

Unique branding strategy drives new growth

Text: Araki Yoshikazu / Photos: Kawashima Nagisa

When Inori Takeichi realized that her family trucking company risked going out of business unless it had a dramatic shift in focus, she did more than simply switch the type of goods it hauled.

She introduced a new attitude, faced up to the critics who doubted if a woman could do the job, and drove the business to renewed success.

This family business based in Ama County near Nagoya City in Aichi Prefecture now transports a diverse range of products including furniture, automobile parts and steel. But it's the care it takes in handling them that makes the business different.

Takeichi joined the company founded by her father straight from college in 1984 when business was booming. Its core contract was long distance deliveries for a furniture manufacturer. But the domestic furniture industry declined dramatically in the late 90s, and when that one big customer went bankrupt, Inazawa Unyu was at risk of failure too.

Strength in crisis

Takeichi senior, then president, knew they needed to diversify to win new customers. He replaced his heavy-duty vehicles with nippier 4-ton trucks to meet the needs of potential new clients, changing from a specialized long-distance operator to a short- to mid-distance regional player.

This shift in focus that built on the strong foundation laid by Takeichi senior and the innovative approach of his daughter ultimately saved the company.

Takeichi examined the company's strengths and realized that years of furniture delivery had given Inazawa Unyu and its staff a unique set of skills. "The handling of furniture is difficult. Even small damages can become a big claim, and on-time delivery is also very important," she explains. "As I was talking to potential clients from different industries, I realized the things we took for

granted as a furniture transport company - safety, peace of mind and reliability - were highly valued in other industries too." That eye-opening moment led her to completely rebuild the company's brand and positioning.

Woman at the helm

When Takeichi took over the presidency in 2006 she stepped into a male-dominated industry. Women presidents were extremely rare and many people were quick to voice their opinions about her appointment.

Taken aback and hurt by these entrenched views, she decided to use the attention she was attracting to the advantage of her company - and that of the transport industry in general. "I thought if I attract that much attention, I might as well promote the fact that a female entrepreneur is playing an active role in this industry," this dynamic leader recalls.

The power of a word

Drawing on her feminine perspective, and firm in her belief that women had something extra to offer, Takeichi set out to promote the company's strengths. She felt that safety, peace of mind and reliability should be the expected industry minimum, not a selling point in themselves. She added "sincerity" and "consideration", which are both traits that reflect her own core values. When all these values came together,

the only word that conveyed her message was "Love". She placed love at the core of the brand's identity, and the slogan "Driving with love" was born.

"The power of a word is tremendous," she stresses. "By clearly expressing the corporate culture and the strength of the company in our own words, we can make our values understood by our customers and generate real trust and confidence."

"Driving with love", was a concept her all-male driving crew was initially reluctant and embarrassed to embrace. "At first I felt a little uncomfortable with the theme of 'Love'," admits driver Yusuke Nakano.

To ease their discomfort, Takeichi explained that the word "love" expressed the confidence and pride of these professional drivers. "I agree with the concept now," Nakano says. "I'm very thankful for this open culture of communication, it has been a great support in my own growth."

This open, no-nonsense approach to communication is Takeichi's hallmark, rather than too much structured formality. "Whenever I feel something is wrong with a driver, I take the initiative to talk to him. Then many things such as requests, worries and problems at work come out. The capacity to respond with care is the very essence of 'love' and I think it is important for an entrepreneur to show that in both work and deed," she says passionately.

Passion is what this determined leader has brought to Inazawa Unyu and the industry in general. The initial backlash she endured as a woman president has been turned into a selling point, with the brand now built around her belief that women have a place in the logistics industry. She works with the youth of the local trucks association and has created an all-women group within it, as part of her mission to revitalize the industry from the inside out.

With Inazawa Unyu back on safer footing, Takeichi has also set up a logistics consulting business.

Drawing on her company's skills and expertise, it helps other companies to rationalize their logistics costs and scheduling. Another dream is to set up a third company in the logistics industry, again drawing on the experience and lessons learned in the family firm. This one will get the industry talking again too - it will be entirely run by women!

Gaining fuel efficiency with UD trucks

Mitsuo Takehara | Operation Manager

"Condor trucks account for 80% of the Inazawa Unyu fleet, and the company is experiencing good fuel efficiency after some eco-driving training.

However, I believe we can achieve even better fuel consumption in the way we accelerate and shift gears. Each driver's habits have an influence on fuel consumption, so I'd like to aim for better fuel efficiency by riding as a passenger and giving thorough driving instructions."



A decade of driving UD's

Yusuke Nakano | Driver

"I have been driving Condor for the last 10 years. It gives me a sense of safety when I drive because the cabin is wide and visibility is great. I mainly drive mid-distance to the Hokuriku region. The steering is so smooth that I feel less tired than I did with older models, and that's an important factor for safe driving."



Revitalizing the industry from the inside out

Takeichi has shaken up Japan's logistics industry with her efforts to promote the presence of women and the softer skills that they can offer. Their concern for others and the capacity to respond with care are traits that are becoming more visible since she established a women's group in the General Corporate Aichi Truck Association in 2010 and became its chairperson. Her role involves working with other women entrepreneurs to grow their ability to contribute as well as enhance the status of women in this industry.



Women in the cab

To address a national lack of experienced drivers, Takeichi believes the first priority is to revitalize the image of the transport industry to create an environment that will attract talented people. That includes women too, so she is keen to show that the female touch is not out of place in the trucking game. It can be a tough environment, she concedes, but women are ideal for jobs where meticulous care is important, such as delivering food products, ready-made meals and other daily necessities to homes.

Inazawa Unyu Co., Ltd.
Established: February 1971
Business: General transportation, freight