

Public Relations in Japan

Prepared by Douglas P. Clements



Part 1: Background information

Official Name: Nippon or Nihon. In English, it is simply Japan.

Capitol City: Tokyo

Major Cities: Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, Nagoya, Sapporo, Kobe, Fukuoka, Sendai, Kyoto

Type of Government: Parliamentary Democracy- 47 Prefectures

Location: Japan is an island nation situated off the main land coast of Asia. The 337,873 square kilometer nation consists of four major islands and more than 4,000 smaller islands. Hokkaido is the northernmost large island; Honshu is the largest main island; Shikoku is the smallest of the major islands and Kyushu creates the southern tip of the main island group.

Currency: Japanese Yen

Culture: Japanese culture has been developed through thousands of years of practice and rich tradition. While religion is starting to play a smaller role in younger generations, Japanese people often practice several religions including Shinto and Buddhism throughout their lives. Ceremonies from both religions are used at significant life events depending on whether it is a wedding, funeral or a rite of passage. Coinciding with religion is a deep dedication to family and tradition. Often, paintings and images of ancestors can be seen throughout Japanese households to guide family members. This type of dedication can be seen in almost every aspect of Japanese culture. The Japanese businessman is so dedicated to his job that to leave early, even for a family emergency, requires a great deal of bowing and is considered a shameful act. They even have a term for 'death by overwork' and employees strive for such an honorable end.

Being so steeped in tradition, the Japanese people hold many ideals that have somewhat progressed in the Western World. As their dedication to the working life indicates, the Japanese have very few individualistic principles. Younger generations are slowly beginning to adopt the Western understanding of individualism, but many cultural practices revolve around a "group think" mentality. Likewise, the Japanese culture still clings to a fairly high degree of class differentiation. The business world is held in higher esteem than rural life and is highly dominated by males. According to Hofstede cultural dimensions, Japan has a high masculinity index which indicates the country experiences a high degree of gender differentiation. In Japanese culture, males dominate a significant

portion of the society and power structure. The rights and power of women are beginning to gain in popularity, but it is a slow process.

According to the CIA Factbook, government-industry cooperation, a strong work ethic, mastery of high technology, and a comparatively small defense allocation (1% of GDP) helped Japan advance with extraordinary rapidity to the rank of second most technologically powerful economy in the world after the US and the third-largest economy in the world after the US and China, measured on a purchasing power parity (PPP) basis. One notable characteristic of the economy has been how manufacturers, suppliers, and distributors have worked together in closely-knit groups called keiretsu. A second basic feature has been the guarantee of lifetime employment for a substantial portion of the urban labor force. Both features have now eroded. Japan's industrial sector is heavily dependent on imported raw materials and fuels.

Part 2: Overview of Public Relations Industry

Public relations is a well-developed profession in Japan, similar to that of North America. There are a large number of firms which practice public relations in Japan. Some are based in Japan while others are international organizations based mainly in the United States. The firms operate in different areas of public relations including: corporate, product, marketing, government, academic related, investor relations, crisis communications, health, IT, and others. Areas of specialization vary between companies, but may include: consultation, press relations, production, research, events and more. Two large public relations firms in Japan are:

- Kyodo Public Relations Company <http://www.kyodopr.co.uk/>
Kyodo PR is Japan's the largest independent public relations counseling firms in Japan. Established in 1964, Kyodo PR is engaged in all aspects of public relations, including counseling, media relations and promotional support for marketing and consumer sales.
- Tokyo Doko <http://www.tokyodoko.com/>
Tokyo Doko Public Relations is engaged in all aspects of public relations in Japan, including overall counseling, media relations and promotional support for marketing and consumer sales. Tokyo Doko public relations philosophy is based on efficiency and personal contacts with the media.

The primary focus of public relations in Japan is media relations. Mass media holds an inordinate amount of control and power in this country. The country's five main daily newspapers serve more than 100 million citizens. The Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper has an estimated circulation of 10 million people. For comparison, Japan's leading financial newspaper outsells the Wall Street Journal by a ratio of two to one.

Similarly, television broadcasts are dominated by five private networks with a great deal of reach. These powerful mass media companies have banded together to form "press clubs" throughout the nation. For the public relations practitioner, getting placement with any of these press clubs is almost a guaranteed way to successfully distribute the

company's message. Additionally, the nature of Japanese culture lends the practice of public relations a great deal of power. Advertisement is viewed as a company selling its own product and is given little value by the people. On the other hand, a news story about a company or product is viewed as third party endorsement and is viewed as much more reliable information.

One major drawback to the power of the press clubs is the country's lack of functioning libel laws. Without strict guidelines as to what press can and cannot say, media outlets can often twist messages and destroy company images. This necessitates the constant vigilance of practitioners and forces good personal relationships with reporters. Also, these press clubs can monopolize press conferences and often keep foreign media from gaining fair access to Japanese news.

The Public Relations Society of Japan, formed in 1980 by the joining of two smaller PR organizations, is the premier public relations organization in Japan. With more than 500 member corporations, departments and individuals, the PRSJ works throughout the year to raise the caliber of public relations in Japan. Through seminars and educational training, PRSJ is gaining credibility on both the national and international stages. With the organization being so relatively young, it has not yet developed ethical guidelines to help its members practice clean and fair PR, but as it continues to grow and work with organizations in the United States and groups from other nations, ethical standards may not be too far off in the future. Information about the Society can be found on <http://www.prsj.or.jp/english/>

There are a variety of tips for doing business in Japan:

- **Greetings:** The Japanese are very aware of Western habits, and will often greet you with a handshake. The bow is their traditional greeting. If someone bows to greet you, observe carefully. Bow to the same depth as you have been bowed to, because the depth of the bow indicates the status relationship between you.
- **Gestures:** Japan is a high-context culture; even the smallest gesture carries great meaning.
- **Business Cards:** The business card is extremely important for establishing credentials. Once given a card, study it carefully before placing it on the table. Do not put the cards in your pocket or in your wallet if you plan to put it in your back pocket.
- **Dress:** Men should wear conservative suits, and never appear casual. should dress conservatively, keeping jewelery, perfume, and makeup to a minimum. Trousers are not appropriate.
- **Negotiating:** A Japanese response "I'll consider it" may actually mean "no". Negatively phrased questions will get a "yes" if the Japanese speaker agrees.

Part 3: Overview of Public Relations as it Relates to Students

Japanese education is similar to that of the United States. One major difference is that most students apply to high schools through the completion of entrance exams. High

schools that require entrance exams are usually of the highest quality and are designed not to give students a broad education, but to focus their curriculum on their eventual career.

Most Japanese universities do not yet have a public relations or even communications department. However, several prominent Japanese public relations firms are actually not based in Japan. They utilize students with international business and public relations degrees from around the world. For the student that wants to study in Japan, most practitioners would study an Economics program which is similar to a United States business degree.

The ten most prestigious Japanese Universities are:

- University of Tokyo
- Kyoto University
- Osaka University
- Tokyo Institute of Technology
- Tohoku University
- Keio University
- Kyushu University
- Nagoya University
- Hokkaido University
- Tsukuba University

With the public and business perception of PR rising, it would not be surprising to see new student organizations and undergraduate programs being created within the next ten years.

Resources Used:

<http://www.prsj.or.jp/english/membercompanies.html>

<http://www.nigelward.com/top30.html>

http://www.geert-hofstede.com/hofstede_japan.shtml

<http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ja.html>

<http://www.globalpr.org/knowledge/businessguides/Profile-Japan.pdf>

http://www.us.emb-japan.go.jp/english/html/profile/profile_index.htm

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1584/is_n28_v4/ai_13238883

<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/about/overview/index.html>

<http://www.cic.sfu.ca/forum/horvat-1.html>

<http://iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/Spring01/Newsome/PRtoday.html>

<http://www.getcustoms.com/articles/dba.html>