

Fukoku: From one-man venture to world leader through a focus on quality and innovation

Having grown into the world leader in wiper blade rubber production over the last 68 years, Fukoku's dedication to constant innovation enables the company to produce custom-made solutions for the automotive industry and beyond.

Trusted carmakers like Toyota and Nissan's reputations have been built on superior build quality and reliability. And behind these car manufacturing giants lie the Japanese SMEs that produce their vehicles' high-quality and high-performing parts which together work in perfect unison.

These specialized SMEs, which form the backbone of the Japanese automotive industry's success, are dedicated to the tenets of *monozukuri*, focusing not just on quality and durability, but also a commitment to constant innovation. This innovation allows them to create groundbreaking products which meet the changing needs of an automotive industry undergoing a revolution.

Since its establishment in 1953, Fukoku has become the world's leading producer of wiper blade rubber, using innovative technology proven consistent over many years to cement its international reputation. The company produces a range of high-performance rubber products for the automotive industry, such as pioneering anti-vibration products created with composite technologies. These custom-made products have also allowed Fukoku to expand into more industries including construction machinery and railroads.

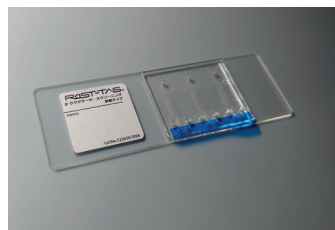
This expansion is based on what the company calls the 'Fukoku Way'. "It's about being responsive to the needs of the wider community, not just talking about our company but also beyond that, to our stakeholders and the company's contacts around the globe," Takashi Ogawa, President of Fukoku, explains. "The slogan is not 'Yes, we can' but 'Yes, we do' because we put a lot of effort into what we do."

The company's commitment to R&D has also been a cornerstone of its growth. "Our R&D fuels us from the design point of view. Later on we switch to the manufacturing site to actually implement those ideas that are coming out from the R&D



"You have to continue adjusting your best practices and you have to look from a wider perspective"

Takashi Ogawa, President, Fukoku Co., Ltd.



offices," says Mr. Ogawa. "Timing is also very important, being capable of producing and delivering the products on time is something that is also a feature of Japanese *monozukuri*."

Faced with the global mega-competition, Fukoku constantly adjusts its best practices, preventing less costly alternatives from being able to replicate the performance of its superior products. An



example of this is Fukoku's development of a rubber surface treatment for its flagship wiper blade rubber. This treatment, which is steps ahead of its competitors', ensures increased efficiency and performance in the wiper blades.

The company's technology means it is able to bond rubber and metal, as well as blending rubber with other materials. By ensuring the best materials for

customer needs in all aspects of its production, Fukoku's products can help increase the safety and comfort of automobiles.

Whilst the automotive industry accounts for 80% of Fukoku's sales, the company is also focused on growing the other 20% of its business in a wider range of industries, including healthcare. "It's a new kind of approach from our company. Some time ago the company introduced this bio-related section, leading to our healthcare department developing cell culture bags and cell culture medium," Mr. Ogawa explains.

"First of all, the major product here is the culture bag itself. The bag is made from our technologies developed in house and based on our rubber technologies. We came to the realization that it's not just the infusion bags, but also cultivating the cells inside the culture bags. We are conducting research with the aim of realizing safe and efficient cell culture. (Refer to our video treatise: <https://www.jove.com/video/57922>). It is something that might help in the medical field. The customers have also been satisfied in this regard," explains Mr. Ogawa.

The 'Fukoku Way' not only encompasses tailoring solutions to customers, but also creating a warmhearted atmosphere within the company. This atmosphere is aimed at ensuring every employee in the company perfectly understands the goals they are aiming for, and what the company's principles are as a whole. "The dream is very ambitious. It is to create the 'atmosphere' not only among the company's employees but also for our customers and everybody related to the company," Mr. Ogawa proudly states. "We aim to be an institution where no words are needed to understand each other perfectly on what goals we're aiming for."