

Japan in Motion: “Cool Japan” in the Eyes of the French

By Shinichi Kawakami



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About Japan in Motion

Japan in Motion is a television program made by TSS Production, a subsidiary of the Japanese regional station Television Shin-Hiroshima System (TSS), and broadcast every Tuesday on the French cable television channel Nolife. The program covers the whole of Japan and focuses on various interesting aspects of the country — tourist spots, cuisine, J-Pop, fashion, traditional crafts, anime, etc. — and introduces them to French viewers.

Japanese culture is enjoying something of a boom in France, particularly among the young. Last year's Japan Expo, an annual festival of Japanese culture held in a Parisian suburb in early July, drew more than 200,000 visitors over four days. Buoyed by this boom, *Japan in Motion* has won a strong following among Japanophile French viewers.

Why Was Japan in Motion Produced?

TSS Production established *Japan in Motion* in 2007 as a web-based video streaming site to share information about Japanese tourism and culture with the world. It was a time of media diversification amid a prolonged economic slump, bringing both a shrinking market for television advertising and a decline in the budgets allocated to produce shows; TSS Production needed to find new sources of revenue.

During this period of surging growth in the popularity of the Internet, the government was also taking active steps to promote Japan as an international tourist destination. The *Japan in Motion* website project was established as a way for TSS Production to

ensure its survival by applying its television production expertise and high-grade broadcasting equipment to the creation of high-quality videos about Japanese tourism and culture that could be streamed over the web in multiple languages.

A Rockier Path than Expected

Operating funds for *Japan in Motion*, of course, came entirely from TSS Production. Although efforts were made to keep costs down overall, such as partnering with a travel company to reduce expenses when shooting on location, securing sources of income was exceedingly difficult. Nevertheless, through trial and error, making use of national and local promotion programs here and there, the project managed to scrape by at the edge of financial viability.

With the rapid rise in popularity of YouTube, however, merely streaming high-quality video over the Internet no longer conferred an advantage. At the same time, revenues from the main business of producing television programs continued to fall. The situation for *Japan in Motion* was looking bleaker by the day.

Regular Broadcast on Nolife Channel in France

Facing a pressing need to establish a new center of business for *Japan in Motion*, we approached a number of overseas television stations about a partnership. The French cable television channel Nolife responded right away. With its focus on — and genuine enthusiasm for — Japanese culture, Nolife was just the right partner to cooperate with. And so it was that regular broadcasts of *Japan in*

Source: TSS Production



Japan in Motion, Season 7

Source: TSS Production



Japan in Motion, Season 8 #24, broadcast on March 12, 2013, showed a French “cosplayer” on the show.

Source: TSS Production



Japan in Motion, Season 3 #4, broadcast on Oct. 6, 2010, was a special program on Momotaro Jeans.

Motion on Nolife in France began in September 2009. With a 30-minute format — 10 minutes each on tourism, J-Pop, and a special feature — the show still runs every Tuesday from 19:30 to 20:00, with repeat broadcasts eight times a week.

In addition to being very interested in Japan, France is also one of the most cultured nations in the world. What catches on in France can easily spread to the rest of the world, which makes it an ideal place to put the word out about Japanese culture. Partnering with Nolife has generated a great deal of momentum for us.

Customizing for Foreign Markets

Nolife's primary viewers are men and women aged 25-34, a generation that has grown up enjoying Japanese manga. Because they are keenly interested in subcultures — particularly Japan's "idol" culture, which has no parallel in the French media — we put

Source: TSS Production



Japan in Motion, Season 8 #22, broadcast on Feb. 26, 2013, featured Dogo-onsen.

together a program using idol personalities as the main emcees. By incorporating French reporters sent from Nolife into the program, we also worked to better understand the French perspective, to learn how Japanese culture is seen through their eyes.

As a result of such trial and error, *Japan in Motion* gradually grew to become one of Nolife's most popular programs, earning us the channel's unshakable confidence. In addition, as word of *Japan in Motion*'s reputation as a popular show in France began to spread, since fiscal 2010 we have been able to secure a steady stream of support through relatively large-scale promotion programs administered by Japanese ministries and local governments.

Accessing such large-scale support enabled us to go beyond conveying information on television through the *Japan in Motion* program to develop sales channels for Japanese products in the French market, conducting promotions linked to Japanese cultural events on the ground in France, and seeking to increase functionality

Source: TSS Production



Japan in Motion official Facebook image

Source: TSS Production



Japan in Motion website image

Source: TSS Production



Japan in Motion, Season 8 #7, broadcast on Oct. 23, 2012, showed Natsuko Aso cooking Hiroshima-style okonomiyaki.

though web marketing and by interacting with viewers over Facebook. We attempted many things and have had some success in promoting inbound tourism for regional governments, developing French market sales channels for corporations, and promoting artists seeking to make their mark in France.

For us, the meaning of *Japan in Motion* has changed greatly, moving beyond just broadcasting the program to seeking, through the broadcast, to stimulate a Japanese cultural movement in France. The section below gives a concrete example of how we triggered such a movement.

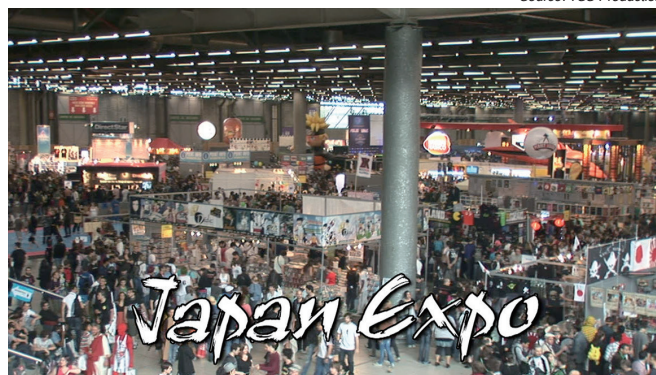
Case Study: Launching Momotaro Jeans in France

One example of how we developed corporate sales channels in France is Momotaro Jeans, produced by a domestic jeans manufacturer in Okayama Prefecture. In the beginning, the manufacturer was developing a Momotaro Jeans design to sell overseas but struggled to decide what to put on the back pocket: *kanji*, a family crest, or double lines. Internally, the *kanji* design had the strongest backing but the company was unsure and hesitated to start production. Furthermore, they were also unable to decide whether applying the pricing used in Japan — where each pair of jeans retailed for about 40,000 yen — would be reasonable for France.

At *Japan in Motion*, we ran a feature on the Kojima district of Kurashiki, Okayama, an area where denim manufacturers are concentrated, using idol personalities to convey the high quality of Momotaro Jeans to viewers in a way that was easy to understand. We then offered a gift of Momotaro Jeans through the website. Registering to win the gift required answering a questionnaire that enabled us to gain a broad sample of opinion about price and design from French viewers who were interested in jeans.

As it turned out, the double-line design was their overwhelming favorite. The data also showed that around 15,000 yen was seen to

Source: TSS Production



Japan in Motion, Season 8 #1, broadcast on Sept. 11, 2012, featured the Japan Expo 2012.

be a reasonable price. Combining these results with other marketing data, the company developed the Japan Blue brand for Europe, incorporating the double-line design. By adjusting factors such as the type of thread used, it was able to hold the price down to around 17,500 yen. Success in getting Japan Blue picked up by a world-famous shop in Paris led to an expansion of sales channels not only within France but also in Europe, North America, and Asia. The success of Momotaro Jeans drew a great deal of attention to *Japan in Motion* as a tool for spreading Japanese culture.

The Situation Today: Japanese Regional Information Direct to Overseas

To date, we have been able to introduce wonderful aspects of Japanese culture to many French viewers through *Japan in Motion*, but there is still so much more in Japan that we have not yet been able to present. In addition to the Hiroshima area we are currently doing more of our reporting in Tokyo, and would like to expand further afield to locations such as Hokkaido and Kyushu. Still, because TSS Production is not a huge corporation, cost remains an issue. Therefore, we are currently working together with our parent company TSS, as well as local television stations in Fukuoka, Hokkaido, and Shizuoka that are part of the same affiliate group, to build a network for conveying information directly overseas from regional areas. There is still an enormous amount of appealing content tucked away in regional areas, much of which has gone unnoticed even by Japanese. By utilizing the knowledge and programming ability of local television stations to uncover deeper aspects of Japanese culture, we hope to contribute to the globalization of more of Japan's local regions. **JS**

Shinichi Kawakami has been president of TSS Production Co., Ltd. since 2011. He had previously held various positions in the company since joining it in 1985.