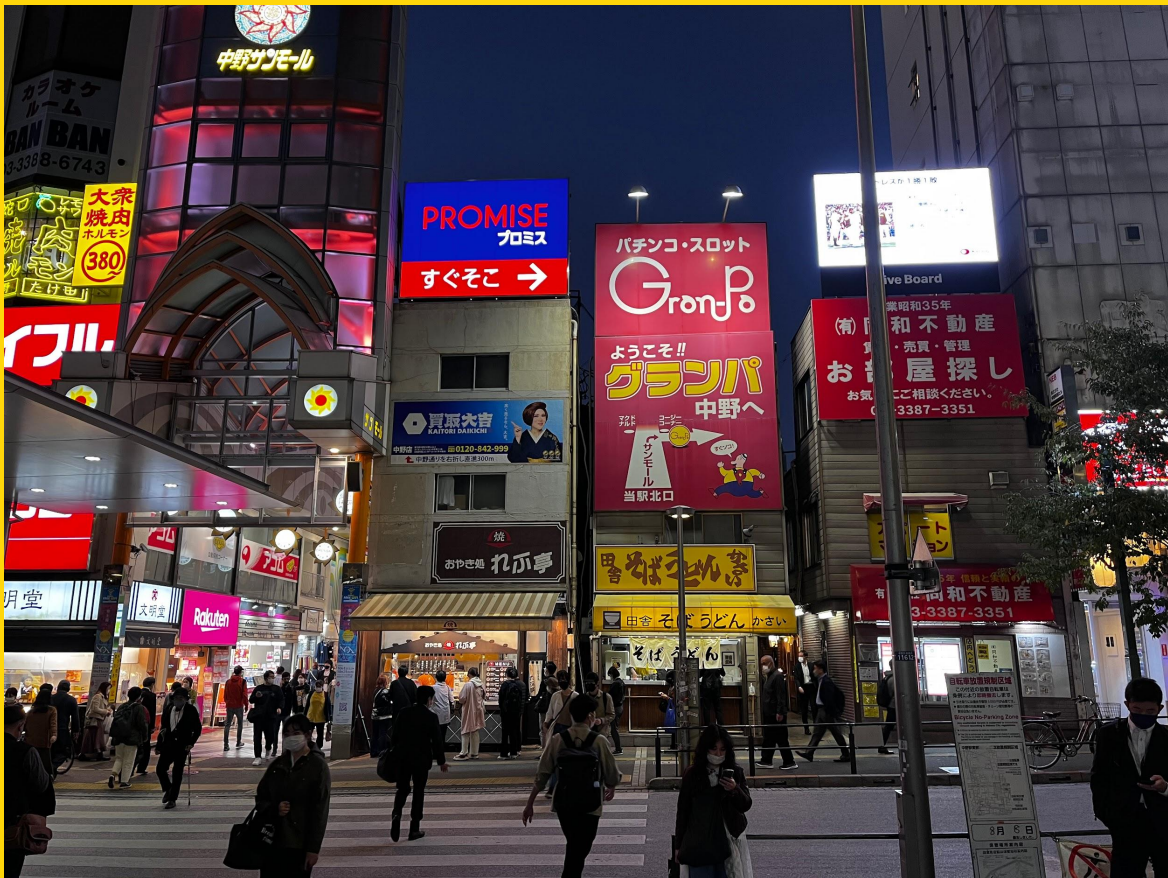


# JAPAN: LAND OF THE RISING SUN, LAND OF THE WORKING AD

The Article was first published in Campaign



Konichiwa. Watching Blade Runner and, being a media soul, I always marvelled at just how many advertising opportunities Ridley Scott imagined might decorate the cityscape of 2019 Los Angeles? Real life 2020's LA disappoints me in this regard.

But, there is a land, far far away, where Scott's ad landscape is made real. That land is Japan and off the back of a recent short trip to Tokyo, I wanted to share some observations and on what I think we can learn from Japan's ad land.

# VIDEO RULES

Everywhere you go, the eye is drawn to LCDs delivering ads which twitch, jiggle, blink and shine out from LCD screens of every possible shape, size and combination. Japan is a very rich country, and has a hugely advanced data and technology infrastructure and my experience would suggest that neither money nor data connectivity are a bar to digitising the out of home advertising landscape. LCDs are literally everywhere. On every wall, on the side of every bus, on every escalator panel, at the top of the stairs, at the bottom of the stairs, in the loo - well OK, not in the loo.

However the average Japanese loo certainly seems to have the technical capabilities to become part of the advertising landscape. Even in a lowly bus station you can rely upon a convenience which has push button controls for flushing, bidet functions front and back, warming the seat and playing music.

It seems to me a terrible oversight that no one has acquired that inventory to use the sound functions for the purposes of delivering a happy advertising jingle. Think of the sponsorship opportunities! There's plenty of scope for our own domestic outdoor estate to be further digitised and connected, so a growing advertiser demand is matched with growth in the inventory available

# NO LCD, NO PROBLEM

Where LCDs cannot physically be attached to a surface, paste and paper and vinyls may instead be suspended or otherwise positioned. Just because you can't hang an LCD from the monkey bars on the tube, doesn't mean you can't hang a vinyl ad there. This led me to think about how effectively, or otherwise, we currently use our own spaces.



# BUILT IN PLAYFULNESS

The Japanese seem a little bit more playful than we Brits. It's not unusual to see the most serious looking of middle aged business execs reading a manga or gaming on the bus, or stalking the figurine shops of Tokyo's Akihabara 'geek' district for the latest merch from their favourite series. Perhaps it's because much written Japanese is literally pictures, but Japanese culture feels innately and intensely visual.

So whilst the environment felt to me to be saturated with ads, it never felt too much. The reason being that the ads are endlessly entertaining, often surrealistic, frequently with very beautiful graphical artwork; in short they are a joy to see.



# STAND OUT

Given the volume of ads, the visual nature of the culture and the demonstrable rich creative talent in the community, it's no surprise that ads in Japan work really hard to 'stand out'. Gaudy and clashing colours; in. Exaggerated expressions; in. Massive overacting; in. Surreal situations; in. And of course QR codes; in. Be it on the smallest coffee shop napkin, or the largest video screen, QR codes are everywhere. Every opportunity is taken to remove the friction between seeing an ad and visiting the website to buy the product, or learn more, or get a piece of branded content or brand relevant useful gadget, widget or app.

# BRAND AND RESPONSE

For Japanese ads also stand out in the clarity of their purpose. There is not much that is coy or hard to decode about the average Japanese ad. Even if you don't speak much Japanese, it's invariably easy to understand what the proposition is, why it's better than the competition and why you therefore need this particular product in your life, and of course how to go about acquiring it; perhaps directly via QR code.

I'm making it sound like every Japanese ad is all about direct response and there's no 'brand' advertising. Of course that's not true. Most international advertisers don't seem to have adapted their international brand campaigns very much for the Japanese market; surely a missed opportunity.

And there's certainly plenty of ads I saw that didn't fit into the 'buy it now' category and which I presume were building brand affinity among those with enough Japanese to brand affiliated. But the overall impression is of an ad landscape where every impact works hard one way or another.

# WHAT CAN WE LEARN?

Our tolerances for ad clutter in the UK are very different to those in Japan; or at least we believe they are. But the biggest thing I took note of is just how much fun Japanese ads are. They seem to decorate and enhance environments and experiences rather than intrude upon them.

As we've always known; people don't like ads, they like to be entertained and sometimes that's by an ad. And when it is, they don't care where it is or how many of them there are. They're fun! And who can have too much fun?

Sayonara!

# COLLABORATIVE

Insight . Ideas . Inspiration

Collaborative is VCCP's insight platform, showcasing the collaborative thinking of its strategists from across the VCCP Partnership which include specialists in media, communications and experience design.

Report author: Steve Taylor, Joint Chief Strategy Officer at VCCP Media

If you have any questions or for more information please contact [collaborative@vccp.com](mailto:collaborative@vccp.com)