukuri' concept has helped one company achieve new levels of excellence in packaging development

For modest beginnings 125 years ago when it started producing high-quality facial soap, Japan's Kao Corporation is now a prestigious firm that continues to use the 'moon' trademark and fancy packaging.

The chemical and cosmetics producer is now dominant in the sector, directly employing around 6,200 people and reporting annual sales of ¥1.3 billion (US\$12 million). More than two thirds of its sales are in Japan, 12 per cent is across Asia, and the remaining 18 per cent is shared equally between the US and Europe.

Well-known products include Bioré, Jergens, Kanebo, John Frieda, Curél, Essential, Liese and Merries.

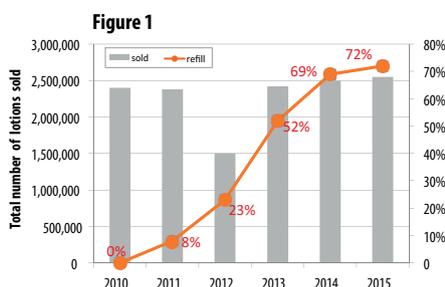
Contributing to society has always been vital to Kao, explains creative director of the packaging design division, Kumiko Tajima: "Yoki-Monozukuri is our strong commitment to providing products and brands of excellent value for full consumer satisfaction. It consists of the two Japanese core concepts, 'Yoki' meaning good/excellent and 'Monozukuri' for development/manufacturing of products.

"Kao strives to develop innovative products and brands to maximise consumer satisfaction by determining the needs of consumers and fusing them with the seeds of R&D."

About 40 per cent of household waste in Japan is typically made up of plastics packaging. Kao, meanwhile, sells more than two billion household items a year such as shampoo, cleaners and cosmetics. As a manufacturer of products used on a daily basis in many households, Kao has for many years been making efforts to reduce the volume of plastics it uses in its containers.

Its first concept was called 'Eco together', which aimed to combine convenience with reduced environmental impact. The best example of this is refill packs.

"The Refill products have become a familiar part of Japanese life," explains Tajima. "Often original bottle and refill pouch are bought



together, with the price difference between the two small [around £2/\$3]. Bottles of liquid shampoos, skin creams or detergents allow the repeated use of the actual container simply by refilling the contents. With products such as sprays, parts can be replaced, which reduces not only the use of resources but also the amount of waste post-use."

Kao first started selling refill packs in 1991. Refill products account for a continually growing share of products sold in rigid containers (Figure 1).

Ongoing research has enabled Kao to adjust and launch additional convenient refill products.



Refill products have become a staple of Japanese life. Left: Ease of opening is an important aspect for the consumer





Japanese brands have perfected the art of convenience
 Right: Special labels use Braille to indicate the nature of the product

First the company launched a bottle-type replacement with 'universal design' features in 2008 for the Curél line of shampoos and conditioners.

One feature of the design was a stand-up bottle form that does not easily lose its shape, making it suitable for the elderly and reducing the risk of spillage.

As Japanese women commonly hold the family purse, household and personal care products often bear a feminine appearance. Their practicality also requires optimisation so as to avoid spillage and waste.

To illustrate this improved customer convenience awareness, Kao introduced the 'pull-ring' system, which is targeted at ease of opening using the minimum force and with a wet hand. In addition, larger print characters and brighter colours improve shelf stand-out.

Targeted at visually impaired consumers, special labels are used as Braille to indicate whether the item is shampoo or conditioner. In addition, stickers come on loose paper sheets that can be given free of charge to retailers.



In the cosmetic sector, Kao has adjusted its packaging to suit a Japanese female consumer increasingly interested in makeup. Appropriate packaging and instructions on the box inform the consumer how to apply each colour correctly.

A similar approach is seen on the company's powder cosmetic products, where pictures help illustrate to the consumer how to apply the product to the cheeks.

Concluding in true Japanese style, Tajima explains how these innovations are the result of the united ability, creativity and energy of every person at the company; part of the Yoki-Monozukuri approach.

In the Yoki-Monozukuri cycle, the profits earned go towards the continuous creation of value-added products and brands. This cycle earns the respect and trust of all stakeholders including consumers, employees, business partners, local communities, and shareholders, thereby achieving profitable growth.

More information from Kao Corporation, 1-14-10 Nihonbashi Kayabacho, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 103-8210, Japan. Tel: 81 2 2660 7111. www.kao.com



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