

JAPANESE GIFT MARKET

The Japanese have two main gift-giving seasons: (1) *Ochugen* (summer gift) in July, and (2) *Oseibo* (year-end gift) in late November to early December. These gift-giving seasons coincide with the payment of bonuses. In Japan, unless there is any special reason such as financial crisis, etc., a bonus is paid twice a year to all workers in the public and private sectors. The total amount paid worker per year ranges from two to six month's salaries depending on the results of each company's operation. Bonus' paid to public sector workers is decided based on data on those paid in the private sector.

Two types of gifts are given from individuals to individuals as well as from companies to their clients. Of an immense number of gifts, foods are the most popular items. Of these, some seafood such as salted salmon, smoked salmon, crab (sections, whole, live), herring roe (salted, seasoned), spiny lobster (whole fresh, live), homard lobster (frozen, live), red sea bream (fresh, live), pawn (fresh, live) and many other processed seafood are sent as gifts. This gift-giving tradition in Japan has contributed substantially to consuming seafood.

Japan has a number of gift giving occasions which can be broadly categorized under individual and corporate gifts. Seasonal gift occasions make up the largest share of the market with *Ochugen* (years-end) and *Oseibo* (mid-year) being, respectively, the two largest occasions. The market is estimated at 13 trillion yen, 60 % of which is individual buying.

There are four categories of individual gifts: seasonal, social, personal and greeting. Gifts of the social, personal and greeting varieties are chosen according to the receiver's likes, lifestyle, concerns and interests as well as what will make them happy. At the same time gifts tend to reflect the personality of the giver. Seasonal gifts, which comprise the largest part of the market, are chosen according to custom.

Many Japanese occasions are marked by the giving of gifts for example religious occasions such as *Ochugen* (mid-year), 60th, 70th, 77th, 88th, 90th, and 99th birthdays, and funerals. Personal gifts are given for individual ceremonial occasions, for example *Oseibo* (years-end), house-warmings, gifts for newborns, school entrance, achievement, reaching adulthood, marriage and work promotions. Some Western gift-giving occasions have also been adopted such as Valentines Day, Mother's and Father's Days, Christmas and golden wedding anniversaries.

Products used for personal gifts are edibles, non-food items, gift certificates and cash. Imported items are not exclusively intended for gifts, but most have that potential. Edibles such as whiskey, wine and beer and non-food items such as handbags, scarves, neckties, ceramics, and tableware are popular gift items. While varying according to occasion, the price range of imported gifts is generally between 10,000 and 50,000 yen.

There are three classifications of corporate gifts: seasonal, social and incentive. Seasonal and social gifts are given to stock holders, clients, and employees and are selected according to the same criteria as individual gifts. Incentive gifts, such as premiums and novelties, may be given to clients but are generally intended for consumers.