

Students' Pick of Jobs

By Ato Ekusa

The ancient theory has it that a university is an institution of higher learning—a place where students gather to satisfy their thirst for knowledge. Yet today, it is a place they go to look for a job. In fact, the standard criterion for ranking Japanese colleges and universities today is how many of their graduates get jobs with “good” companies.

Few places attract as much attention among university seniors as the guidance office, and they are demanding in their standards. There are a number of companies that specialize in helping students find the right employers and companies the right students. One of these is Mainichi Communications, which surveys the nation's students every year on where they want to work. Not surprisingly, the results of this popularity poll say a lot about the way Japanese business is heading.

The survey itself divides students into two groups: technical and non-technical. For the technical students, there has not been much change over the last five years (Table 1). As can be seen, there has been no change in the top three choices of technical students over that period.

One notable change lower down on the list is that Nissan has replaced Toyota. Toyota used to be a favorite (ranking 10th), but the fact that Nissan has been advertising itself as a very high-tech company has apparently struck a responsive chord among college students. The tie for 10th place is also worth noting. Shiseido, a leading cosmetics firm, has come up from 43rd just five years ago largely on the strength of expectations that the information revolution will make the next few decades a women's era and that Shiseido will be in the forefront of this trend.

Going the other way, Hitachi has fallen from 4th to 10th, largely because it has a reputation as a manufacturer of heavy electrical equipment somehow out of touch with the kind of products that are expected to dominate markets in the

Table 1 Where Do Technical Students Want to Work?

Company	1991 ranking	1986 ranking
NEC	1	1
Sony	2	2
Fujitsu	3	3
Matsushita Electric Industrial	4	7
Honda Motors	5	6
IBM Japan	6	8
Nissan Motor	7	23
NTT	8	5
Kajima	9	25
Shiseido	10	43
Hitachi Ltd.	10	4

electronics age. In both of these cases, their popularity seems to rest on whether or not management is able to stay abreast of and even ahead of the times.

There have clearly been major changes in where the liberal arts graduates want to work. Five years ago, the top 10 were (in order) Mitsui & Co., Nissay, Mitsubishi Corp., C. Itoh, NTT, Sumitomo Bank, Tokio Marine & Fire Insurance, Dentsu, Sumitomo Corp., and Mitsui Real Estate Development. Japan was perceived as a trading nation, and these people gravitated to the trading and financial sectors.

But this year, the top three are ANA, JTB, and JAL—all of which are travel and leisure industry leaders. Also in this vein, the privatized Central Japan Railway has jumped from nowhere to seventh place. Five years ago, it was part of the debt-ridden JNR national railway system, and JNR did not even rank in the top 100.

Securities houses, which are currently at the center of a major political storm, are seen as paying well but are not very popular with students. Perhaps the students have a sixth sense that warns them to beware of companies that are just a little too flamboyant or that skirt the bounds of business ethics a little too closely. The securities firms have never been fashionable places to work, and so they have cut a number of shady deals to boost their profits and enable them to pay

Table 2 Where Do Non-technical Students Want to Work?

Company	1991 ranking	1986 ranking
ANA	1	14
JTB	2	16
JAL	3	25
C. Itoh	4	4
NTT	5	5
Tokio Marine & Fire Insurance	6	7
Central Japan Railway	7	—
Mitsubishi Bank	8	18
Mitsui & Co.	9	1
Dai-ichi Kangyo Bank	10	11
Fuji Bank	10	12

enough to offset the undercurrent of disdain. The importance of a company's public standing is also evident with Sumitomo Bank, which was sixth five years ago but has fallen to 15th in the wake of some under-the-table financial dealings. In contrast, Mitsubishi Bank, which is regarded as rather staid, has risen from 19th to eighth on the strength of its conservative image.

The face of Japanese industry is changing, and today's students are very attuned to the changes taking place. As society moves away from heavy manufacturing and toward personal leisure pursuits, students want to work for the winners. Little wonder that the Japan Racing Association has moved from 44th last year to 33rd this year or that sports equipment maker Mizuno has broken into the top 100 at 82nd place.

This is also true in the publishing industry. Iwanami, known for its very academic list, did not even make the top 100 this year, while strong showings in the *manga*—or comic book—market have pushed Kodansha from 73rd last year to 44th this year, Shuei-sha from 79th to 45th, and Magazine House from 86th to 54th. It is an age of mass culture, and everybody wants a piece of the action. ■

Ato Ekusa is a free-lance reporter based in Tokyo.