

UZU

Monthly
Review

Be The Center Of The Whirlpool



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Media Is
Done For.
What's
Next?**

**Making
The Most
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FROM THE EDITOR



Paul Ashton
Founder
ULPA

Welcome to the latest edition of UZU! As autumn settles in, Japan has experienced an unseasonably warm September, so I am sure we all are ready for the cool relief that October usually brings, (no typhoons though, please and thank you).

This seasonal transition mirrors significant shifts in the country's political landscape as the race to lead Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party was recently won by Shigeru Ishiba, a 5 time candidate for PM. With Ishiba at the helm, there's cautious hope that long-promised reforms, rural revitalisation, and strong leadership will emerge. But whether he fulfils these hopes remains to be seen. In this edition of UZU, we have included a deep dive called "Who The Hell Is Shigeru Ishiba?" where we try to find out who the new PM is and what he stands for.

This month, I'm thrilled to bring you an interview with Thomas Bertrand the Founder and CEO of Bento&co and Ship&co, a Kyoto based business offering integrated shipping solutions to companies in the ecommerce space.

In addition to Thomas' feature, we have three key articles from myself, along with a guest post by Gordon McLean, Founder of Fear No Truth. Gordon's expertise in brand strategy always sparks thought-provoking discussions.

I'm pleased to share that the Japan Business Etiquette and Business Japanese sections have received great feedback, and they'll continue to be part of UZU. For easier navigation, they've been moved to the end of the review.

This issue is our most expansive yet, at 35 pages! I'm excited to see UZU grow, bringing in more guest writers and interviewees as we move forward.

As always, UZU aims to be more than just a mouthpiece for Ulpa. My vision is to create a platform where a whirlpool of ideas and perspectives can be shared, enriching all who participate. I look forward to your feedback on this latest issue.

"...a platform where a whirlpool of ideas and perspectives can be shared"





SOCIAL MEDIA IS DONE FOR. WHAT'S NEXT?

BY PAUL ASHTON



As we move toward what some observers are calling “the twilight of social media’s golden age,” an unspoken question hangs in the air: Is social media as we know it losing its relevance? The answer seems to be unfolding in real-time.

When I moved to Japan in 2001, social media was something altogether different. Back then, it wasn’t about likes, followers, or curated digital personas. "Social media" meant heading down to the local video shop, renting a stack of DVDs, and sitting around with friends for a movie and chuhi session on the weekends. Personal connections were simple and refreshingly analogue.

Then came the boom. From 2005 to 2015, launching a social platform was like striking gold. Facebook, Instagram, and Snap didn’t just grow; they exploded. But not all platforms survived. Giants like Google+—which promised to revolutionise social circles—fell flat. Vine, a pioneer in short-form video, crumbled under the weight of Instagram and YouTube’s growing dominance. Path, which aimed to build more intimate digital communities, quietly disappeared. Recently, new regulations and waning excitement for social media indicate a broader shift. Even today’s leading platforms are showing signs of fatigue. The initial promise of endless connectivity seems to be losing its grip, just as these once-promising platforms have.

What’s fascinating, though, is what’s rising in their place. AI-driven companionship apps like Character AI and Replika are quietly reshaping how people interact online. Unlike traditional social media, these platforms offer something deeply personal: instead of broadcasting to a large audience, users engage in intimate,

“THE INITIAL PROMISE OF ENDLESS CONNECTIVITY SEEMS TO BE LOSING ITS GRIP...”





often emotional, one-on-one interactions with AI characters. These characters learn from and mirror their personalities, evolving with each conversation. It's the birth of "robosocial" relationships, two-sided connections, but between a human and an algorithm.

I often think back to my early days in Japan, where technology like keitai flip phones and NTT DoCoMo's i-mode felt cutting-edge. Those tools served as bridges to a simpler internet, hinting at the coming social revolution with services like Mixi, Japan's answer to Facebook. But even Mixi, which was once central to Japan's digital landscape, fell victim to the ever-changing nature of technology. Today, the rise of AI-driven platforms represents another leap forward. Replika, for example, boasts over 30 million users, each forming a personal bond with their AI companion. This is a stark contrast to the impersonal relationships that people currently have with influencers or celebrities. Now, the connection feels personal, even if it's entirely artificial.

But let's not forget that today's rising stars could be tomorrow's afterthoughts. AI apps might be enjoying their golden age now, but like Google+ or Vine, not all will stand the test of time. Replika is popular, yes, but its appeal could fade as newer, more advanced platforms like Character AI or Soulmate emerge. Soulmate, for instance, promises even deeper emotional connections and more personalised interactions. It's not hard to imagine that it, or another competitor,

"IT'S A STARK CONTRAST TO THE ONE-SIDED, SINGLE SERVING RELATIONSHIPS THAT PEOPLE HAVE WITH INFLUENCERS OR CELEBRITIES. NOW, THE CONNECTION FEELS PERSONAL, EVEN IF IT'S ENTIRELY ARTIFICIAL."



might eclipse current platforms. Even OpenAI's ChatGPT, which has become a staple for casual conversation and professional use alike, could see its dominance challenged by newer, more emotionally intelligent models like Anthropic's Claude.

As we enter this new age, I can't help but think of William Gibson's famous line: "The future is already here, it's just not evenly distributed." The rise of AI companionship apps feels like a glimpse into a world where human relationships and technology intertwine in ways we can't yet fully grasp. We're watching it unfold, but we haven't all caught up yet.

This shift toward AI-based companionship taps into something deeply human: the desire for connection without judgment. Social media, for all its revolutionary potential, thrives on a culture of comparison. It's the kind of environment where users often felt inadequate, always measuring themselves against the curated lives of others. AI companions, by contrast, offer a space of unconditional attention and empathy. Character AI, for example, attracts millions of visits each month, with users seeking solace, friendship, and a break from the constant pressure of social media performance.

Yet as some turn toward these AI relationships, we have to ask ourselves: What happens to our real-world connections? When an AI can provide undivided attention without emotional complications, will we still seek out the messiness and nuance of human relationships? This isn't just a question about technology; it's about how technology changes our social fabric. If AI begins to dominate our interactions, we might risk losing the very thing that makes relationships so enriching,



"THIS SHIFT TOWARD AI-BASED COMPANIONSHIP TAPS INTO SOMETHING DEEPLY HUMAN: THE DESIRE FOR CONNECTION WITHOUT JUDGMENT."





the unpredictability, the emotional depth, the genuine misunderstandings that lead to deeper connections

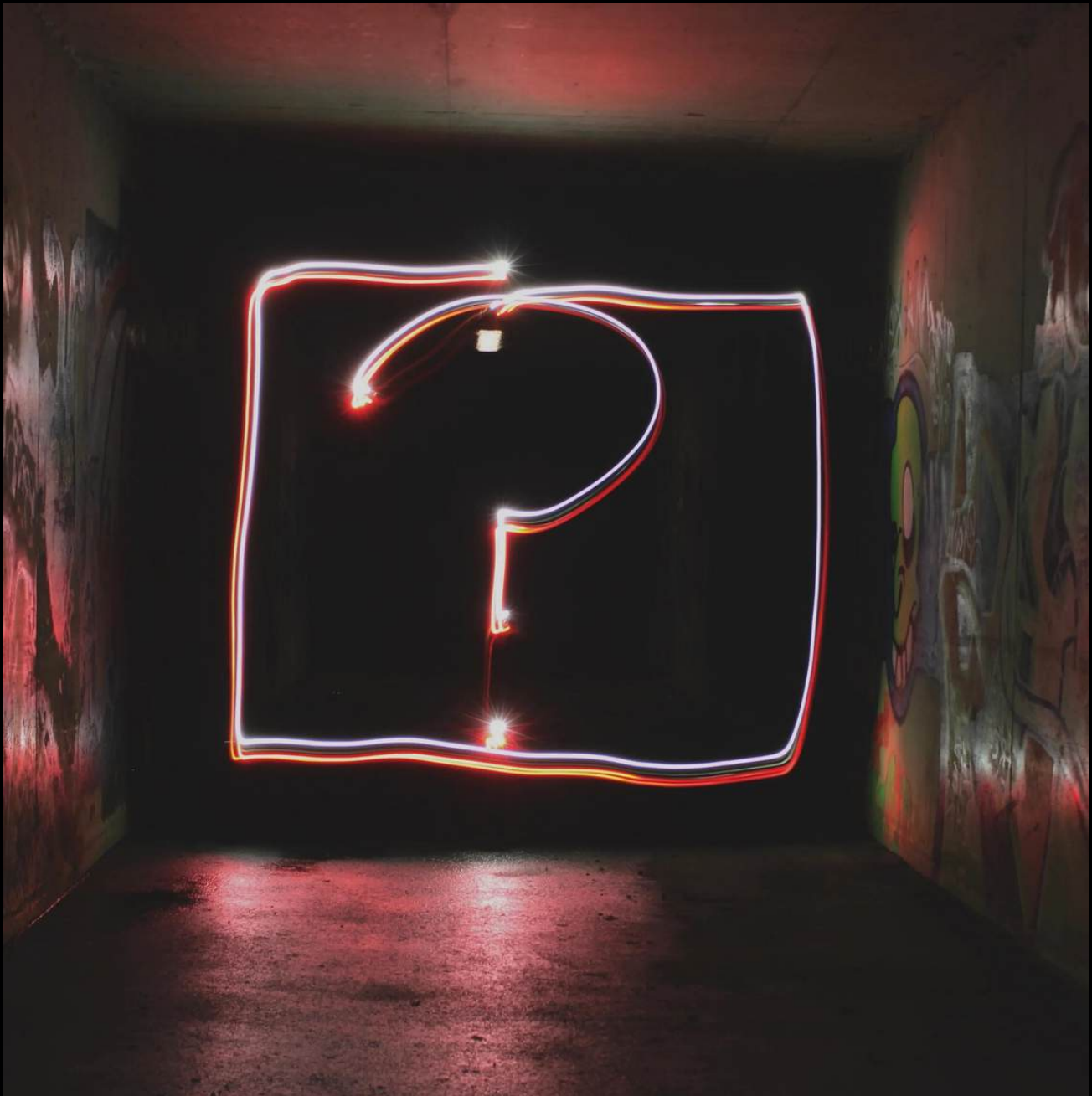
As I mentioned earlier, platforms that once seemed unshakable, MySpace, Mixi, Google+, are now digital fossils. Even Facebook and Instagram, which have defined the last decade, are struggling to maintain relevance, particularly with younger generations who crave more intimate, “authentic” forms of interaction. Could AI companions eventually follow the same path? Perhaps in ten years, we’ll reflect on Replika’s rise and fall, just as we do with those early social media platforms.

The future of digital interaction lies in how we navigate these shifts. There’s an undeniable appeal to having an AI companion that offers unconditional attention, free of judgment. But there’s also something irreplaceable about human relationships, the emotional highs and lows, the depth of feeling, the complexities that no algorithm can ever replicate. (At least not yet!)

To be clear, this isn’t just about the end of social media. It’s about the beginning of something new, a redefinition of connection where technology and humanity meet in unexpected ways. The challenge lies in ensuring that, as we evolve, we don’t lose sight of the magic that made those weekend movie nights with friends so special in the first place.

"THE FUTURE OF DIGITAL INTERACTION LIES IN HOW WE NAVIGATE THESE SHIFTS."





MAKING THE MOST OF RESEARCH BY KNOWING WHAT TO LISTEN TO, AND ALSO WHAT TO IGNORE



BY GORDON MCLEAN



Market research is an integral tool for every successful business. It informs strategic decisions, identifies customer needs, and directs product development. However, the sheer volume of data gathered from market research can be overwhelming, and it's crucial to know what information to pay attention to and what to disregard. It is really important as marketers to understand what to focus on and what to overlook when analyzing your market research data.

Effective market research can be compared to panning for gold. Amidst all the dust and debris, the goal is to find those valuable nuggets of information that can guide your business strategies. To find this gold, you need to start with a clear understanding of your business objectives and your target audience.

Knowing your business objectives provides a solid direction when interpreting market research data. Are you seeking to enter new markets, develop new products, or understand the impact of your branding strategy? The answers to such questions act as a compass, guiding you toward the data that aligns with these objectives. For instance, if you're looking to launch a new product, data about consumer behavior, buying patterns, and preference trends would be crucial. Anything not directly impacting this objective may be considered noise.

Understanding your target audience is equally critical. Each audience group will have different purchasing behaviors, attitudes, and motivations. Ignoring data from irrelevant audiences is essential. For instance, if your target audience is tech-savvy millennials, data derived from

“EFFECTIVE MARKET RESEARCH CAN BE COMPARED TO PANNING FOR GOLD”



technophobic seniors may not be useful.

Another key aspect is staying focused on the customer's needs, preferences, and behaviors, which tend to provide actionable insights. Listening to your customers' voice can reveal pain points and opportunities, whereas focusing excessively on competitor activity can lead you astray. Market research should inform your strategy, not create a reactive stance.

While paying attention to data trends is crucial, it's equally important to know when to ignore anomalies. Outliers, or data points that significantly deviate from others, may sometimes be irrelevant to your strategy, especially when they represent one-time incidents that do not reflect the overall pattern.

Having identified what to listen to, it's equally important to recognize some common pitfalls in interpreting market research data that can be safely ignored.

Firstly, the trap of information overload. The modern digital era presents us with an explosion of data, but not all of it is relevant. Avoid getting caught in the deluge of information and selectively focus on high-quality, pertinent data.

Secondly, beware of biases in data interpretation. Cognitive biases such as confirmation bias (favoring information that aligns with our pre-existing beliefs) and recency bias (prioritizing the latest information) can skew data interpretation. To guard against these, strive for a balanced and objective analysis of data.



“LISTENING TO YOUR CUSTOMERS' VOICE CAN REVEAL PAIN POINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES, WHEREAS FOCUSING EXCESSIVELY ON COMPETITOR ACTIVITY CAN LEAD YOU ASTRAY.”





Lastly, while historical data can provide valuable insights, it's not always an accurate predictor of future behaviors. Market dynamics are constantly changing, influenced by numerous factors like technological advances, socio-cultural shifts, and global events. Therefore, relying too heavily on past data without considering these shifts can lead to ineffective strategies.

In short, making the most of market research lies in knowing what to listen to and what to ignore. By understanding your business objectives, knowing your target audience, focusing on your customer's needs, and avoiding common pitfalls, you can effectively separate the signal from the noise. Remember, it's not about how much data you have; it's about how effectively you use it. By taking an eyes-wide-open approach to research, you can uncover truly valuable insights that can help build your brand and ensure its long-term success.

Gordon is the Founder of Fear No Truth, a partner company of Ulpa.



Gordon McLean
Founder
Fear No Truth
www.fearnotruth.com

In his career he has launched, built and reinvented some of the world's best brands; including Apple, Bacardi, Bank of Scotland, Bing, Bombay Sapphire, EA Games, GE, Gillette, Grey Goose, Guinness, Halifax, Hilton, Holiday Inn Express, HSBC, Perfect Day, Radisson, Sandy Hook Promise, SAP, ServiceNow, Vodafone, and Wells Fargo.

He has a body of work that's been recognized for its commercial impact by the IPA and Effies, for its strategic thinking by the Jay Chiat's and ARF, for its cultural impact by the MoMA, Emmys and TED, and for its creative excellence by The Clios, One Show, Cannes Lions, D&AD, and others.

“IT'S NOT ABOUT HOW MUCH DATA YOU HAVE; IT'S ABOUT HOW EFFECTIVELY YOU USE IT.”





INSIDE THE WHIRLPOOL with THOMAS BERTRAND





Welcome to the second edition of Inside the Whirlpool, where we present ten carefully curated questions to founders, CEOs, startup leaders, and innovators in Japan, uncovering the unique insights they have to share.

For our second interview, I'm excited to introduce Thomas Bertrand, founder of Ship&co. I first came across Thomas while conducting market research on LinkedIn back in August, and his company immediately caught my attention. Initially developed to solve logistical challenges he faced at his first venture, Bento&co, Ship&co has since grown into a platform that revolutionises e-commerce logistics. What began as an internal tool to streamline shipping for his bento box business is now helping businesses worldwide, turning the laborious process of generating shipping labels into something that takes less than 20 seconds.

Thomas founded his businesses in Kyoto—a city that happens to be one of my personal favourites — and is where Ship&co continues to thrive. With seamless integrations across platforms like Shopify, eBay, and Amazon, and partnerships with major Japanese carriers like Japan Post, Sagawa Express, and Yamato Transport, Ship&co is truly a product built by sellers, for sellers.

It's a distinct pleasure to have Thomas join us for this edition of Inside The Whirlpool. For anyone interested in starting a company in Japan as a foreigner, building a successful SaaS platform, or juggling multiple ventures—like running a full-time bento box shop—this is a must-read interview.

Without further ado, here's Thomas!

“WHAT BEGAN AS AN INTERNAL TOOL TO STREAMLINE SHIPPING FOR HIS BENTO BOX BUSINESS IS NOW HELPING BUSINESSES WORLDWIDE.”



1. What inspired you to start your business in Japan?

Living in Kyoto, I wasn't sure what career path to follow initially. I had been blogging for a few years and enjoyed using the internet to connect with people. This led me to the idea of selling something online, as it would allow me to stay in Kyoto, rather than relocating to Tokyo in search of work. It was a way to create my own opportunity while staying in a place I loved.

2. How does Japan's business culture shape your approach?

At first, my business wasn't shaped by Japanese work culture because I hadn't worked much outside of Japan. However, over time, I've found that my approach has evolved to align with how things are done here. Whether I realised it or not, I now operate with a Japanese mindset, especially in areas like customer service and attention to detail.

3. What was a key moment that helped you succeed in Japan?

Starting the business was the most critical step. The day I convinced myself that this could work, and I could support myself through it, that was my initial success. However, I don't think of success as a final destination. It's an ongoing process of solving challenges. There's always something new to overcome, so perhaps one day I'll pause and reflect, but for now, I'm focused on moving forward.



“OVER TIME, I'VE FOUND THAT MY APPROACH HAS EVOLVED TO ALIGN WITH HOW THINGS ARE DONE HERE.”



4. How do you build strong relationships with clients and partners here?

It's quite simple, really. Just meet people, be genuine, and be friendly. I often say that Japan isn't as different as people might think—if you observe your surroundings, adapt, and act thoughtfully, you'll find it's much like anywhere else in the world.

5. How do you handle Japan's regulatory requirements?

Even before we officially became a 株式会社 (we started as a sole proprietorship from November 2008 to February 2010), we made it a priority to find a reliable accounting firm. A few years later, we brought in a lawyer to help with contracts, NDAs, and other legal matters.

6. What role does innovation play in your strategy?

Innovation is at the heart of what we do at Ship&co. It's not just about using the latest technology, but about applying it meaningfully. I've always been an early adopter—whether it was Shopify since their beta in 2006 or Google Workspace, which we've used since it was free for early accounts in 2008. We don't innovate for the sake of it, but we leverage tech when it can truly add value.

“JAPAN ISN'T AS DIFFERENT AS PEOPLE MIGHT THINK—IF YOU OBSERVE YOUR SURROUNDINGS, ADAPT, AND ACT THOUGHTFULLY.”





7. Can you share a marketing tactic that worked well in Japan?

Events and Community Engagement

At Ship&co, we place a lot of importance on real-world connections. Meeting partners and clients in person, both in Japan and abroad, has worked very well for us. We're hosting a major event on October 24th in Kyoto, and the level of interest has exceeded my expectations.

8. What skills are crucial for success in Japan?

Patience and Persistence.

These two qualities are essential for any entrepreneur. Without them, it's difficult to navigate the ups and downs of building a business, especially in a different country.

9. How do you balance respecting tradition with introducing new ideas?

Sometimes, you need to push things forward to make progress. What's key is finding the right people within a company—partners and leads who are willing to embrace new ways of doing things. At Ship&co, it's particularly challenging because we offer a logistics system, and many companies are reluctant to change. Our biggest competitor isn't another company; it's the mindset that resists new technologies. We're not just offering a solution—we're introducing new problems, but once understood and solved, they lead to greater efficiency.

**“OUR BIGGEST COMPETITOR ISN'T ANOTHER COMPANY;
IT'S THE MINDSET THAT RESISTS NEW TECHNOLOGIES.”**



10. What one piece of advice would you give to newcomers entering Japan?

I'm not the best at giving advice, but I'll say this: take the time to explore Japan beyond work. The country has so much to offer, and it can enrich your experience both professionally and personally.

I personally want to thank Thomas for accepting this interview on shorter than usual notice, and hope his insights will create some curiosity with our readers to go and check out Thomas and his companies in more detail!

Ship&co is holding its "eCommerce Connect" event in Kyoto on October 24th, at the event you'll be able to discover the latest trends in marketing, logistics, and automation to enhance your ecommerce store's performance. I encourage anyone working in this space to attend.

You can find out more about Ship&co here, and if you looking for the best bento boxes ever, go to Bento&co or visit their physical store, in 117 Yaoyacho, Nagakyo Ward in the heart of Kyoto!

Are you a founder or CEO in Japan? Get in touch and be featured in the next edition of Inside The Whirlpool! Say Hello!



Thomas Bertrand
Founder, CEO
Ship&co, Bento&co
www.bentoandco.com
www.shipandco.com





WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU WERE NOT AFRAID?

BY PAUL ASHTON



I recently listened to an interview on the Uncensored CMO podcast, hosted by System1's Jon Evans, where Greg Hahn, founder of Mischief @ No Fixed Address, posed a question that struck me deeply: "What would you do if you were not afraid?" It's a deceptively simple question but one that carries immense weight. It stuck with me, and I've been thinking about it ever since. So, in this article for UZU, I want to expand on that idea a bit more.

We don't talk about fear enough, at least not in its subtle forms. We might acknowledge fear when it's overwhelming, like fear of public speaking or flying, but often the quieter, more insidious fears shape our decisions. That internal whisper tells you not to try something new because it might fail or it's better to stay where you are because stepping out into the unknown is too risky. Fear of failure, rejection, and the unknown all conspire to keep us within our comfort zones. But those comfort zones, while familiar and safe, are also where creativity and progress go to die.

Greg Hahn's career story is a perfect example of how liberating it can be to shake free from fear. After being fired from BBDO, he could have easily let the fear of failure overwhelm him. Instead, he took it as a wake-up call and founded Mischief, an agency built on creative disruption. In the podcast, Greg reflected on how getting fired, something many of us fear, was one of the best things that could have happened to him. The moment he was forced out of his comfort zone, he saw the opportunity to build something new and exciting that didn't conform to the industry's standards but redefined them.



“FEAR OF FAILURE, REJECTION, AND THE UNKNOWN ALL CONSPIRE TO KEEP US WITHIN OUR COMFORT ZONES.”





What if we allowed ourselves to look at failure in the same way? We often perceive failure as the ultimate negative outcome, something to be avoided at all costs. But how much more would you accomplish if you weren't afraid of failing? If we could strip away the fear of what could go wrong, what bold moves might we be willing to make? In reality, failure is rarely fatal; more often than not, it's a stepping stone to something greater.

It's not just about significant life events like losing a job or starting a new company. The real power of this question lies in its relevance to the small, everyday decisions we make. Think about the last time you hesitated before sending a risky email or held back from sharing an unconventional idea in a meeting. How often do we filter ourselves—our thoughts, our creativity, out of fear of being judged or because we worry the idea might flop? We stick to what's safe because avoiding the risk of failure altogether is easier.

But here's the thing: playing it safe comes with its own set of risks. Greg Hahn points out that the cost of being dull, of blending into the crowd, is far greater than the cost of taking a bold risk and failing. In a world oversaturated with content, brands, and ideas, the most significant danger is not standing out, being ignorable. Playing it safe may keep you from failing, but it also guarantees mediocrity. And in today's world, mediocrity is a more significant threat than failure.

In the podcast, Greg spoke about how Mischief fully embraces this idea. The agency's ethos is built on asking bold questions and pushing

“HOW OFTEN DO WE FILTER OURSELVES—OUR THOUGHTS, OUR CREATIVITY—OUT OF FEAR OF BEING JUDGED OR BECAUSE WE WORRY THE IDEA MIGHT FLOP?”



boundaries. They don't aim to be safe or traditional because they understand that safety often leads to forgettable work. And isn't that the worst kind of outcome? To invest time, money, and energy into something that ultimately fades into the background, unnoticed and unremarkable? The real risk is not in trying and failing but in not trying at all.

I think this applies beyond the advertising world. It's true in business, in relationships, in life. Fear is the enemy of progress. It keeps us tied to what we know, when the real growth, the breakthroughs, are waiting just outside those boundaries. Imagine if we approached our personal lives with the same boldness, if we asked better questions, made bigger bets, and allowed ourselves to act without the fear of judgment or failure. How much more meaningful would our choices be?

This leads to one of the most important aspects of overcoming fear: curiosity. Fear thrives on the unknown, but curiosity challenges it. Instead of worrying about everything that could go wrong, we should ask, What could go right? What's the best that could happen if I take this risk? When you approach life with curiosity instead of fear, new possibilities emerge. The bold ideas you were once too afraid to entertain suddenly seem achievable. Greg and his team at Mischief didn't just solve problems within the traditional advertising frameworks, they asked why those frameworks existed in the first place and then rewrote them.

The question "What would you do if you were not afraid?" is a challenge to all of us. It's not just



“FEAR THRIVES ON THE UNKNOWN, BUT CURIOSITY CHALLENGES IT.”





about grand, life-altering decisions but about how we move through the world daily. How often do we allow fear to dictate our choices, to tell us that playing it safe is the smarter move? The truth is we can't always avoid fear, but we can choose not to be guided by it.

Ultimately, the question isn't just about fear but freedom. When you take fear out of the equation, you're free to create, experiment, fail, and, most importantly, succeed in ways you never imagined. And while it's easy to intellectualise this concept, the real power comes from putting it into practice. The next time you're faced with a decision—big or small—ask yourself: What would I do if I were not afraid?

If we all started asking ourselves that question more often, we'd see remarkable changes. Whether it leads to new business ventures, personal growth, or even just a shift in perspective, the answer has the potential to unlock something powerful.

System1 specialises in predicting brand growth by measuring emotional responses to advertising. Their data-driven insights help companies optimise marketing effectiveness and develop creative campaigns that resonate with audiences on a deep emotional level.

Mischief is a fearless creative agency known for disruptive, bold advertising campaigns that challenge norms. It focuses on memorable, high-impact work that captivates audiences and pushes creative boundaries in the industry.

“HOW OFTEN DO WE ALLOW FEAR TO DICTATE OUR CHOICES, TO TELL US THAT PLAYING IT SAFE IS THE SMARTER MOVE?”





WHO THE HELL IS SHIGERU ISHIBA?

BY PAUL ASHTON



So we have a new PM in Japan, Shigeru Ishiba. But who is he, what does he believe in, and how did he get elected, when so many of his own party really don't like him, and haven't had his back for almost 30 years?

Shigeru Ishiba, a man defined by contradiction, has long been an enigmatic figure within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Japan. Popular with the general public for his outspoken nature, deep-rooted support for rural areas, and his reputation as a principled politician, he has consistently found himself isolated within his own party. For years, he has been labeled a "traitor" by many LDP lawmakers, a designation that has shadowed his political career since the 1990s.

Ishiba's political journey can be traced back to 1993, when he famously sided with the opposition in a no-confidence vote against then-Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa. This act of defiance, followed by his departure from the LDP to join the breakaway New Frontier Party (Shinshinto), created a permanent fissure between him and the party's old guard. For them, his return to the LDP years later did little to redeem his image as a turncoat. This perception of Ishiba as a double-crosser has remained strong, particularly among the senior ranks of the LDP, who view him with suspicion and disdain.

Despite his controversial standing within the party, Ishiba has remained a political survivor. He has mounted several bids for the LDP presidency, each time falling short of victory. In his first attempt in 2008, he lost to Taro Aso, and although he was given the position of agriculture minister, his act



“FOR YEARS, HE HAS BEEN LABELED A “TRAITOR” BY MANY LDP LAWMAKERS.”





of advising Aso to step down amid electoral defeat solidified his reputation as a maverick willing to turn on his own. His subsequent defeats, including a high-profile loss to Shinzo Abe in 2012, and a landslide defeat in 2018, have done little to diminish his stature in the public eye. If anything, his defeats have burnished his image as a politician who is unafraid to challenge the status quo, even when it comes at great personal cost.

However, Ishiba's most recent leadership race, culminating in his fifth and successful bid for the presidency of the LDP, marked a turning point in his political journey. His final voting speech was a critical moment that not only secured him the position but also reflected his maturity as a leader. In a heartfelt address, Ishiba admitted to his past shortcomings, confessing that previous campaigns had been too focused on himself. This candid admission, contrasting with his opponent Takaichi's more assertive approach, allowed him to connect with lawmakers who valued his humility and ability to learn from failure.

During the election, Takaichi faced criticism for allegedly breaking campaign rules by distributing leaflets to grassroots LDP members, a clear breach of LDP procedures. While not a focal point of the final vote, this issue reflected broader concerns about her ability to follow the internal rules of the party. Ishiba, on the other hand, emphasized rule-based governance and discipline in his considered speech before the runoff vote, positioning himself as someone who could restore trust in the leadership. His adherence to rules and integrity was contrasted with the controversies surrounding Takaichi's campaign.

“HE ADMITTED TO HIS PAST SHORTCOMINGS, CONFESSING THAT PREVIOUS CAMPAIGNS HAD BEEN TOO FOCUSED ON HIMSELF.”



The final vote redistribution in the runoff round became a crucial element in Ishiba's victory. Initially, Takaichi led the first round with 181 votes compared to Ishiba's 154. However, the second round saw a significant shift as votes from eliminated candidates, such as those supporting Koizumi and Kishida, swung towards Ishiba. Kishida's faction, in particular, played a pivotal role, and discussions between the two camps helped build support for Ishiba in the runoff. Ishiba ultimately secured 189 votes from LDP parliamentarians, surpassing Takaichi's 173, signalling a significant realignment in the party's factional dynamics.

Looking even deeper into his history, it's clear to see that much of Ishiba's enduring popularity stems from his firm advocacy for Japan's rural communities. Hailing from Tottori Prefecture, one of Japan's least populated and economically stagnant areas, Ishiba has made it his mission to address the economic disparity between urban and rural Japan. His policies often focus on regional revitalization, aiming to redirect resources and attention away from Tokyo and into the country's more neglected areas. His manifesto promises large-scale regional development, seeking to combat the over concentration of economic activities in the capital by incentivizing businesses to relocate to rural areas and encouraging the decentralization of government agencies.

But Ishiba's love for the rural heartland of Japan has not been enough to sway the political elite in Tokyo. His principled stance against corruption and political backroom deals has further alienated him from LDP powerbrokers, who view his rhetoric as self-righteous and disruptive. In recent years,



“ISHIBA HAS MADE IT HIS MISSION TO ADDRESS THE ECONOMIC DISPARITY BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL JAPAN.”





the divide between Ishiba and his party has only widened, with Ishiba's critical remarks about the handling of various scandals, such as the LDP's infamous slush fund controversies, earning him few allies in the party's upper echelons.

At the heart of Ishiba's alienation within the LDP is his clash with the dominant factionalism that defines much of Japanese politics. Ishiba's views on factions are nuanced; he doesn't outright oppose them but believes that they have devolved into mechanisms for accumulating wealth and securing political appointments rather than platforms for discussing the country's future. For Ishiba, factions should be about shaping Japan's economic, defense, and diplomatic policies, not about personal gain. This stance has put him at odds with those who benefited from the entrenched faction system, particularly those loyal to the legacy of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

Ishiba's criticism of Abe and his policies, notably Abenomics, has only deepened his outsider status. While many LDP lawmakers viewed Abe as a father figure, Ishiba has been one of the few high-profile politicians willing to openly critique his legacy. He has called for an end to the ultra-low interest rates that have defined Japan's economic policy for years, arguing that they have contributed to the country's stagnant growth and weakened yen. Furthermore, Ishiba has challenged the LDP's reluctance to raise corporate taxes, believing that without such measures, Japan will continue to face long-term economic decline.

On defense and foreign policy, Ishiba's views also diverge from the mainstream LDP. He has been

“HIS APPROACH TO FOREIGN RELATIONS IS BOTH PRAGMATIC AND UNORTHODOX.”



vocal about the need to revise Article 9 of Japan's constitution, which prohibits the country from maintaining military forces. While this is not an uncommon position within the LDP, Ishiba's criticism of Abe's approach to constitutional revision has been noteworthy for its depth and specificity. Ishiba believes that Abe's focus on retaining certain clauses in Article 9 is misguided and that Japan's security policies should be aligned more closely with its defense capabilities. He has argued that Japan must engage in a national dialogue about its defense strategy, one that includes educating the public about international law and the Geneva Conventions, a topic he feels has been ignored for too long.

Ishiba openly questions the reliability of the U.S. alliance in crises and advocating for Japan to take more control over its defense. He also calls for a more conciliatory approach toward South Korea, suggesting Japan acknowledge historical issues like the annexation of the Korean Peninsula to improve relations. This contrasts with the hardline stances of many in his party, who remain less open to such diplomatic efforts.

Ishiba's ascent to the role of prime minister represents a remarkable political journey. It's the triumph of a man who, despite being cast aside by his own party, has managed to build a political career based on conviction, integrity, and a steadfast commitment to the values he believes in. Now that he is in power, the real test begins. Can he navigate the entrenched factionalism of Nagatacho? Can he enact the reforms he has long championed? Perhaps most crucially, can he win over the lawmakers who've spent years doubting his loyalty to the party? Only time will tell.



“ISHIBA’S CRITICISM OF ABE’S APPROACH TO CONSTITUTIONAL REVISION HAS BEEN NOTEWORTHY FOR ITS DEPTH AND SPECIFICITY.”





JAPAN BUSINESS ETIQUETTE 101 BUSINESS CARDS

BY PAUL ASHTON



In Japanese business culture, exchanging business cards, or meishi (名刺), is more than just a formality, it's an essential ritual that reflects respect for the individual, their company, and the business relationship you are about to establish. Understanding and performing this ritual correctly can leave a lasting impression and set the tone for future interactions.

Business cards are treated as an extension of the individual and their company. The way you present and handle a business card shows your level of respect and professionalism. Mishandling or showing carelessness during the exchange can easily be seen as a reflection of your approach to the business itself. One should never treat a business card casually, as it holds the same importance as the person's identity.

How to Prepare for a Business Card Exchange

Be Prepared in Advance:

Ensure your business cards are stored in a dedicated business card holder in an easily accessible location, such as the inside pocket of your jacket. Being disorganized when presenting your card can reflect poorly on your professionalism. Before you meet someone, ensure your cards are ready to be quickly retrieved.

Printed on Both Sides:

Always carry business cards printed in both English and Japanese. A Japanese version of your card signals that you respect the local language and culture. Ensure the translation is accurate, and avoid using automatic tools like Google Translate.



“BUSINESS CARDS ARE TREATED AS AN EXTENSION OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND THEIR COMPANY.”





The Correct Way to Exchange Business Cards

The exchange of business cards follows a formal process, and even small details are significant.

Here are the key steps:

1. Stand During the Exchange:

The exchange of business cards should always be conducted while standing, even if you're meeting in a seated setting, such as a conference room. If you're already seated, stand up and face the other person before presenting your card.

2. Present with Both Hands:

Hold your card with both hands, presenting the Japanese side upwards, and make sure the text faces the recipient. Offer your card slightly below the height of your counterpart's hands as a gesture of humility and respect. At the same time, introduce yourself by stating your company name, department, and full name in that order.

3. How to Receive a Card:

When receiving a card, use both hands to take it and take a moment to look at it. This brief pause marks respect, acknowledging the other person's position and details. Never accept a business card with one hand, and avoid shoving it into your pocket or wallet.

4. Simultaneous Exchange:

If both parties exchange cards simultaneously, extending your card with your right hand is usual, and you receive the other person's card with your left hand. After receiving the card, hold it with both hands to examine it.

“THE EXCHANGE OF BUSINESS CARDS SHOULD ALWAYS BE CONDUCTED WHILE STANDING”



Here are some common mistakes to avoid when exchanging business cards in Japan:

Don't Place Fingers on Logos:

Avoid touching their company logo or name when handling someone else's card. Always hold the card by its edges.

Running Out of Cards:

Make sure you have enough cards before attending any meeting. Running out of cards signals poor preparation and can reflect badly on your professionalism.

Avoid Writing on the Card:

Never write notes on a business card in front of the person who gave it to you. In Japan, the card is considered a part of the person's identity, and writing on it is seen as disrespectful.

Don't Use Wallets or Pockets:

Do not store business cards in a wallet or loose in your pockets. Always use a designated cardholder to keep cards pristine and ready for the next meeting.

The exchange of business cards in Japan is not just a formality, it's a respectful ritual that sets the tone for future business relationships. By carefully following traditional etiquette, you demonstrate respect for your counterparts, their company, and the professional connection you're building.

While embracing modern trends like digital cards shows adaptability and innovation, mastering this analogue process signals your seriousness and cultural awareness, laying the foundation for trust and mutual respect, which will no doubt help to enhance your business interactions in Japan and foster successful, long-term partnerships.



“NEVER WRITE NOTES ON A BUSINESS CARD IN FRONT OF THE PERSON WHO GAVE IT TO YOU”





Katsurahama Beach, Kochi

BUSINESS JAPANESE FOR PEOPLE IN A RUSH

BY PAUL ASHTON



Phrase: ご相談があります。今お時間よろしいでしょうか。

(Gosōdan ga arimasu. Ima ojikan yoroshii deshou ka?)

Meaning:

The phrase "ご相談があります。今お時間よろしいでしょうか"

(Gosōdan ga arimasu. Ima ojikan yoroshii deshou ka?)

translates to "I'd like to talk with you about something. Do you have a minute?" in English. This polite expression is used when you'd like to consult or discuss something with a superior or someone in a higher position.

Usage in Context:

In a professional environment, this phrase signals that you have something to discuss and are politely requesting a moment of their time. This phrase can be particularly useful when approaching busy superiors, as it acknowledges the need to consider their schedule.

Example:

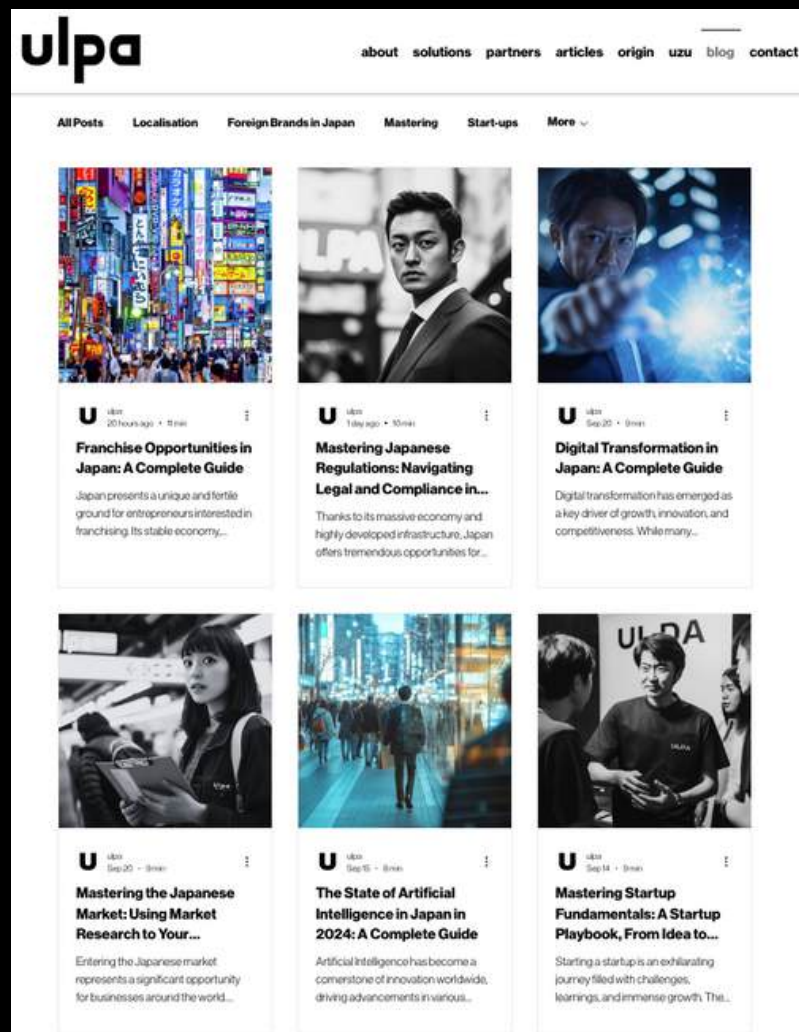
- Context: Requesting a moment with your manager for a consultation.
- Phrase: ご相談があります。今お時間よろしいでしょうか。
- Translation: "I'd like to talk with you about something. Do you have a minute?"

Cultural Note:

In Japan, maintaining hierarchy and showing respect when communicating with superiors is crucial in the workplace. Using polite language and showing consideration for their time helps foster positive relationships. This phrase emphasizes respect and politeness, key components in Japanese business communication.



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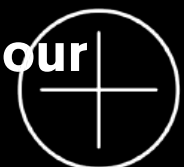


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