

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here today, and it is a great pleasure to meet so many of you who are interested in doing business with Japan. In a little while, you will hear interesting stories from people who have taken up the challenge and who have achieved their own success in exporting their product or service to Japan.

For my part, I would like to give you an overview of the business environment that awaits you there, and on behalf of the Japanese embassy, to offer the support of the Japanese government in the form of any information or advice that you might need.

The first important point is that Japan has now emerged from the so-called “lost” ten years of recession. It has managed to overcome what are known as the “three excesses,” namely excess corporate debt, excess capacity and excess labor. Since last April, full-time employment has been growing faster than part-time for the first time in more than ten years, and wages are rising, too. Debt is being reduced, and the perception among business people is that excess capacity has almost disappeared. This indicates a qualitative change in the Japanese economy, not just an upturn as a result of a normal economic cycle. In the same way that Japan handled the challenges of the past, such as the oil shocks of the 1970s and the pollution problem, it has revived itself and come through the recession. The time is right to think about expanding your business to Japan.

You might ask, why Japan, instead of China or India, with their huge potential markets? Of course, everyone recognizes the future potential of doing business with these two big countries. But the second point to note about doing business with Japan is that in terms of purchasing power, Japan is a very attractive market. The PPP gross national income is almost exactly the same as Belgium’s, around 28,000 dollars, in contrast to China’s, which is around 5,000 dollars, or India’s, which is under 3,000 dollars. Although consumption fell in Japan during the years of recession, Japanese consumers should be spending more freely as the economy improves.

The third interesting point about the Japanese market relates to this purchasing power. Japanese consumers demand quality – your product may be inexpensive, but the quality has to be good. And if the quality is good, even something quite expensive will sell very well. I am sure there is no need for me to emphasize this point, because products and services that you will be exporting from Belgium to Japan are certain to be of high quality.

[Current trends?]

Along the same lines, it is also important to gain the trust of those you do business with in Japan. I am sure you will hear this from those who have done it already – it may take some time to establish contacts and build up personal trust, but these are the keys that will lead to your success. It is common knowledge that it takes more time to get things going when exporting to Japan, but once you have a firm base of personal relationships and trust, you will find that things go much faster and more efficiently.

My final point has more to do with Belgium than Japan. The positive characteristics of the Belgian people are a definite advantage when it comes to doing business in a country so different and so far away. Belgium is at the crossroads of Europe, and has a long history of dealing successfully with other cultures and other peoples. The open-minded attitudes and considerate nature of the Belgian people should stand you in good stead as you set out to export your business to Japan.

To summarize, the Japanese economy has revived.

Spending should soon be on the rise, and the Japanese market is very receptive to quality products.

It is important to establish trust, and this should be relatively easy for Belgian business people to achieve.

So, I encourage you to listen carefully to the stories of those who have gone before you, and to set out on your exciting adventure with a positive attitude. The Japanese embassy in Belgium and JETRO will do whatever we can to assist you.

Thank you for your kind attention.