



This special report celebrates the robust ties between Germany and Japan, highlighting a dynamic relationship strengthened by significant political and economic collaborations.

As Hidenao Yanagi, Japan's ambassador to Germany, notes, "The collaboration between Japan and Germany, which share similarities in industrial structure and advanced technological capabilities, is particularly important."

Key figures like Yanagi and Setsuko Kawahara, the consul-general in Duesseldorf, offer insights into this enduring partnership. Supported by the Japan External Trade Organization Duesseldorf, Tourism North Rhine-Westphalia, the City of Duesseldorf's Economic Development Office, and Hessen Trade & Invest, the report features influential companies including Start2 Group, NSK Europe, Kienbaum, Emma Consulting and Sonoda & Kobayashi.

For detailed interviews and a closer look at how these entities bolster bilateral relations, read the full feature here.

Read the full report at: sms-bridges.com/DE24

Visit: sms-bridges.com

# The strategic partnership between Japan and Germany

## Duesseldorf: Strengthening German-Japanese business networks

With its strategic location, Duesseldorf is a key hub for German-Japanese business interactions.

The city's Office of Economic Development supports this with services for foreign companies, including support with all matters relating to city administration, assistance in real estate searches or introductions to relevant business networks.

"Duesseldorf is the center of Japanese business activities in Germany, with 400 companies in the city and altogether more than 500 in the wider region," Annette Klerks, head of the office's International Business Service said.

Duesseldorf's vibrant Japanese business community, supportive initiatives, high quality of life and events like Japan-Tag (Japan Day), Wirtschaftstag Japan (the German-Japanese Business Symposium) and Duesseldorf Abend in Tokyo, make it welcoming for Japanese nationals. "With 7,400 residents, it is perceived as Germany's 'Little Tokyo,'" shared Benjamin Leonhardt of the International Business Service's Japan Desk.



Annette Klerks (center), Head of the International Business Service at Duesseldorf's Office of Economic Development, is flanked by Benjamin Leonhardt of the service's Japan Desk and Juliane Neu, the desk's Senior Project Manager.

The city's strong support for Japanese businesses, exemplified by tailored programs at industry events, such as Future Tech Fest and Startup Week, underscores its vital role in Germany-Japan relations and the Office of Economic Development's ongoing efforts to strengthen these ties.

Global Acceleration Hub, with digital hub Duesseldorf/Rheinland as a local partner, acting as an accelerator and matchmaker in Duesseldorf," said Juliane Neu, another member of the Japan Desk. "Innovative startups from Japan can also apply for our Welcome Package, with three months of free rent in a coworking space and access to the local network."

These initiatives evolve with the shifting times, offering practical support in emerging trends.

Japanese companies are increasingly adopting open innovation in their business approach with German firms. This shift is evident in the establishment of new innovation centers, such as Asahi Kasei's in Duesseldorf, which collaborates with German energy suppliers like RWE (Rheinisch-Westfälisches Elektrizitätswerk) on decarbonization projects, demonstrating strong joint efforts," Klerks said.

Upcoming events — including Xponential Europe, the Circular Valley Convention, and a visit to the Osaka Expo by Duesseldorf Mayor Stefan Keller in 2025 — underscore Duesseldorf's ongoing efforts to strengthen ties with Japan and reinforce its position as a global business hub and key driver of the German economy.

www.duesseldorf.de



## Emma Consulting: Guiding European SMEs to success in Japan's lucrative market

Navigating the complex Japanese market can be a daunting challenge for European companies, particularly for small and midsize enterprises. Emma Consulting Co., led by Dirk Ebert, is dedicated to bridging this gap.

Established as a trusted partner for European businesses, Emma Consulting offers a strategic approach to market entry in Japan, focusing on companies with well-established products.

"Our clients are typically well-established, family-owned European companies, often with over 100 years of history," Ebert said. Although these companies may be industry leaders in Europe, many have yet to fully explore Japan. "Japan is lucrative but requires a long-term approach, stamina, and a willingness to endure challenges," he added.



Dirk Ebert, CEO of Emma Consulting

Emma Consulting focuses on leveraging proven strengths rather

than taking risks with untested products. "We often take over products in shrinking markets where our expertise, like large engine components, fits best," Ebert said. Their comprehensive approach includes market research, customer identification and local representation. "Success in Japan requires thorough research, a clear understanding of local competition, and a well-planned, long-term strategy, along with the readiness to navigate any obstacles that arise," he emphasized.

One of Emma Consulting's success stories is a power generation client that took four years to secure its first order in Japan. Now, over a decade later, they are the main supplier for the market leader. "It's about building trust and understanding the unique demands of

the Japanese market," Ebert said. Emma Consulting prioritizes quality over growth. "We aim to be better, not bigger," Ebert noted. While technology may ease communication across language barriers, he emphasizes that "trust between supplier and customer remains essential."

Emma Consulting's commitment to guiding European SMEs through the complexities of the Japanese market makes it an invaluable partner for companies looking to succeed in one of the world's most challenging markets.

www.emma-consulting.com



## 350 years of Metzler: Trust and partnerships in Japan

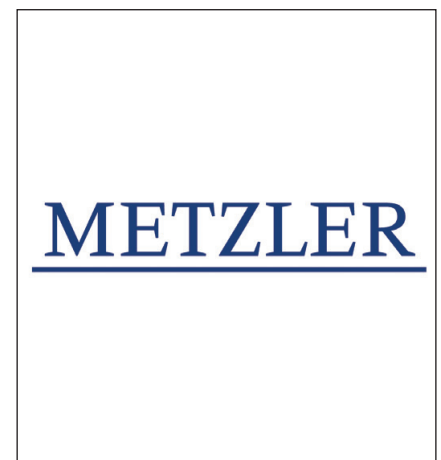
As Metzler Bank celebrates its 350th anniversary, its deep-rooted history of family ownership continues to shape its vision of long-term partnerships, particularly with Japan.

"For 350 years, the needs of clients have been the focus of Metzler Bank's activities. With entrepreneurship, independence and humanity, the company has safely survived wars, crises and revolutions and is still a constant for its clients in the national and international financial business," said Gerhard Wiesheu, CEO of B. Metzler seel. Sohn & Co. AG. "We have been present in Tokyo since 2001, and our clients appreciate the history of our bank and the values we stand for."



Gerhard Wiesheu, CEO of B. Metzler seel. Sohn & Co. AG

As ties between Japan and Germany continue to strengthen, Wiesheu sees immense potential for growth in the financial sector. "Japanese companies are increasingly investing abroad, driven by demographic changes shrinking their domestic market. Acquisitions in Germany or cooperations with German



companies are particularly attractive due to similar industrial structures, especially in sectors like automotive and pharmaceuticals," he explained. Metzler's understanding of both cultures makes it a valuable partner in facilitating cross-border investments.

Metzler's involvement extends beyond finance. Its support for cultural initiatives, such as the Nippon Connection Film Festival, underscores its commitment to fostering cultural diplomacy. "In Japan, business relationships are built on trust and take time to develop. Japanese business culture emphasizes respect, humility, and harmony. A focus on long-term commitment rather than short-term gains is critical. We at Metzler know that maintaining a stable, trustworthy presence is essential for building strong, lasting relationships," Wiesheu said.

Looking ahead, Metzler is focused on expanding its services for Japanese and German institutional investors. "Relations between Germany and Japan are close and friendly — and immensely important both economically and politically," Wiesheu noted. He said his visit to Japan with the German government in 2022, where he held talks with Japanese ministers and business leaders, was "very fruitful."

"In the future, we can also make a decisive contribution to connecting the German and Japanese economies," he added.

Metzler offers asset management services through its Tokyo-based subsidiary, Metzler Asset Management (Japan) Ltd., and advises Japanese companies on mergers and acquisitions in the German market. "This will be an unparalleled honor and joy for me."

Read the full interview: www.sms-bridges.com/DE24-Metzler

www.metzler.com

## Hessen: The right place to invest in Europe

The bilateral relationship between Germany and Japan is characterized by close political exchange and international cooperation: As liberal and pluralistic democracies, both countries share fundamental values and are politically, economically and socially linked in many ways. The trade balance between Germany and Japan has been stable for years.

The economically vibrant state of Hessen lies at the heart of Germany and Europe, at the crossroads of numerous international transportation routes. Home to the eurozone's financial center, it has evolved into one of Europe's strongest regions and is a dynamic science, innovation and business hub.

Hessen has also successfully positioned itself as an international business and technology location in Germany and Europe. The number of international companies that have settled and operate here exceeds 13,000 so far. From the state of Hessen almost 250 Japanese companies have been operating in the European market for decades. Fewer than 4% of the new investments subsequently left again, a clear vote of confidence in this strategic location by the remaining 96%.



Home to the eurozone's financial center, Hessen has evolved into one of Europe's strongest regions and is a dynamic science, innovation and business hub.

Hessen is a high-tech state whose prosperity depends on it providing the best possible conditions for the technology firms located here. Japanese companies such as Honda, Konica, Fuji Europe, Daiwa, Daikin, NTT, Mitsubishi and Panasonic contribute to the state's innovative

strength, as do its numerous small and midsize enterprises. The technological focus in Hessen has shifted in recent years in line with technological and social developments, and now includes the following sectors: industry 4.0 and smart manufacturing, information and

communications technology and internet infrastructure, life sciences, green energy and future mobility.

Japanese companies will immediately feel integrated in Hessen. More than 5,300 Japanese citizens live here. Whether at the Hojinkai (Frankfurt Japan Corporate Association), KAI KO German-Japanese Economic Dialogue, the German-Japanese Society Frankfurt, or through various Japanese associations, service providers, beauty and spa offerings, and over 30 Japanese restaurants in and around Frankfurt — they are sure to feel welcome among friends.

We are looking forward to meeting our Japanese friends again at the 2025 World Expo in Osaka.

YOUR POINT OF CONTACT:

Andreas Damrau  
Director Investor Services  
APAC & MENA  
Hessen Trade & Invest GmbH  
T: +49 611 950 178 346  
E: andreas.damrau@htai.de  
www.invest-in-hessen.com



## NSK Europe: Setting the future in motion

Founded in Japan over 100 years ago, NSK Ltd. has been a cornerstone of industrial evolution, keeping society in motion. From automobiles and home appliances to industrial machinery, railways and aerospace, NSK's comprehensive range of products, including bearings and ball screws, has supported countless industries. With over a century of technical expertise, NSK continues to provide tailored solutions for specific application requirements.

NSK Europe Ltd., a leader in the global bearing and motion control industry, is strengthening its presence across Europe, particularly in markets like Germany, Italy and the Middle East. Under the leadership of CEO Ulrich Nass, the company is driving innovation, sustainability and expansion.

"Our super precision bearing plant is crucial for the machine tool market where Europe, particularly Germany and Italy, plays a significant global role," Nass said. This facility is part of NSK's extensive European network, which includes three manufacturing plants and 17 locations across Europe, the Middle East and Africa. These operations generate around €700 million (about \$932,100) annually and employ approximately 3,500 people.



Ulrich Nass, CEO of NSK Europe

bearings. With two primary business units — automotive and industrial — NSK is well-equipped to serve a wide array of industries, from super precision applications for machine tools and medical equipment to high performance bearings for cars, high speed trains, wind turbines and industrial gears.

Looking ahead, NSK Vision 2026, under the theme of "Set the Future in Motion," highlights the company's focus on innovation and sustainability. A critical aspect of this vision is the acquisition of Bruel & Kjaer Vibro, a company specializing in condition-monitoring and predictive maintenance, aligning with NSK's strategy of full product life cycle management.

As NSK Europe continues to innovate, it remains dedicated to delivering high-quality solutions that drive industry growth.

www.nsk-europe.com



## Connecting startups and corporates worldwide: Inside Start2 Group's vision



Representatives of German startups from the German Accelerator program in Yokohama pitch their innovations to potentially introduce to Japan. The Start2 Group's strong focus on cross-border collaboration allows German startups to enter the Japanese market while helping Japanese startups scale into Germany.

"We currently run programs in both directions — bringing German startups to Japan and helping Japanese startups scale into Germany."

Founded in Munich in 2008 as the German Entrepreneurship, the Start2 Group has evolved into a global force supporting startups across four continents. With branches in Germany, the United States, South America and Asia, Start2 Group is committed to fostering innovation and cross-border collaboration for startups and corporations alike.

Start2 Group's international journey began with the German Accelerator program, supported by the German government to scale German startups primarily in the U.S. Over time, the company expanded its focus beyond Europe and the U.S. to help startups enter critical markets in South America, Southeast Asia, India, China, South Korea and Japan. This shift culminated in the company's rebranding as Start2 Group to better reflect its growing international operations.

Japan is pivotal to Start2's strategy, acting as a bridge for cross-border innovation between Germany and Asia. Through strategic partnerships, such as its collaboration with the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, Start2 facilitates German startups' ability to access the Japanese market while offering Japanese startups a pathway into Germany and Europe.

"We don't just help startups enter new markets; we connect them with potential corporate partners and customers, validating their solutions for expansion," said Claus Karthe, CEO Asia. Start2's programs enhance innovation and collaboration between two of the world's most advanced economies.

A significant aspect of the group's operations is connecting startups with multinational corporations. Through cross-border

innovation, they align startups with the right corporate partners, providing scaling opportunities while helping corporations meet their digital transformation needs.

"With many corporates aiming to digitalize, working with startups is the fastest way to innovate. If you want to move fast, you move with a startup," Karthe said.

Start2 Group's global network fosters strategic collaborations benefiting both startups and corporations, allowing corporations access to market-ready solutions while startups validate their ideas and enter new markets. This dynamic drives innovation and creates competitive advantages for both parties.



## Sonoda & Kobayashi: Leading the way in global intellectual property rights



Yoshitaka Sonoda, Co-founder and Managing Partner of Sonoda & Kobayashi Intellectual Property Law

Sonoda & Kobayashi Intellectual Property Law, a prominent boutique firm established in 1998, has earned its reputation as a leader in intellectual property. Specializing in patents, trademarks, copyrights and industrial designs, the firm offers a full range of services, from application filing to enforcement, licensing and litigation.

Co-founder and managing partner Yoshitaka Sonoda highlighted the firm's international edge, stating, "Sonoda & Kobayashi stands out for its international approach, with a diverse team of 120 professionals from 14 countries, ensuring expert handling of IP issues across different cultural and legal landscapes." This global perspective is central to the firm's strategy, enabling effective management of IP matters across various jurisdictions.

Ranked among the top firms in Asia for IP prosecution and enforcement, Sonoda & Kobayashi's extensive expertise makes

it a highly respected name in the industry. The firm's experience is particularly valuable in industries where IP is crucial. "Intellectual property protection is crucial across all industries, but it becomes particularly critical in sectors like pharmaceuticals and automotive, where patents are key to maintaining market advantage," Sonoda emphasized.

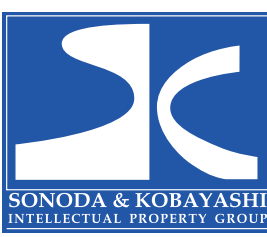
German businesses in Japan face specific challenges, including language barriers and contrasting legal systems. "German businesses in Japan face challenges such as language barriers, differing legal systems, and dissimilar business cultures, but these can be mitigated by leveraging a dependable guide having a deep understanding of both cultures," Sonoda noted. Sonoda & Kobayashi's multilingual capabilities, including services in German, French, Japanese, English and Chinese, effectively address these challenges.

As an international IP law firm, Sonoda & Kobayashi remains at the forefront.

"The harmonization of IP laws is advancing, but significant differences remain between countries, highlighting the need for tailored strategies in protecting and enforcing IP rights," Sonoda pointed out.

With globalization reshaping the IP landscape, the firm is committed to helping businesses navigate these complexities.

www.patents.jp



## Kienbaum Japan: Future-focused talent and organizational growth



Etsuji Suzuki, Managing Director of Kienbaum Japan

Founded in 1945, Kienbaum is Germany's first consulting firm and a prominent player in leadership and management consulting. With 26 offices globally, Kienbaum has a strong presence not only in Germany and Europe but also in the Americas and Asia. Its mission remains steadfast: to give people and organizations a future.

Kienbaum Japan, established in 2006, specializes in integrating corporate cultures and managing talent across regions. The company supports clients in every aspect related to "people and organizations," focusing mainly on German and European companies operating in Japan and Asia, as well as Japanese companies doing business in Germany and Europe — a focus that dates back to 2001.

As Managing Director Etsuji Suzuki explained, "The greatest challenge for German companies in Japan is acquiring and retaining talent while managing communication between German headquarters and Japanese subsidiaries, and vice versa for

Japanese companies in Europe." By leveraging its expertise in both German and Japanese markets, Kienbaum Japan emphasizes technical skills and intercultural communication.

In the field of executive search, Kienbaum Japan operates exclusively and is one of the few firms in Japan that conducts retainer-based searches, as opposed to success-based searches. With this method, fees are incurred from the start, making it especially suited for executive and niche market searches. This ensures a clear commitment from both the consultants and the firm to finding the right candidate. Consultants represent the client throughout the entire search process, from identifying candidates to signing contracts, while providing detailed insights into company culture and management styles.

"We are not just an executive search firm; we cover a broad range of HR (human resources) topics, including management diagnostics, assessments, and compensation and performance management systems," Suzuki emphasized. "Understanding the German 'mittelstand' — mid-sized, often family-owned companies — and 'hidden champions' — niche market leaders with global success — is crucial for managing cross-cultural challenges. We are proud to support these companies, which form the backbone of the German economy. Kienbaum works with clients of all sizes, leveraging our deep understanding of the mittelstand and hidden champions to excel in Japan-Germany business relations."

international.kienbaum.com/japan

