

Success Stories: Ideas for Potential Players

Wholesale / Retail



Sales / Services

Ornafish Japan Co., Ltd.

Unique business built on close cooperation with the local community



The Dutch headquarters of Aquadistri BV, a wholesaler of aquarium plants, koi, and related products of the Aquatic Wholesale Group.

Some people enjoy the sport of catching fish, many more like to eat them, while a few prefer to keep fish as pets in aquariums and ponds. Ornafish Japan Co., Ltd is in the business of supplying the latter group with Japanese ornamental carp, or koi, as they are called in Japan.

The founder of Ornafish, Robert Jan van den Enden, is also president of the holding company Aquatic Wholesale Group BV (AWG) in the Netherlands, which

oversees Ornafish and a number of other companies specializing in activities concerned with aquarium and pond fish, as well as related products including fish foods and plants. Together, the group companies supply some 2,000 stores throughout Europe. AWG was established in 1986 and has been active in Japan since 1997.

The Birthplace of Ornamental Carp

Ornafish was established in February 2009 in Ojiya, Niigata Prefecture, which is located in Honshu on the Sea of Japan coast. The company has built up relationships with some 40 carp breeders, all government certified, and it organizes regular buying trips to Ojiya for customers coming from Europe.

“Ojiya, Niigata, is the birthplace of ornamental carp,” says Van den Enden. “And though there are now many carp farms elsewhere, Niigata is still the center. It has a long-established brand name and a good bloodline. That is why we set up here.”

Originally, AWG bought carp from Japanese suppliers, but ornamental carp has grown into a highly specialized business involving choosing and separating preferred species and types, health issues, and quarantine

1986 Aquatic Wholesale Group BV is established in the Netherlands.

1997 Starts activities in Japan.

2009 Ornafish Japan Co., Ltd. is set up in Niigata Prefecture.



President Robert Jan van den Enden.



Aquadistri BV delivers koi from Ornafish throughout Europe.

procedures, not to mention the packing and transporting of the fish so that they arrive at their destinations safely and in good health. To be in control of all these steps and to maintain the highest quality, Van den Enden decided to set up his own export business close to the source.

Ornafish has developed and implemented a sophisticated scheme that packs the fish on the farms of origin using special water-filled bags inflated with pure oxygen. Factors like temperature and the amounts of water and oxygen have to be carefully considered and are related to the amount of travel time it will take for the cargo to arrive. The company has also devised a fully automated computer-based labeling and shipping system that facilitates the efficient transfer of the fish to their destinations, namely retailers and AWG's own branches in Europe.

JETRO's Network of Offices

To set up the Japanese operation, Van den Enden first approached the JETRO office in Amsterdam. After several discussions, the Amsterdam office arranged for Van den Enden to meet with officials in JETRO's headquarters in Tokyo. JETRO has local offices throughout Japan and is able to provide assistance to companies whenever and wherever it is needed. In the case of Ornafish too, JETRO coordinated with its Niigata office to help it get established in Ojiya. After the company's launch, JETRO worked with the Niigata prefectural and other local governments, helping Ornafish make use of a range of administrative services.

"The JETRO people were with us the whole time and are still assisting," says Van den Enden. "They also helped us with introductions. Without introductions you get nowhere in Japan."

Currently, Ornafish relies on three full-time employees and some temporary help during busy periods, and it intends to hire additional staff as the business grows. So the company meets the requirements enabling it to take advantage of an office rent subsidy and other financial help provided by the Niigata Prefectural government to encourage new companies to establish themselves in the region.

Van den Enden voiced surprise at the amount of paperwork involved in registering the company, a process more complex and drawn out than in other countries. Nevertheless, once the complicated procedure was finished with, he had faith in the process and was then able to focus on building up his business. "I can trust the market here," says Van den Enden. "The people I do business with here are loyal and trustworthy."

Now that the company has a firm footing in the Ojiya community and the business is thriving, Ornafish is looking at opportunities further afield. It is seeking to export to countries beyond Europe and is currently considering expanding into the United States.

Japanese Operation

Established:	February 2009
Capital:	¥6 million (as of December 2009)
Employees:	3
Business:	Exports Japanese ornamental carp and organizes regular buying trips to Ojiya for customers coming from Europe
Location:	3551-1 Sanbusho, Ojiya, Niigata, Japan 947-0051
URL:	http://www.ornafish.com/
Parent company:	Aquatic Wholesale Group BV (The Netherlands)