

Advice for Exporters (Part 2)

The Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) has dispatched 31 JETRO "senior trade advisors" to trade promotion agencies of other industrialized countries with the aim of increasing exports to Japan. With abundant expertise and trade experience, these specialists give local trading firms advice on exporting through seminars, visits to individual companies and introductions to Japanese importers. They also consult with in-place JETRO staff members regarding technical and strategic measures to help smooth trade. Fumio Otsuka reports on his activities in Ireland where he has been working as a JETRO advisor at the Irish Trade Board since July 1991.

Located closer to the United States than any other European Community (EC) nation, Ireland has actively traded with the U.S. and Europe as well as the U.K. The highly export-minded nation exports a majority of its gross national product (GNP). Irish living and culture, nurtured since the New Stone Age more than 8,000 years ago, produced a craft industry which has developed through trade with these countries. Highly educated and persevering, the Irish manufacture consumer products which are competitive on the international market, though confined to specific fields.

For nearly two decades, since joining the EC, Ireland's public and private sectors have vigorously attracted foreign companies contributing to its industrialization. This economic activity has also fostered and reinforced domestic businesses. The Irish Trade Board has been involved at every stage and there are now more than 30 Japanese firms operating in Ireland.

Consultation not limited to product exploration

Before leaving Japan for Ireland I was told to investigate new and promising products. After working in the country for a while I found these instructions insufficient. It took me only a week or two to complete my goods-finding mission after checking out shops, but I discovered that the real work begins after I find an attractive product. I call on the company which



Lir Chocolate produced by Lir Chocolates; importer Look Advance (Japanese medium-sized trading company). Connie Doody's homemade chocolates were a hit with children in neighboring areas. Ms. Doody and her friend Mary White started their business by selling the chocolates at supermarkets, airports, etc. Immediately afterward, remarkable sales were recorded. Advisor Otsuka heard about this success story and advised and encouraged them to import the chocolates to Japan. Mary White was invited to Japan through one of JETRO's projects which invites foreign business persons to Japan. She actively promoted the chocolate and finally concluded a contract with a Japanese medium-sized trading company and Lir Chocolate will be sold at Japanese markets shortly. This is a good example of a JETRO senior trade advisor project.

manufactures these products to learn more, such as looking at production facilities and learning about management and employee attitudes toward their work. I also ask executives about the company's management policy and exporting interests. Then I compare this data with that of other firms in the same industry. Finally I judge whether the targeted company is worth introducing to Japanese corporations.

During my visits, corporate executives often ask me about Japanese businesses, mainly existing distribution mechanisms. Firms which have already established trade with Japanese partners are more important than those wishing to export to Japan for the first time. We talk about measures to increase their exporting volume and heighten their presence in the Japanese market.

I was also instructed to increase the Irish Trade Board staff's understanding of Japan. Due to a shortage of time, however, I have only been able to hand in a JETRO report on corporate supporting activities to the staff member in charge. I spend most of my time driving all over Ireland visiting companies where I some-

times drink with executives and other company staff members, a practice I believe contributes to the promotion of private-sector diplomacy.

I think that a company engaged in business with foreign companies should, in general, maintain contact with their counterparts through frequent correspondence and patience. It is very important for both sides to share information, for example, on how their business is progressing. Communication with foreign partners, though, can be very difficult and cumbersome when the two sides speak different languages. It is a pity to say that not all Japanese importers are adept in carrying out their business activities in foreign languages, such as writing letters, negotiating specification changes and contract procedures.

Japanese companies stress the business practice of establishing long-term relationships with partners based on mutual confidence. As we learn more about each other we can deepen mutual interests, which should enhance business performance. Information sharing, I believe, is an important component of strengthening mutual understanding and trust.