

Japanese-German Business Association

7th meeting of the "IT" working group within DJW
Munich, 10.03.2016

Summary

For many German companies, Japan is an interesting but difficult market due to cultural differences. In the presentation "Retarus Japan Readiness", Andreas Persch, Executive Assistant to the Board of Retarus Group, expressed confidence in the quality and USP of the company's information logistics products and services, but also a need for greater understanding of the Japanese culture and business protocols for a successful market entry. He pointed out that the aim is to be "a German company with Japanese service standards".

With representatives from established Japanese companies such as NTT Data and Benefit One in attendance of the meeting, a wealth of insightful tips arose from the discussion that followed. Here are some of the main points:

Get insider introduction: In many cases there is no need for a personal introduction, but you need a referral from an acquaintance of someone inside the Japanese company before you can begin business discussions with them.

Don't waste resources at the bottom: If you are introduced to someone at the lower end of the decision making chain, you will have to meet with them several times before they might refer you to their direct boss, at which point you will need to repeat the process until you reach the actual decision maker. This can compile to become a major strain of your time and resources, so it is recommended to invest the effort in getting an intro at the top at the beginning.

Personal meetings and seasonal gifts: While a German company will not take a meeting unless there's a specific business agenda, and elaborate gifts might be viewed as bribes, regular face to face 'Aisatu' (greeting) meetings accompanied by gifts are an essential part of strengthening corporate ties. It's best to not overdo it for every meeting, but thoughtful seasonal gifts for occasions such as New Years and Shocu-Mimai (summer greeting) will be well received.

References:

Evernote's success in Japan. Its investment from NTT Docomo (20% of users were from Docomo referrals) and their presence in Japanese bookstores with books on how to use Evernote (conceivably seeded by the investor) are often cited as two key factors in gaining acceptance.
<http://www.forbes.com/sites/rosatrieu/2015/05/18/evernote-and-japans-largest-mobile-carrier-ext-end-partnership/#2b0196a61e02>

How Japanese companies are tackling cultural differences with employees from overseas.
http://www.nhk.or.jp/gendai/kiroku/detail_3749.html

Many thanks to those who attended and contributed to the interesting discussion, and also to Retarus for hosting the meeting.