

# Reed Exhibition Japan

By Kishi Nagami

In January, the Tokyo International Book Fair was held at Makuhari Messe over a period of four days, attracting people from the publishing and other relevant businesses from Japan and internationally. Everywhere could be found active dealings over copyrights on a wide variety of books.

It seemed like magic that so many people gathered in one place and that business transactions on a large scale were carried out in spite of the prolonged worldwide recession. The author of this magic was Reed Exhibition Japan, a firm specializing in the organization of trade fairs. This firm—established in 1986 as the Japanese subsidiary of the world's largest trade fair organizer, the British-based Reed Exhibition Companies—now organizes 15 large-scale international trade fairs a year on a regular basis.

In Japan, most trade fairs, exhibitions and other similar events have been organized and operated under the initiative of industrial organizations. What motivated many of the businesses participating in such events was a sense of obligation. An event initiated by an industrial organization usually begins with discussions by the board of directors to decide what should be presented, how, and on what schedule. On the basis of these decisions, the board commissions the operation of the event to a firm, which undertakes public relation activities, site management, personnel recruitment and deployment before and during the period. This firm is responsible for only a small part of the entire operation.

Trade fairs organized by Reed are completely different. Reed develops a plan for a trade fair, obtains approval for the plan from people concerned, and implements it. What is more important, Reed plans a trade fair on the basis of the concept that a trade fair should offer opportunities for business talks.

“At a trade fair organized by us, everyone should be able to obtain

knowledge, have access to the latest information, and close one or more business deals. To achieve this, we do not invite all the companies that seem relevant in the hope of merely increasing the apparent size of a fair, but arrive at the list very carefully to ensure maximum potential for successful business negotiations,” states Ishizumi Tadao, president of Reed Exhibition Japan.

Reed not only calls people together to a trade fair, but also is engaged in various activities to increase the attractive power of the fair. For example, it plans various events, including lectures and seminars by specialists, and conducts campaigns using newspapers and magazines. It also sends out direct mailings to a total of about 1 million customers and buyers, whom it picks up from its own database. During the period of a fair, Reed's staff also works as coordinators between participants to encourage them into promising business talks.

Simply put, a trade fair organized by Reed is a package product, which it develops wholly at its own risk.

## A business which the current times demand

The business of organizing business-talk-oriented trade fairs, which is rare in Japan, has been nurtured by President Ishizumi.

Following a career as a salesman in the U.S. for Pentel, a large Japanese manufacturer of writing materials, and as vice president of a damage insurance company, Ishizumi was offered the post of Japanese representative of Cahners Exposition, which was in the business of organizing small-scale trade fairs in Japan. Cahners Exposition had a small office in Japan, with only 10 employees, and was little known to Japanese people.

“When I was with Pentel, our company participated in several international trade fairs as an exhibitor and I was in charge of exhibiting our products. At one of the largest of such fairs, I was very surprised to learn that one private

company was in command of the entire event, and I came to be interested in this business. This was one of the major reasons why I accepted this offer,” Ishizumi reflects.

Around that time, the fall of 1989, Japan's first full-scale facility for international trade fairs opened, motivating Ishizumi to give up his post for a new business. This facility, Makuhari Messe, had an International Conference Hall with booths for simultaneous interpreters in four languages, Makuhari Event Hall with a capacity to accommodate 9,000 people, and the International Exhibition Hall with the largest space in the East. One of Ishizumi's friends had been involved in the establishment of this facility, and Ishizumi became convinced that the trade fair business had great potential, and he wished to make it take root in Japanese culture with his own hands.

Ishizumi decided to take the job of representative of Cahners Exposition in Japan on two conditions: to establish the subsidiary as an independent firm, and the authority to manage the firm in his own way. He was inaugurated as president, not merely as a Japanese representative under the control of the parent company. Three years later, the firm changed its name from Cahners Exposition Japan to Reed Exhibition Japan, to match the name of the parent company.

Ishizumi began his work as president with trips around the world to see in person as many international trade fairs as possible for elaborate research. One of the fairs exhibiting eyeglasses gave him an idea of what kind of fair he wanted to organize. He chose eyeglasses as the subject of the first fair to be handled by the new firm.

As soon as he returned to Japan, he researched the Japanese eyeglass industry for six months, and then called or met with people at hundreds of Japanese eyeglass-related firms, just as energetically as when he traveled selling Pentel's small mechanical pencils in the

United States. He also sent out a call to those in the eyeglass and related businesses throughout the world to participate in the eyeglass business in Japan. Since the name of Reed Exhibition Japan was little known to Japanese people, Ishizumi had to use his own legs and enthusiasm to generate a market.

"In some cases I called people directly for appointments, and in others I sent letters to introduce myself and to explain why I wanted to meet with them. Most people received me politely even though I was a stranger to them. Some people are convinced that corporate executives do not see visitors unless they have been introduced by someone in a similar position; according to my experience, it is not true. In business, a meeting set up by a go-between more often turns out to be a failure, mostly from complications of the interests of each party concerned. My method of persuasion is to talk earnestly, following a logical process and with common sense. People do not gather automatically; someone has to persuade them to do so."

## The persuasion factor

Ishizumi compares his method and

enthusiastic attitude to those of a candidate running for election; in an election campaign, a candidate begs sincerely a large number of voters, namely strangers, one by one to vote for him or her. Thus, his thoroughgoing approach in facing each challenge was the key to his bringing great success to Pentel America and to Reed Exhibition Japan.

He encourages relevant manufactures to come to Japan to find customers. At the same time, he sends direct mail to a total of 1 million buyers who seem to be potential customers for such firms. In addition, he follows up the campaign by calling or visiting those who have received his mailings. In some cases, he does not hesitate to fly to London, Paris or wherever potential buyers are. Moved by the enthusiastic persuasion of Ishizumi, a large number of people gathered from many countries, leading the first eyeglass fair to great success. This took place one and a half years after his inauguration as president.

With the aim of giving participants the impression that they can conclude a deal at a fair organized by Reed, the eyeglass fair has been held on an annual basis since. Following this fair, Reed organized a number of large-scale events, including the International Jewellery Tokyo '91 Exhibition, International Stationery Exhibition, and CASE Exhibition, a computer-related fair, which is still uncommon in Japan.

"The great satisfaction and the feeling of self-content after we finish a fair successfully drives me to another challenge. Organizing a fair, however, forces me to always be careful and alert in every single preparatory task, keeping my nerves at high tension from day to day."

Reed is always working to know various industries better and to identify current consumer trends, the results of which are fully utilized in planning regular and new types of fairs. It is not, of course, always successful.

Some product categories, which were common subjects of trade fairs in other countries and for which Reed attempted to plan trade fairs, still had only small markets in Japan and sufficient response from people concerned, who thought that the time was premature, could not be obtained. Others had been so popular but short-lived that people lost interest before Reed could complete the preparations for the fairs.

For a while immediately after starting this business, many people were wary that foreign manufacturers encouraged into the Japanese market by a trade fair might turn out to be a great threat to themselves.

"We visit each of these people to persuade them. We say to them that, if they do not use this opportunity, they would eventually lag behind their Japanese competitors in establishing a footing in international circles."

Since Japanese businessmen have lacked the concept that a trade fair is an opportunity for making business deals in an international perspective, it is understandable that many of them react in this manner. By taking time and patience to persuade such people, the persisting wariness begins to fade. They have come to understand that a trade fair can also be a great opportunity for them in obtaining a lead to going out to the world. The current recession, therefore, has little impact on this business; companies are making every attempt to reduce expenses, but they do not refrain from participating in a trade fair organized by Reed which has proved that its exhibitions and trade fairs always offer business merits to both exhibitors and visitors.

As Ishizumi stated, "An economic recession is not a negative factor for our business. On the contrary, we can prosper more under a recession because, by offering a place for the world's suppliers and buyers to gather, we can create potential for successful business negotiations, which are sought more enthusiastically when the economy is sluggish. If participating firms experience a certain amount of business effects at a trade fair, they will return the following year."

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**Above:** Ishizumi Tadao, president of Reed Exhibition Japan

**Left:** International Jewellery Tokyo '91 Exhibition