

Press release

Contribution to Germany Year in Japan: 10-year licence partnership with Wilkhahn Japan

This year Japan not only hosted the World Exposition but “Germany Year” is being held from Spring 2005 through to Spring 2006, supported by leading design and cultural institutions. Coinciding with this, an exceptional success story of German-Japanese collaboration will be celebrating its jubilee in October: the Japanese Kokuyo Group has been producing and selling the products of the German manufacturer of office and contract furniture from Lower Saxony under the name of Wilkhahn for ten years – with increasing success.



Bad Münden. Exactly ten years ago, Wilkhahn gained a strong, new foothold in working the Japanese market when it signed a licence agreement with the Japanese Kokuyo Group. In Japan itself, Kokuyo is the epitome of office furnishing and as the brand name of Uhu in Germany is used as a synonym for glue, likewise Kokuyo in Japan is a synonym for pencils.

What is unique about this licence partnership is that Kokuyo established the renowned brand of Wilkhahn as an independent label and subsidiary company (Wilkhahn Japan Ltd.) in the Japanese market from the very start. The cooperation between Wilkhahn in Bad Münden and Wilkhahn Japan has developed to such an extent that Wilkhahn Japan adapts Wilkhahn’s entire market presence to the Japanese market and, in so doing, employs the corporate design of the German company almost one to one.

It means something in Japan: Wilkhahn as a symbol of made in Germany, for example at the World Bank in Tokyo or in the Lexus and Daimler-Chrysler showrooms.

For the highly traditionally and culturally minded Japanese, Wilkhahn design as the very best of German design is clear value added that makes Wilkhahn a coveted premium brand in the Japanese market. For example, postcards and booklets with “historical” Wilkhahn products and designer portraits have been a cherished part of sales literature for many years.

Wilkhahn



Successful and admired: the conclusion of the contract 10 years ago marked the beginning of assembly and sale of Modus, the innovative office chair bestseller (design: Klaus Franck, Werner Sauer and wiege).



Delighted about ten successful years of cooperation and looking forward to future success: Watanabe, President Wilkhahn Japan, and Wilkhahn Managing Director Dr. Jochen Hahne.

For further information and images, please contact:

Wilkhahn
Press + Public Relations
Fritz-Hahne-Straße 8
31848 Bad Münden
Germany
Tel. ++49 (0) 5042 / 999 -169
Fax - 230
burkhard.remmers@wilkhahn.de
www.wilkhahn.com

'Amongst our Japanese friends, knowledge and esteem regarding the cultural achievement of "design made in Germany" is more wide-spread and deeply entrenched than in virtually all other markets throughout the world – including our own market in Germany" Dr. Jochen Hahne, managing partner of Wilkhahn, is delighted to add. Dr. Hahne recently visited Wilkhahn Japan and it is not surprising that he immediately felt at home there as not only the products were awaiting him but also the distinct Wilkhahn green and the familiar corporate design.

In turn, employees from Wilkhahn Japan have been paying regular visits to Wilkhahn Head Office in Bad Münden in Lower Saxony, Germany, since 1995. This involves not only experts from production and logistics who wish to familiarize themselves with the manufacture of new Wilkhahn products: for employees in marketing and sales it is important to experience the special philosophy of the company hands on to be in a position to adapt this to the Japanese market. For this very purpose, an exhibition comprising historical exhibits, drawings, photographs and catalogues was put together this summer to pinpoint the milestones of Wilkhahn development for office chairs within the past 50 years. The same exhibition will be shown at Wilkhahn Japan in Tokyo this coming November, and will be on view in other Japanese metropolises until spring 2006. The jubilee celebrations will feature the Modus swivel chair presented in the form of a "Lebkuchen" (a sumptuous German spicy biscuit) – to give just one charming example of the German-Japanese cultural transfer.

The consistency and continuity of cooperation is also of economic benefit to both parties: in 2005 some prestigious projects were secured, such as furnishing all Lexus showrooms with Modus swivel chairs, equipping Mitsubishi showrooms with Sito cantilever chairs and last but not least, contributing to the interior design of Daimler-Chrysler showrooms in the form of 1,000 units of various Wilkhahn table, chair and lounge furniture ranges. For the current business year, turnover will amount to 900 million Yen (approx. EUR 6.6 million). That corresponds to an increase of more than 18% compared with the previous year.

Both Wilkhahn Japan President, Motomasa Watanabe, and Dr. Hahne are optimistic about the future in view of economic reforms in Japan: "In the years ahead, we will be among the well-known market players in Japan not only in terms of image: the customer potential for Wilkhahn on the Japanese market is far from being exhausted." So we can look forward to even more developments in this direction.