

## ◀ Working in Japan: A Totally Different business! ▶

VODW Marketing has been working together with Ford Motor Company for a long time. A clear example of the co-operation between the different brands of Ford Motor Company is the implementation of Service Upgrading in Japan. A country recovering from a severe recession. Both Ford and Mazda are implementing the new interactive service concept. Innovation and an excellent service are the weapons to stay ahead of competition and to regain customer's trust. Last year, VODW Marketing supported both brands with the start of the implementation.

### Flying Doctors

The co-operation between Ford and VODW goes back more than 14 years. The close co-operation also applies for the development and implementation of Service Upgrading. Since 1997 the consultancy team of VODW Marketing has been active as a kind of 'Flying Doctors' in the start-up of the implementation in more than 25 countries.

### The Vision

The vision of Mazda Japan is clear. The starting points of Service Upgrading are a perfect fit with the objectives for improved innovation and excellent service. The question was whether this concept would also succeed in Japan which has a totally different culture. Therefore, an important task for the

Mazda team and VODW was to make sure what the opportunities were and if the Service Upgrading concept could be implemented.

### Japan is Different! Or Maybe Not?

Every foreigner in Tokyo will see the specific Japanese aspect which make the environment different from other countries and cultures. For example, the inauguration of cars is a ritual that you will not encounter in many other countries. And still, basic principles of running a company are exactly the same in Japan as anywhere else in the world', says Jeroen Boesmans, Principal Consultant of VODW Marketing. 'Even here, the customer is the best starting point. Just as a European or American, Japanese do not like to wait and do not like to receive a bill that is much too high. However, the difficult thing in Japan is that the customer will never say he is unsatisfied.'

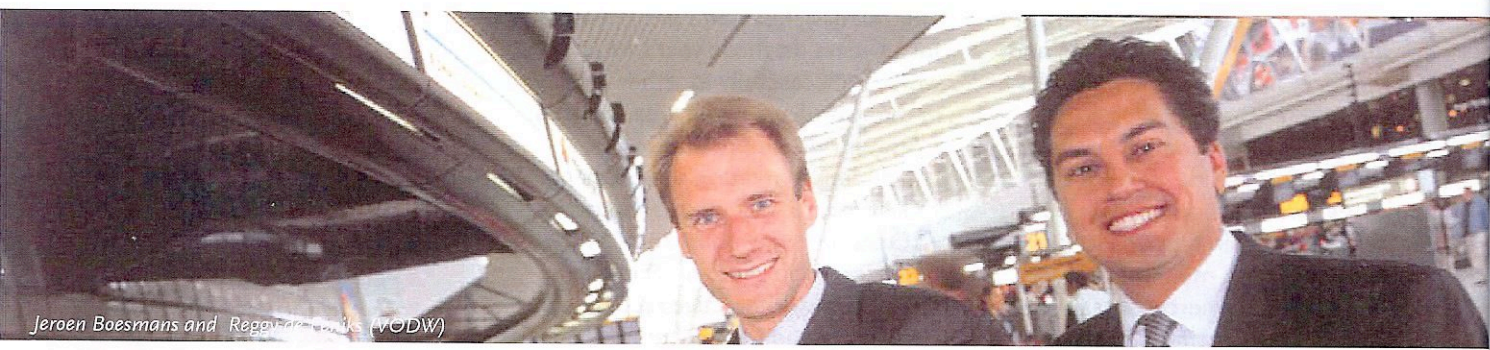
### What Are the Needs of a Japanese Customer?

From this starting point we prioritised the demands and wishes of the Japanese customer and linked those to the Service Upgrading concept. It is striking that the cultural differences don't have that much influence on the ideal customer process, the facilities or the systems. We discovered that in Japan we can make use of trend-setting communication technologies, such as I-mode, and at the same time explore

many opportunities for increased efficiency.

### The Sacred Customer

Cultural differences mainly have effect on the way you treat people: how you educate them, how you put together the teams and how you judge them. Japan is a good example of a customer-oriented culture. While fundamental customer-orientation is one of the bottlenecks in the West, in Japan the pleasing of the customer is not only a rule, but in fact sacred. Often you notice that employees run through the office to be able to help a customer 10 seconds



Jeroen Boesmans and Regijn de Gooijck (VODW)

sooner. Because of this, we were able to continue with the question how Mazda can use this customer-orientation for commercial success as well.

### Yes, Maybe

Besides the development of the Service Upgrading strategy in Japan, a second objective was to realise change within the dealerships. Preconditions were two one-week visits to Japan and a culture, which is one of the most difficult cultures in the world to penetrate for a foreigner. Reggy de Feniks, Principal Consultant of VODW Marketing, can join in the conversation: 'you continuously have to find the balance between content and process. Results are the bottom line, yet the implementation process of explanation and convincing people and changing behaviour is extremely important. Therefore, our most important objective was to create a model leadership, fulfilling minimum standards. This dealership functions as an ambassador towards other dealerships: Success creates success, also in Japan. During the implementation process, we developed several specific tools for the Japanese market. These tools support the local implementer, for example to convince dealership management and staff. Important in implementation is to find the right tone of voice for a specific culture. This is true for 'country cultures' and 'company cultures' as well. Without this mindset most efforts will not lead to the desired effects.

### Pressure-cooking!

In order to achieve the results, we used a very intensive method, which we call 'pressure cooking'. This method combines analysis, concept development, making choices and implementation. Every day starts with a short presentation about the result and decisions made the day before. 'With many visual tools we facilitate the discussion and then the whole team agrees on the decisions made. By working in this short decision-cycle, you create an enormous amount of momentum and achieve fast decision making process.

### Promising Future

Mazda Japan is now looking at the future: The support of VODW resulted in a fast analysis of the core issues and in taking the first steps in implementing Service Upgrading. Although further change in their entire dealer network is ahead, Mazda Japan is looking forward to benefit from Service Upgrading; Making better use of the customer-oriented culture and translating the customer-orientation into commercial results. And, at the same time exploiting the opportunities to start working more efficiently.'

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