

Antenna Firm Sends Clear Signals in Japan

A producer of high performance miniature antennas has its future mapped out after a successful launch into the Japanese market.



Fast facts

Company: Sarantel
Industry: Manufacturing
Target Market: Worldwide
UKTI Service: Market Visit and OMIS

Navigating its way through language and culture barriers, Northamptonshire-based antenna producer Sarantel has credited Business Link Japan and the UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) team with the scale of its triumph in Tokyo.

With new personnel and a sales office in the capital, new products in development and budding relationships with all their key potential customers in Japan, bosses at Sarantel are optimistic about the firm's future there.

Identifying new opportunities

Established in 2001, the company built a significant presence across Europe and the United States. By 2008, it was decided it was time to branch out into new markets. Japan was identified as a possible opportunity. Sarantel already had distributors in Tokyo who had begun to identify potential demand for their technically advanced antennas.

Although experienced exporters, the senior team at Sarantel realised they didn't have the necessary experience to deal with such a complex market.

"In the US we had local contacts, local knowledge, similar cultures and no language barrier," explains Chris Muir, Sarantel's Director of Sales. "We knew there would be significantly more challenges entering Japan and that we'd need more support."

Attendance at a UKTI Japan market briefing convinced the company that working with the UKTI network would provide the necessary building blocks for export to Japan. After signing up to a market visit to Tokyo, Sarantel accessed the services of UKTI's team in the country and the support of the visit organisers Business Link Japan.

Chris said: "We had two main objectives. Firstly to identify potential customers and secondly to find license partners for our technology. Not only did Business Link Japan already have local presence and expertise in licensing deals but we were able to access UKTI's Overseas Market Introduction Service (OMIS) which uses the UKTI commercial team in Japan to do our research and get us in to see interested customers."

Chris continues, "If you're trying to do it on your own in Japan you can spend a lot of time working your way through layers of people in an organisation before you find the right person. Using UKTI's in market research has shortened the time needed considerably."

Meeting new customers

Chris also puts part of their success down to more creative use of UKTI's in-market research service which enabled them to hold a seminar at the British embassy in Tokyo.

Embassy staff identified and invited potential customers to the seminar, and the UKTI team in Tokyo assisted with all the local administration and provided simultaneous interpreting throughout. In the same way, Business Link Japan organised a seminar at the Osaka Chamber of Commerce attracting a very large group of Japanese companies.

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Supporting your business

Sarantel also used the British Embassy team to introduce its products at trade shows when it wasn't cost effective to fund its own booth, travel and Japanese-speaking staff. Due to the technical nature of Sarantel's products, the development cycle can last between nine months and three years which, combined with the way the Japanese do business, means investing in Japan is a long-term commitment.

Japanese business has a highly organised structure which can contribute to the time it takes to make decisions. Trust is also essential, and time and resources need to be devoted to building mutually respectful relationships.

"The Japanese culture and personality is massively different to Europe," says Chris, "Business Link Japan and UKTI have given us the connections we need. The relationships we've built since our first market visit give us an immediate legitimacy and relevance in Japan. The trust we've built up has got us in front of people and that's been critical."

Chris's advice for others looking to export to Japan is straightforward.

"Don't do it unless you're prepared to commit to what is required. You're going to have to work hard at relationships and be creative about how you use the tools available.

You can't just dip your toe in the water - you need regular visits. Make the effort to learn some Japanese even if only the basic courtesies and always have your materials translated. It'll make you stand out from the crowd."

OMIS - Overseas Market Introduction Service

UKTI's Overseas Market Introduction Service is a flexible business tool which uses the expertise of our global trade teams to benefit your business.

How can OMIS help you?

The programme includes:

- Market, sector advice
- Analysis of market entry strategies
- Support during overseas visits
- Identification of possible business partners

Whether you're a first timer or an experienced exporter, OMIS can provide help at any stage - from initial research, to arranging a market visit or to using our contacts at embassies and high commissions across the world to help close a major deal.

For further information please call us on 0845 052 4001.

Fact File

Location:	Wellingborough, Northamptonshire
Employees:	40
Years trading:	Ten
Years exporting:	Ten
Markets:	Europe United States and Japan
UKTI service	Market Visit and Embassy Support



"Companies using the OMIS service between July 2009 and July 2010 expect to make, on average, an extra £330,000 of profit in the following 5 years."

Source: UKTI 'PIMS' research June 2010



UK Trade & Investment is the Government department that helps UK based companies succeed in international markets. We assist overseas companies to bring high quality investment to the UK's dynamic economy. We provide companies with the tools they require to be competitive on the world stage.

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