

Nippon Closures proves there is no cap on innovation

The packaging manufacturer which specializes in closures and caps for products across the food and beverage industries is collaborating with overseas partners to enhance innovation and break into new global markets.



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President,
Nippon Closures Co., Ltd.

When you think of a product on the shelf of any super store, the first thing you often imagine is not about the product itself – or its core contents – but how that product looks and presents itself from the outside: its packaging. Indeed, packaging is integral to a product's brand and how the product appeals to diverse consumer tastes through the character, personality and functionality that it provides. As it turns out, with a culture that places the highest value on beauty, quality, and function in the manufacturing process through a long tradition for *monozukuri* (fine craftsmanship), the Japanese are unsurprisingly masters of packaging solutions.

"The Japanese are always aware of their ideal world and strive for perfection in beauty and function, without ever being satisfied with the status quo," says Hisashi Nakajima, President of Nippon Closures, which develops, manufactures, and sells plastic and metal closures and caps for products across the food, beverage, medical, sanitary, and chemical industries. "In order to produce a product that we are satisfied with, we keep improving it. We believe that is one of the reasons Japanese brands have such a good reputation, because



they strive for better functions and constantly develop their technology to have an ideal product."

The famous Japanese manufacturing philosophy *monozukuri* has traditionally been about craftsmanship quality, fine attention to detail, and the kaizen philosophy. Nowadays, it is also about responding to market demands and customer requests, as well as providing the solutions that customers require, explains Mr. Nakajima.

"We have always believed that the essence of *monozukuri* is to meet the needs of the customer, no matter what. In essence, we never turn down a demand or request from a customer in need," he says. "We communicate carefully with our customers to find out what problems they are really facing. We make it a point to first understand the customer well and then consider how we can help this person in need when developing our products. To achieve this, we always try to be creative, innovative and pursue the most advanced technology. This is something that has remained unchanged since the inception of our company and we are proud to say that our attitude towards ideal manufacturing has resulted in the trust our customers have placed in us over the years."

Central to this philosophy is the aspect of collaboration with other like-minded companies in

order to enhance innovative capabilities and produce optimum solutions. This is particularly so when it comes to co-creation amongst international partners who can share knowledge, technology, and research that enables the respective parties to break into new overseas markets. In 2019, Nippon Closures signed a cross-licensing agreement with the American packaging firm Aptar for the design, development, and manufacture of tethered caps, for instance.

"With regards to co-creation and collaboration with overseas companies, our goal is not necessarily to provide caps at a lower price, nor is it to pursue cost reduction or profitability," explains the Nippon Closures president. "Rather, we are thinking about how we can take advantage of our existing technologies and match them well with overseas partners and overseas closure manufacturers to provide highly specialized caps that meet the needs of each market. An existing technology may open a market in some other country. Or if it can help solve social issues in that country, that will be the greatest motivation for our engineers and staff members, which will also lead to their growth. What we pursue is not only profit but also how much value we can provide to society."

An example of this is how Nippon Closures has adapted its products to cater to changing Japanese society, which today has the oldest population in the world with the longest average life expectancy at 84, and more than 33% of the population soon expected to be over the age of 65.

"Since our establishment, we have been seeking ways to reduce the amount of force required to open a cap," says Mr. Nakajima. "For example, the twist-off caps used for jams and other products, introduced from a foreign cap manufacturer, initially required a strong force to open. As a result of various improvements, we've succeeded in making a cap that is easy for anyone to open."

In 2017, the company organized an "idea marathon" in Singapore to develop a set of caps and bottles that are easy to open for everyone including the elderly and disabled. "Through this project to develop a product by directly exchanging opinions with consumers and major beverage brands, we realized once again the importance of open innovation through diversity, which led to the opening of the FUTURE DESIGN LAB as a base for development and marketing in Singapore by Toyo Seikan Group Holdings."

As a business with a firm focus on such Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), another goal of Nippon Closures is to overcome the problem of plastics, says the company president.

"Personally, I have a great dream and goal to ensure that the continued use of plastics does not destroy the planet and to achieve a circular economy for plastic closures. As a business, we would like to contribute greatly to the happiness of the people living in any region, and not just pursue profit. To this end, CSR and social contribution are one of the main goals of our growth strategy that we are currently formulating."