

OKA: CRAFTING QUALITY

that Breeds Customer Loyalty

A JAPANESE COMPANY IMBUED WITH A DEDICATION TO INNOVATION AND A DEEP SENSITIVITY TO USERS' NEEDS, OKA CREATES PRODUCTS THAT ITS CUSTOMERS BUY TIME AND AGAIN. *By Cian O'Neill*

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"Japan's culture of quality manufacturing is our heart and soul—the thread connecting us to our customers."

Yohei Oka
President, Oka Co., Ltd.

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eincorporated in 1972, Oka Co., Ltd.'s origins date back to 1934, when the company began selling hemp rope. Today, the firm prides itself on creating durable, long-lasting products that customers want to buy over and over again.

"Oka is not a big company, but we aim to be an integral part of people's lives, not only for the happiness of their families, but also for the environment," President Yohei Oka says.

The company's flagship product, the kandoryoko bath mat, best embodies this approach. Since it was introduced in the early 1990s, it has sold more than 10 million units thanks to its superior water absorbency and quick-drying properties.

It has been more than 40 years since Oka took the industry by storm, when the company proposed that the bathroom and its contents, such as mats, toilet seat covers and cleaning products, should be a harmonious space.

This move helped Oka to penetrate the Japanese domestic market and is representative of a corporate culture focused on innovation that continues to this day.

Mr. Oka states: "In our discussions with customers, we realized that many people did not feel comfortable washing bath mats together with their clothing. Also, traditional bath mats were not suitable for use in the dryer because of their non-slip coating."

He continues: "So we developed CARARACA®, a dryer-safe bath mat that uses the same materials as our flagship product, kandoryoko, with a few improvements."

Oka has announced plans to expand the company and believes CARARACA® will be an important way to enter the market in the United States. For a long time, the U.S. has been dominated by washer-dryer combinations.

"Clearly, in order to overcome the challenges posed by Japan's changing demographics, we need to turn our attention to the international market. It is important to find new sales channels for our existing products," says Mr. Oka. "Through our own factory in Shanghai, we hope to cover all of Asia."

Furthermore, Oka is eager to develop new businesses. "We believe it is important to diversify our product line," Mr. Oka says. "There are possibilities in pet and nursing care products, and in the B2B field, there are opportunities in hot spring facilities and Japanese-style hotels."

