

## Toward the Age of Sensibility - Changing Consumer Consciousness



Toshikazu Akita, Director

After the good times of the high-growth era and at the sacrifice of the sudden burst of the economic bubble, we have finally come to realize that sensibility will be the key to business success in the coming years. During the postwar period, when commodities were in short supply, companies utilized mass production technology to manufacture large numbers of products in an effort to satisfy vigorous consumer demand. Once the goal of securing a sufficient supply of products was achieved, consumers began calling for improved quality. To address this need, businesses adopted the concept of quality control (QC). Product quality improved and high quality became the norm. Today, satisfied in terms of both quantity and quality, consumers are looking for new products with added value. They want products that are “sensitive” to their needs. In other words, customers are demanding improvements in the intangible aspects of products, such as image, design, and taste. This trend is characterized by many different key words, including comfort, convenience, safety, sense of security, pleasure, fun, delight, spiritual wealth, beauty, cleanliness, environmental consciousness, and the feeling of being benefited.

Consumer focus shifted from “product” to “image” and then to “heart.” To respond to this change in consumer consciousness requires a new approach. When considering the development of production technologies, for example, manufacturers must devise innovative ways to create products that impress consumers with their beauty, spiritual wealth, and sense of play. Design is also an essential factor. Products must be designed with the psychological effects on individual consumers taken into considera-

tion. Industry is now taking a better view of mass production, once merely a conventional technology typical of the days of high growth. Mass production certainly boosts productivity and substantially reduces production cost. From a broader perspective, however, this technology often leads to overproduction, leaving many products unsold and ultimately resulting in the manufacturer throwing them away as garbage. This poses a serious problem for the environment. Production technologies must be developed with emphasis not only on the effectiveness and costs of the manufacturing process but also on their effects on the global environment.

Manufacturers shifted their focus from mere production to mass production, and then from quality control to customer satisfaction (CS). Starting in the days of shortages, we are now in the age of sensibility, with emphasis on consumer contentment and sense of fulfillment. Today, it is increasingly difficult to sell products without satisfying consumer needs as represented by the key words mentioned earlier.

Given today's increasingly fierce international competition, it is hardly necessary to say that continued efforts to "create new value" are required in order to develop products that exhibit sensitivity to consumer needs while keeping up with the fast pace of the changing market.



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