



London Market Tokyo, March 2018 – Full Report

Background:

For designer and heritage fashion brands, Japan remains one of the UK's most supportive and lucrative export markets. Statistically, Japan is the UK's second largest export market outside the EU but even this statistic fails to convey just how important Japan is to British exporters.

Japanese retailers have always been extremely supportive of UK heritage and designer collections, they love the British look and products manufactured in the UK and they are willing to pay fair prices for good quality products. They are early adopters, keen to look at new products, admire and respect the UK's quirky heritage but they expect the highest level of production and service. British companies are always keen to engage with Japanese buyers. They find them more knowledgeable, better travelled and better researched than most of their international counterparts. They pay their bills, in full and on time. They take responsibility for their purchasing decisions: charge-backs or so-called "rebate" are generally seen as being dishonourable. On the streets and in the stores of Tokyo and Osaka it is possible to see more British brands supported than in most other cities of the world, including London.

Until a few seasons ago, the UKFT/DIT Trade Mission to Japan was an essential part of the fashion calendar, for buyers as well as exporters. Initially twice a year, in June and October, these events organised at the Embassy attracted large numbers of Japanese buyers and press who were keen to engage with British brands, including those they had already seen at international tradeshows. As a result, this was always the most sought-after and popular fashion-related trade event outside the key trade shows. At the last edition, in November 2016, 22 brands had the opportunity to meet up to 400 Japanese buyers and press.

Since then, to UKFT's great regret, it has not been possible to organise an annual mission to Tokyo. As the lead export organisation representing the UK fashion and textile industry, UKFT continues to campaign for these fashion missions to be reinstated. We know how important the Japanese market is for the vast majority of exporters, especially those manufacturing in the UK or with new and innovative collections. We also know that the Japanese market is undergoing substantial change. More and more retailers are launching their own lines, "Factory Brands" are very much "in" and it has become more difficult to introduce start up brands to the market. Wholesale remains the main route into the market for most brands but we need to be more active in the market to keep up to date with the latest market trends.

As the industry prepares to be UK prepares to leave the EU single market, it is more important than ever that the UK continue to engage with this, the most open market to our products.

The birth of London Market Tokyo:

As UKFT was considering how best to take new British heritage and designer brands into the Japanese market following the loss of its critical annual mission, another organisation was also looking at how it could relaunch itself in Japan. Man/Woman tradeshows, based in Paris, a small independent tradeshow organiser with which UKFT has worked very closely in Paris and New York, was also keen to reconnect with Japan. UKFT has always had a strong personal relationship with Antoine Floch and Olivier Migda, directors of Man/Woman in Paris, New York and Las Vegas and a lot of UKFT's exhibitors have shown very successfully at their events. Man/Woman's target audience for Japan is traditionally similar to our own (heritage, casual, designer but not especially lux) so when



Man/Woman announced it was going back to Japan UKFT asked them to consider taking us with them.

Man/Woman Tokyo was conceived as a contact-building event for a small number of carefully selected brands, including YMC, Universal Works, Albam and Garbstore from the UK during Amazon Fashion Week Tokyo and on the official schedule. Man/Woman also put together a proposal for a separate standalone event to be called London Market Tokyo. Both events would be on the official Fashion Week schedule, located about five minutes from each other in the trendy Harajuku/Omotosando district in Shibuya, Tokyo. The proposal was for a turnkey solution with Man/Woman providing the location, furniture and most of the logistics, supported by UKFT. UKFT realised that smaller companies would need a degree of financial help so UKFT contacted DIT London who, in turn, secured funding for all 16 participants from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The grants were equivalent to approx.. £5000 each, leaving the companies to pay only £500 plus their travel, accommodation and expenses. This was the best deal we have seen for many years but it was only available to London companies and they had to meet some very stringent conditions and be in robust financial health.

Recruitment for the event:

UKFT and DIT worked closely together with the ERDF team to recruit the companies. Invitations were sent out to factory brands, larger exporters and newcomers from our respective contact databases. In particular, UKFT, DIT and Man/Woman were in agreement that all 16 participants should have interesting high quality collections of specific interest to Japan, that all had to be ready to commit to the expense of travelling to Japan. We knew we needed to have at least four really established and exciting designer brands who were strong enough to act as the anchors of the event, inviting their own buyers to attend. In line with our understanding of the market, we knew it was important to have some UK manufactured products, a mixture of menswear, womenswear and accessories and some designer collections. We felt it was important to have a number of stories to tell buyers, including “Made in the UK”, “Designer”, “Ethical Fashion” and we knew from experience that lingerie and childrenswear products would not work.

After a two week recruitment period, over 80 companies expressed interest in the event. Many were rejected by the ERDF team as they were small businesses which were still investing more in the business than they were making on sales – the ERDF’s forensic approach to business finance threw up a number of surprises along the way! Some companies which were accepted decided they could not afford the trip to Japan even with the generous ERDF funding.

Meet the Participants:

16 companies were chosen to travel to Tokyo on this first edition of London Market Tokyo:

Barbaraalan*	Designer men’s and womenswear
Bluebuck	Men’s underwear
Christopher Raeburn*	Designer men’s and womenswear
Cossac	Ethical designerwear
Country of Origin	Kntwear – Made in the UK
Folk*	Designer men’s and womenswear
Kombucha Core by Story Mfg	Ethical designerwear
Laird Hatters	Men’s headwear – Made in the UK
London Sock Company	Socks
London Undercovers	Umbrellas
Look Mate London	Socks and other items

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President HRH The Princes Royal



Mandkhai
New and Lingwood
Satta
The Workers Club
Tom Smarte London

Designer cashmere
Classic men's outerwear and luxury robes
Ethical designerwear
Designer menswear
Men's Headwear

The majority of the companies had either been to Japan before or had had dealings with at least one Japanese stockist. The three main anchors (*) had existing contacts in the market and a substantial following but were willing to work with and "godfather" the smaller companies.

Event promotion:

The Man/Woman team prepared a number of exciting graphics with the show and reception details. These were sent out to their, DIT's and UKFT's Japanese contacts. The British Embassy Tokyo kindly agreed to send the invitations to its database of approx.. 3000 contacts. Both the Man/Woman and LondonMarketTokyo events were listed on the Amazon Fashion Week Tokyo websites as part of the official #FWT programme. DIT took care of the RSVPs.

An @londonmarkettokyo Instagram account was set up with the hashtag #londonmarkettokyo.

Man/Woman sent a professional photographer to take images of the showcase and reception which were used to aliment the Instagram feed. The Man/Woman and UKFT team posted images on Instagram and UKFT and DIT London Fashion also posted on their own separate channels.

Set Up and the Show:

The show was set out over two floors of Case B, with 8 brands on both floors. The organisers provided space, light, a combination of wither three sets of rails or three sets of shelves, hangars etc. Chairs and tables were available but to ensure that the Japanese buyers were made to felt welcome, it was decided to keep the seating area away from the stands. The stands were separated by one of the three sets of rails or shelves. Each stand has a sign with its name. UKFT had liaised with the organisers and the participants to collect in everyone's stand fitting and travel requirements.

The organisers had thought of everything, from steamers on set up, a massive London Market Tokyo decal on the front glass windows, cocktails and food from the trendy @mamalui catering company, music for the party and throughout the show and bi-lingual reception staff and floral decorations.

Paul Alger of UKFT and Reanna Bowman of DIT London were at the show on set up and throughout the show to advise and support the companies.

UKFT set up a WhatsApp group to make communications easier between the group.

LondonMarketTokyo opened its doors on Thursday, followed by a reception in the evening. Friday was the second and final day, which coincided with the first day of Man/Woman Tokyo. Most of the British exhibitors were, therefore, able to join the other British and international exhibitors at Man Woman Tokyo for their first night drinks. On Saturday, LMT was closed but some of the companies still in Tokyo were able to visit the B2C day at Man/Woman Tokyo.

Overall, just under 400 buyers and press visited the LondonMarketTokyo showcase and the reception over the two days. Whilst many of these were regular attendees at our previous missions a lot of them were people we had not seen before. Although the steady drip of visitors had the effect of making the showcase feel quiet much of the time, there was a real buzz around the time of the reception on the first evening, at the time of the press visit organised by Amazon Fashion Week Tokyo and on the last afternoon, as some of the buyers covered both events on the same day.

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Whilst more buyers would always be nice to have, the general consensus was: that most of the buyers who promised to visit the showcase did, that the quality of the buyers was extremely high, that the visitors were generally happy with the collections they saw although some said they would have liked to see more established brands and more womenswear.

Most of the companies in the showcase either took orders or made valuable new contacts with one or two of the anchor brands being especially busy and popular. All of those present came away with a stronger understanding of the Japanese market and some of its key trends.

On the basis of the feedback from the participants, the event can be judged to have been a success and UKFT hopes to ask DIT London to consider funding the event again in October for its second edition, which will be a better show date for some buyers.

Lessons to be learned for the future:

In no particular order:

- The format, look and feel of the showcase generally worked. It would be possible to add another 4/6 stands into that space
- The participation of the more established anchor brands was crucial to success. It was clear that these companies performed better than the less established brands but that they were willing to introduce their buyers and contacts to other smaller brands. UKFT and DIT will need to look at this to see how to involve more established companies and whether the funding rules could be looked at again to include come brands from outside London
- Although the event was only 5 minutes from Man/Woman Tokyo, not all the buyers made it to both events. Size of brand is potentially one factor but co-location would be a better way to address this (the organisers have started to look at options for this for October).
- Buyers are more interested in Factory Brands (companies who own a factory), UK product, very special products manufactured most places (mostly excluding China) or with a string back story. However, they are very much more demanding and some of the buyers would have liked to see more innovative collections.
- The two day format works. Man/Woman Tokyo's additional B2C day was interesting and innovative but will take some time to catch on with local shoppers. If LMT does co-locate with MWT in October, thought will need to be given as to how to handle this side of things.
- Man/Woman Tokyo was an excellent delivery partner throughout. They invested a lot of time and energy in the project and would like to work with us again on the project in future.
- The ERDF funding mechanisms were a little difficult to comprehend at first but the level of funding is the easiest way to encourage the smaller companies into the market. How we involve larger brands, repeat participants and non-London participants needs to be looked at.
- The WhatsApp group helped to ensure that everyone knew what was going on but with the benefit of hindsight it would have been better to add the Reception staff so that they could message the group with the names of the stores entering the show.
- Some of the younger companies struggled with the cultural issues surrounding business in Japan. More needs to be done of this next time. In particular, participants need to understand that Japanese buyers will not wish to intrude if they see exhibitors sitting down or working on their computers. On a number of occasions we had to coax some of them out of their seats. The WhatsApp group helped in this regard but a more thorough briefing is necessary for next time.
- A longer planning period would help with the exhibitor training and preparation issues and might enable us to keep some of the more exciting smaller designers we would like to see at the next event.



Acknowledgements:

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Paris Gittens at the ERDF office for bearing with us all as we tried to get our head around the rules of the scheme.

The participants for their trust in us, the new concept and the Japanese market

Kae Miyazawa and her team at the British Embassy for supporting the event with their mailing to buyers and their presence at the Reception and at the show.

Lastly, to my colleagues at UKFT who let me embark on this new project without question.