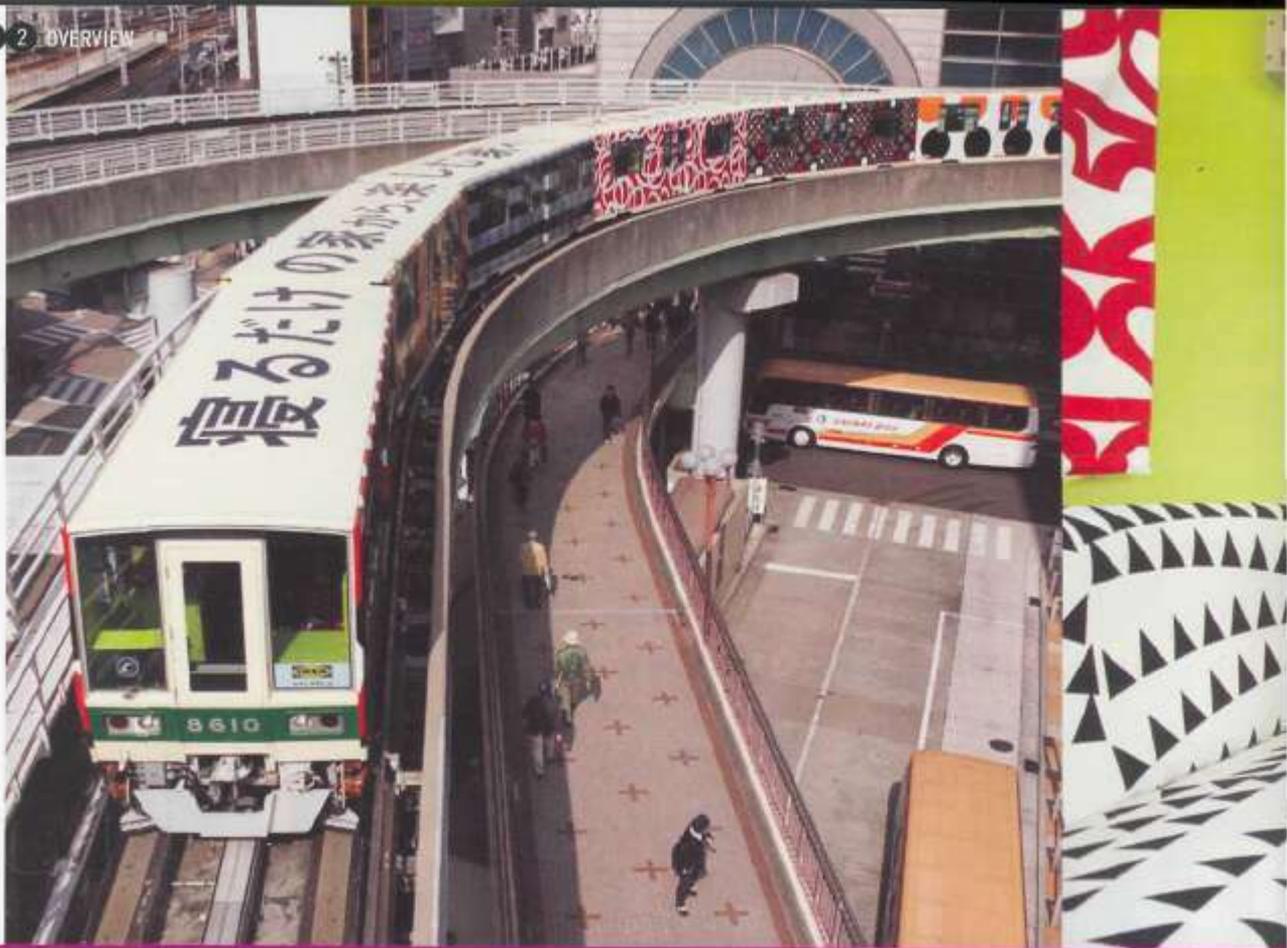


Whether it's outdoor media or a computer widget accompanying your every desktop move, integrated branding is a teaming ahead in Japan, as can be seen with this train announcing a new IKEA store in Tokyo



japan



Buzz is a big thing in the leading cyber nation that is Japan. Online communication is breaking new ground every day, and Japan's advertising creatives are responding by breaking free from the shackles of mass media.

In this brave new digital world, the unique style of creative directors such as Yugo Nakamura continues to win consumers' hearts. The Cyber Lion Grand Prix winner (for NEC, 2004) is part of the brains behind the trail-blazing Uniglo campaign, and his company, Tha, was also behind the acclaimed work for the New York Museum of Modern Art website.

Elsewhere, Koichiro Tonaka, co-founder and creative director of boutique agency Projector, is

shock of the new

Japan's technological innovations have forced a conservative agency world to radically rethink its approach to creativity and media planning, says **Yoshimi Kikuchi**

the driving force behind the Uniqlock push. And communication designer Naoki Ito is another talent that's caught the eye of international clients, bringing the virtual world to life outdoors with his work on Microsoft's Big Shadow. You may have guessed by now that Uniglo's Uniqlock campaign is the hottest advertising topic in Japan at the moment (it's already been mentioned twice in this feature, and there's more details on page 88). This is no faddish blog, but a new way of communicating online, incorporating music and dance to that essential daily item, the clock. The dancers put on a series of five-second performances clad in seasonal Uniglo gear and the huge variety in the performances, the simple Uniglo outfits, and the complete design package of the blog-parts makes for an innovative and effective web tool.

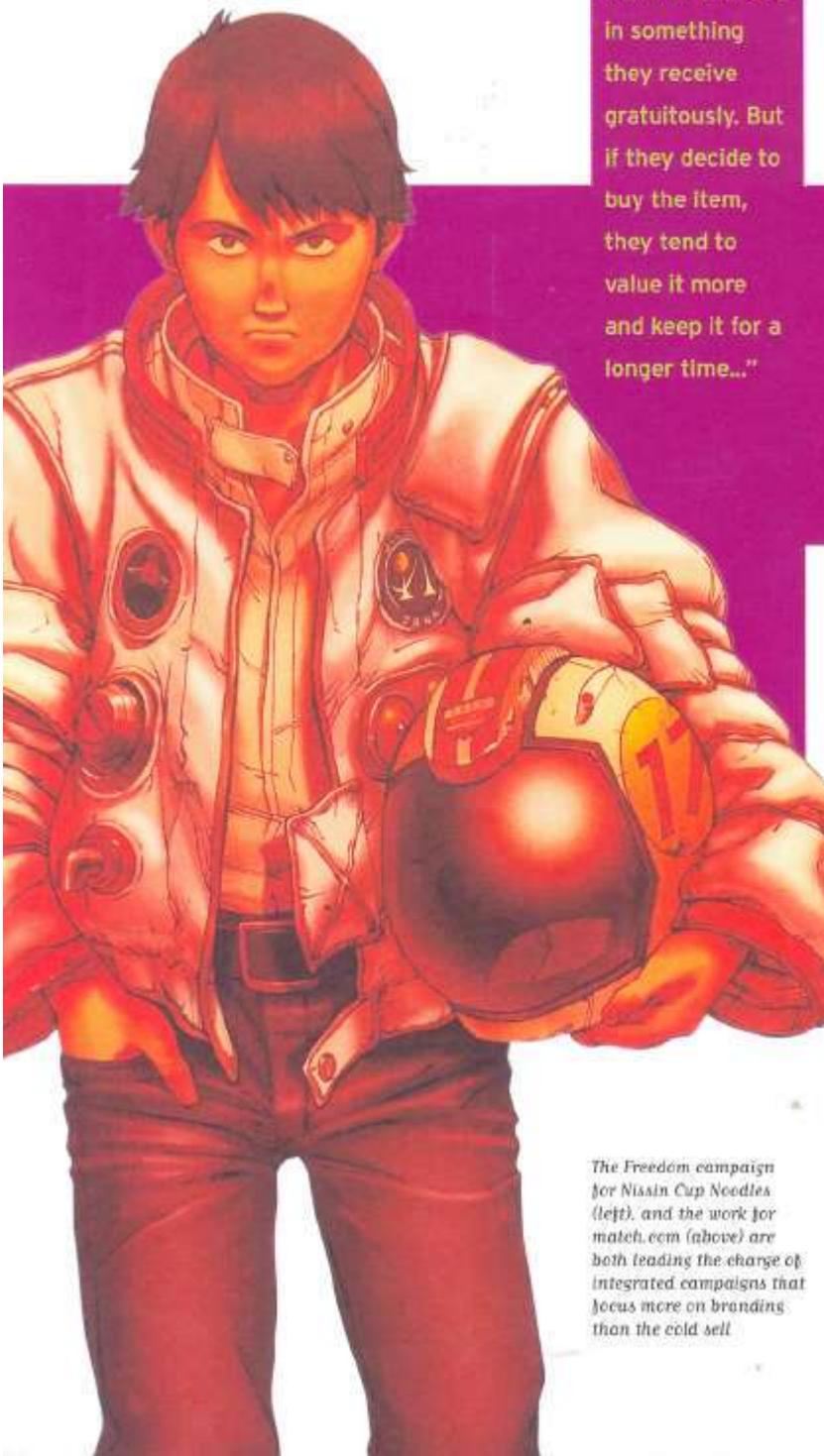
Tanaka says: "It generally only takes about five seconds to download a five-second movie.O

so lots of different elements can be downloaded in the background while the current movie or gadget is playing."

In a sense, it's media technology that gave life to Uniqlock. Yuichi Kodama, the visual director of the campaign has been able to generate almost-inorganic dancers, even though their movements are graceful like ballet dancers, and stop precisely like a clock. "I've slightly softened the focus for a visual quality that can withstand long hours of viewing," explains Kodama. The genius behind the Freedom Project for Nissin Cup Noodle is Takamatsu Satoshi. In this project, Satoshi teamed up with the popular animation author Katsuhiko Otomo to create a feature-length animation series. In addition to extending this to a TV ad, the work was sold on DVD and released as a comic book and a novel, in print and for mobile.

The characters from the stories also appear as licensed goods and are sold in major retail environments. These goods have done well engaging not only Cup Noodle users but also anyone who loves animation.

"Consumers show no interest in something they receive gratuitously. But if they decide to buy the item, they tend to value it more and keep it for a longer time..."



The Freedom campaign for Nissin Cup Noodles (left), and the work for match.com (above) are both leading the charge of integrated campaigns that focus more on branding than the cold sell

The Freedom craze has reached a point where life-size figurines of the characters are now sold for a few hundred thousand yen (hundreds of pounds). These are just a few examples of how communication is expanding beyond the mere selling of a product and towards sophisticated branding. Entertaining content is becoming an increasingly important media tool in itself, and more advertisers see it as part of their strategy to generate sales. The match.com creative strategy, again, by Takamatsu Satoshi, takes a unique approach to getting around strict 'exposure' regulations in Japan. Belgian white chocolate and a message card from the client was included in this charming package, which was sold in retail outlets. "Consumers show no interest in something they receive gratuitously. However, if they decide to buy the item, they tend to value it more and keep it for a longer time," says Satoshi. Japanese women love-love-love sweets, he adds, and after they buy this, they will probably place the Belgian white chocolate next to their keyboards. In other words, match.com has successfully secured the space closest to the many Japanese potential clients - the keyboard. Swedish furniture retailer IKEA, which successfully launched in Japan two years ago, will open its Kobe store this spring. Osamu Enari, vice president of Dorill Inc. a creative shop that boasts a media-neutral approach, decided to completely kit out the train that goes to the store in all IKEA textiles for



the launch campaign. He was executive producer of the campaign, and the man behind the glass show rooms revealing the small housing conditions of Japan that cruised the streets for the launch of the first IKEA store. The various interior concepts in the different mobile showrooms were put to a vote, and the campaign eventually went on to win a gold Media Lion last year. In the latest Kobe launch campaign, Enari decorated the six-car trains with sheets and curtains and arranged the floors and ceilings in three style concepts; Scandinavian, Modern, and Country. As the train runs through an office district, the line 'From a place to sleep in to a home to enjoy' was placed on the roof for people in the surrounding buildings to read. The colourful IKEA train was a hit and kept the momentum going for the month leading up to and after the IKEA Kobe launch.

Today, there are many creative shops in the market which offer a media-neutral approach for clients who seek efficient branding exercises more than any specific media choice. To this end, the mega agencies, such as Dentsu and Hakuhodo have all set up a specialist units, such as creative, promotions, media planning and interactive. These big houses sometimes team up with the independents on an ad hoc basis.

The outdated traditions that have often stifled Japanese creativity are dropping away as the industry embraces the digital revolution. 5



art directors japan

CHE MORIMOTO

This fresh young talent says she gains most of her inspiration from encounters with people, and all of her work certainly seems to emit a gentle warmth. Even the name of her office, 'goen', is a reminder of the importance she places on relationships - it means "destined encounters". She says: "I want to work with a variety of people, and I always make the studio a fun environment. Then people bring in more people, creating more encounters..." The studio's 'goen' hotspot is the kitchen, and

the collaborators there are all are creators at the top of their game. In 2006, Morimoto held an exhibition with Yoshitomo Nara and a creative unit, graf AtoZ. All the scrap from the exhibition was revived as a log house just for Morimoto. She's going to need it, as her schedule is filling up fast. Her projects extend from TV commercials to graphic design on books, CD jackets, store livery, events and restaurants. She is also involved in the direction of various dramatic productions.



"I want to work with a variety of people, so I always make the studio a fun environment. Then people bring in more people, creating more encounters..."

Japan turns to its open-hearted young artists to put a human face on its rush of technological innovations

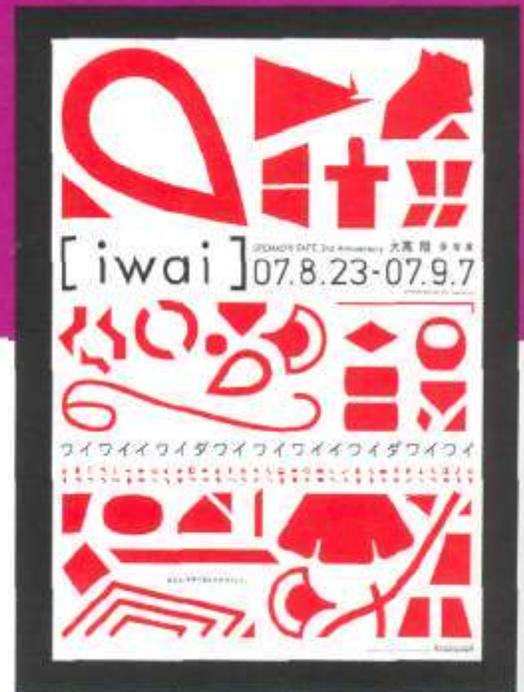


KAORI MIKI

As the daughter of a package designer, Miki always knew that she would one day follow in her father's footsteps and become a designer herself. She just wasn't sure what type of designer.

Now, as a winner of a special award at this year's Young Media Competition at the Cannes Advertising Festival, the future's coming into view.

"I've always been part of various projects," she-eays. "They all target different advertising sectors, but my focus is really just on the core of the campaign. There is no style or taste hemming me in. Advertising is like a live animal. It's always different, so it's always fun."



YAGI YOSHIHIRO

A significant part of the success of the popular Kuryudo/Iwai cafe event in Tokyo, created by Yagi Yoshihiro, were the traditional colours and shapes that characterise Japan. It combines haiku, the traditional Japanese poetry, and icon-based design, using red and white. Iwai has won awards at New York ADC and Cannes. "I was especially thrilled that Japanese identity was appreciated on a global stage," says Yoshihiro. Incorporating traditional styles into modern advertising has proved a winning combination.

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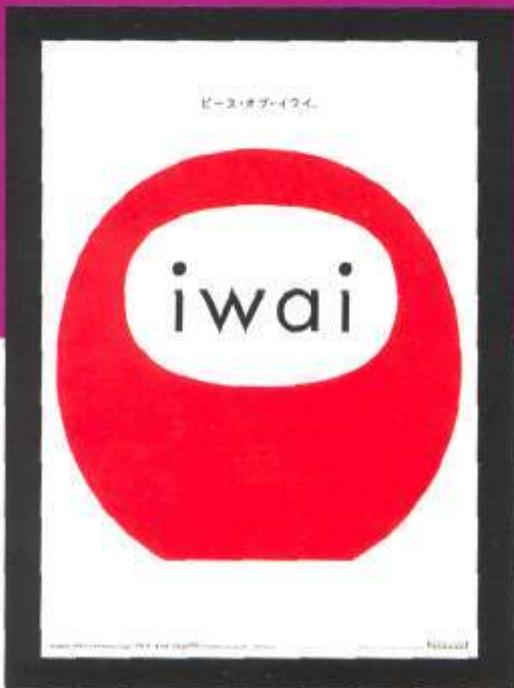
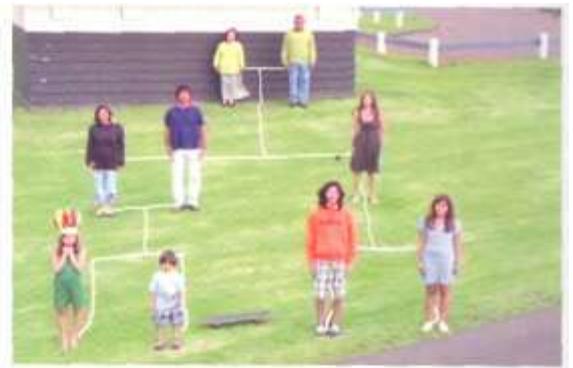
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"All my advertising work targets different advertising sectors, but my focus is really just on the core of the campaign. There is no style or taste hemming me in."

There is only one thing you need to know about shooting in Canada, it's called Karen.,

tnp

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Before those clever monkeys at Japan creative hothouse Projector held aloft the Titanium Grand Prix at Cannes this June, few will have known that they were the brains behind the phenomenon that is Uniqlock.

This is a multi award-winning initiative (they've also pocketed a D&AD Black Pencil, a Grand Clio and the One Show Interactive Grand Prix) for the Japanese clothes store Uniqlo, which takes the form of a "music dance clock", a functional but entertaining website which triggers connections between Uniqlo and the world's bloggers, the buzz builders. At least, that's how the website explains it.

The challenge was "to raise the brand's global awareness and to achieve a high level of engagement". Tokyo-based Projector, a three-man boutique shop led by creative director/co-founder Koichiro Tanaka, dreamt up this wizard 24/7, endless online presentation of Uniqlo's clean-cut clothing - from dry polo shirts in summer to cashmere sweaters in winter - via an infinite, random sequence of music dance videos.

The central dance clock widget can be downloaded and placed on other

When on the subject of Projector itself, and what it does, he is a little less - but only a little - esoteric. "We propose new web services or content to clients. It is outside of advertising. It is between utility and entertainment," he says. "We are also involved in some online ad campaigns."

Projector was, in fact, established in 2004 as an independent creative boutique consisting of three members - Tanaka as 'thinker/creative director' and two 'thinkers/producers'.

They organise supplementary teams for each project, tapping into a network of freelance creators, technologists, film producers, system developing companies, web design studios and so forth.

"I started my career at a film and digital production house called TYO," explains Tanaka. "There, I produced many genres of advertising content, such as short films, motion graphics, art events, websites and desktop applications. Then, I felt my hybrid experience was enough for a new challenge, so I set up Projector."

To date, aside from the Uniqlo work, the boutique has been involved in a range of other projects, including interactive shop installations, art books and motion walls. It has also worked in collaboration with IdN Magazine, the leading Hong-Kong creative publication, as well as the creative website Shift.

projector creative agency tokyo

Belinda Archer taps into the inspiration behind a unique online widget that is charming its way onto the desktops of millions of users around the world

websites or blogs and every hour, synched with the clock chime, it features film specials of robotic-looking female dancers demonstrating Uniqlo's seasonal clothing. It's fun, precise, and weirdly hypnotic. Plus, it has an alarm function and maps out all the users around the world.

This ground-breaking, even unique, initiative has led to over 68 million views (of both widgets and the website) from 209 countries, and over 50,000 unique views on YouTube (as a teaser, 16 audition videos were uploaded onto the site).

The fun thing is that if you Googled 'Uniqlock' at the start of the process, it came up with zero, just "Your search did not match any documents. Did you mean 'unlock' or 'unblock'?" Now it comes up with 'Hypebeast. Online magazine for fashion' and a dizzy total of 619,000 webpages.

When asked about why he thinks the site has been so successful, Tanaka is stubbornly modest. "My interpretation is not important. The interpretation is for users," he says. "The expansion of online advertising has the power to invite them to interpret Oniqlock themselves. I think it is important that various people can enjoy the interpretation whichever way they want to."

z He also refuses to throw much light on what the Uniqlock initiative | precisely is. "It is up to you and users. The imagination is endless. The only d cue is 'Uniqlock', the only tag," he says.



"It is important that people enjoy the interpretation whichever way they want to. The imagination is endless. The only cue is 'Uniqlock' "

But Tanaka particularly admires the online work for HBO Voyeur, which he claims "has redesigned the Hitchcock narrative".

"Digital technology has a big potential as a means to redesign the narrative world," he says, almost mystically.

Perhaps it is appropriate that, on their website, Projector simply call themselves "a unit between logic & magic".