

# Transforming Ideas into Products and Services

*The Ministry of Trade, Economy and Industry is implementing a Cool Japan Strategy Promotion Program aiming to edit various elements of Japanese culture and communicate them to people in Japan and abroad. The Japan Journal's Osamu Sawaji talks to the project's creative director, **Naoki Ito**, chief creative officer at the innovation and ideas lab PARTY, about the project and the creativity of Japanese people.*

**This month's Cover Story introduces Japanese creativity through the window of theme parks examples including manga and cup noodles. What has impressed you the most in terms of products and services driving home Japanese creativity in recent years?**

**Naoki Ito:** It is not a recent example, but in the sense of having a great impact overseas, I think the Prius, the hybrid car from Toyota, is an example of Japanese creativity at its very best. The consideration for the environment, the high level of comfort, the compact size and the moderate pricing, it achieved all the things that are in demand these days.

Also, while it is not a global product like the Prius, the rechargeable electric scarf that MUJI started selling recently is also impressive. I think it is very much a typically Japanese product, connecting electricity with a fashion item like a scarf.

**What do you think are the special characteristics of this kind of**

**Japanese creativity?**

Japan is extremely good at quickly and flexibly adopting cultures and technologies from around the world, and to sublimate them into their own values. For example, I love traveling overseas, but I don't think there is any other place where you can eat international cuisine to the degree you can in Japan, and particularly in Tokyo. Also, it is even tastier than the real thing.

I guess that it is the high level of Japanese craftsmanship that supports this kind of creativity. I think that the dexterity, delicacy and effort found among Japanese people increase the quality of products and services.

**You are involved in a lot of advertising work; please tell us about some ads that have made a strong impression after the Great East Japan Earthquake.**

"Xylophone" is a film to promote a mobile phone made with thinned cypress wood for NTT Docomo. It won Gold Lions in two categories [the attention-grabbing Film Craft Lions and

Naoki Ito has been involved in numerous corporate ad campaigns—for companies including Nike and Sony—TV commercials and product development. He has won more than 130 awards in Japan and overseas including Gold Lions at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity.

Cyber Lions categories] at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity in June this year. On a slope in the forest, a wooden ball is set rolling down a xylophone staircase made with thinned wood to create the sound of Bach's *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*. It is a work that really shows off the craftsmanship of Japanese people and it has been played over 7 million times on YouTube.

Another one is the commercial for the Kyushu bullet train that won a Gold Lion in one category [the Outdoor Lions category] at the Cannes Lions Festival. From a viewpoint inside the train, the film shows all kinds of people who volunteered to wave at the bullet train as it passes. The commercial does not directly support the victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake, but I'm sure it will give them courage.

People overseas have also raved about these two commercials, saying, "This is the Japan."

### **What do you do as creative director of the Cool Japan Creative Director Project?**

We are launching the "Mazer" open platform on the Internet [<http://mazer.jp>, scheduled to go live in the middle of November]. Mazer is a "place" for soliciting far and wide for ideas from ordinary people, and for exchanging opinions and evaluation about the ideas in order to bring about new services or products.

For example, the creative director solicits



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ideas on the theme of "souvenirs that please foreigners." Then, the participants nominate things like "folding fans" or "washlets." But since these things already exist, the creative director has to add another new element. For example, "social media" with regard to nominations of "plastic food replicas" for souvenirs. The participants then cross "plastic food replicas" with "social media," and think up ideas. Then the result could be, for example, that you take a picture of the curried rice that you are eating, and if you send the photo to a particular company, you can pick up a replica of the food at Narita International Airport.

We are not going to translate all the content on Mazer, but we plan to install some translation tools to make it more convenient for foreigners.

Since there are themes like "souvenirs that please foreigners" that will attract ideas from people overseas, we would like to have their steady participation. 