

The Home Center Business in Japan

The typical home center in Japan is a one-story building located next to a principal road in a suburban area. It may carry from 20,000 to 30,000 different items, and have an indoor sales area of over 330 square meters with outdoor sales area. Most home centers provide customers with a spacious parking lot, a customer service counter and a workshop. Some of them hold DIY classes and print up instructional materials for give away. Almost all of them have a sales area specifically set aside for auto-related products. And most are so successful that they are branching out to nearby areas, but they are not like food chains as the home center business should have much skilful persons who can consult with consumers. It takes time to train these persons.

The range of products handled by home centers in Japan includes:

- 1) Hand tools, power tools
- 2) Construction-related hardware
- 3) Racks and shelves
- 4) Repair materials including adhesives, fillers, tapes, and so on
- 5) Materials used for interior decoration
- 6) Building materials
- 7) Semifinished products such as furniture kit
- 8) Paint and sundries
- 9) Plumbing supplies
- 10) Exterior decorations
- 11) Small electrical appliances and equipment
- 12) Auto-related products

Japan's Do-It-Yourselfers

First of all, various studies show that the Japanese as a whole, are not as familiar with the idea of DIY as are Americans and Europeans. We expect that this situation will change very rapidly, however, as a result of the many educational and marketing programs now underway to increase consumer awareness and knowledge about do-it-yourselfing.

For example, TV broadcasting corporations, have DIY consumer education program sometimes.

In addition, many books and magazines on DIY are being published, and homecenters, wholesale centers, and manufacturers themselves, are printing up instructional materials to distribute free of charge to their customers

The point-of-purchase (POP) customer service counters set up in most of the home centers are also making DIY more accessible to people by giving them a place where they can easily go to their questions answered.

Last but not least, advertising is spreading the word. Whithin their market area, many home centers are using newspaper inserts as an advertising vehicle. Not only do these inserts show home center products, but they also provide basic information about DIY.