



Where Venture Companies Meet

Support for foreign companies looking to make inroads in Japan is on the rise. Founded in 2015, Anchorstar is one such supportive presence.

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ACCORDING to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, 3,322 foreign-affiliated companies had made Japanese market inroads as of March 2015, which represented strong growth of 5.7% over the previous year.

Amid this situation, both the private and public sectors provide a wide range of support for foreign companies seeking to enter the Japanese market. Anchorstar Inc., which is based in Minato Ward, Tokyo, is one such company providing support. Anchorstar provides a wide range of consulting

services mainly for foreign venture companies in market entry strategy and human resources exchanges for their growth in the Japanese market.

Taro Kodama, the founder and CEO of Anchorstar, was brought up in Los Angeles and returned to Japan after graduating from high school. In 1999, Kodama joined Yahoo! JAPAN, which was a venture company with about 100 employees at the time, and worked energetically as the head



Anchorstar's lounge and office space
Photos: Tomooki Kengaku/Nacasa & Partners

of the social network division. Subsequently, he was appointed as the Country Growth Manager to found a Japanese branch office as the first employee of Facebook Japan in 2010.

“Now both Yahoo! and Facebook are major corporations that almost everybody has heard of. But when I joined those companies, they were both still small in scale and were venture companies that we were not sure would grow,” says Kodama. “In particular, Facebook was a social networking company that required users to participate in the network using their real names. Most people thought that such social networking service would be viewed unfavorably by Japanese society, which was not active in disclosing real names.”

To increase the number of Facebook users, Kodama worked actively on building partnerships with large Japanese corporations. To highlight the advantages of SNS using real names, Kodama first asked a leading domestic recruiting information company to adopt Facebook as a support tool for recruiting activities, and he succeeded in attracting numerous university students as users. In

addition, Kodama also partnered with major Japanese advertising agencies, clothing manufacturers and convenience stores, and ran a wide range of campaigns. As a result of these efforts, the number of domestic users increased dramatically to 21 million just four and a half years after the establishment of the Japanese branch office.

“At that point in time, I thought that I had finished playing my role to a certain extent, so I started thinking about what to do next,” says Kodama. “Instead of working as a country manager of another overseas company, I wanted to support more venture companies looking to take a chance in the Japanese market and grow strongly.”



Taro Kodama, CEO of Anchorstar
Photo: Masatoshi Sakamoto

Kodama founded Anchorstar in November 2015 with his strategy based on building partnerships between foreign-affiliated venture companies and Japanese companies.

“In any country, large corporations tend to become inflexible as organizations. But they become animated and energized by venture companies’ cutting-edge technologies and ideas and their wide-ranging innovations,” says Kodama. “I felt strongly about this when I worked for Yahoo! and Facebook. In other words, the partnerships between large corporations and venture companies lead not to one-way support, but to mutually beneficial relationships.”

The lounge space at Anchorstar can be used not only as offices until foreign companies fully launch their businesses in Japan, but also acts as a venue where people from many countries can enjoy exchanging information. Kodama imagines his company as being like the bar where the aliens in the movie *Star Wars* gather. When you drop anchor in an unknown country, you first go to a port-side bar, get to know the local features, gather information and meet new friends. This concept forms part of the name Anchorstar.

“From now on, I will make efforts not only to support more foreign companies in participating in the Japanese market, but also to find venture companies that large Japanese corporations need as their partners from all over the world,” says Kodama. 