

The Prefectural Government Officials Support You! “Product Development and Marketing Support Project!” 2017 Best Practices in Japan’s Advanced Municipalities



Okayama Prefecture

Background

Marketing is essential when developing and selling new products.

Many large companies have well-established marketing departments. However, a private survey showed that 64% of small and mid-sized enterprises recognize they have “poor marketing implementation” because of costs and recruiting issues. Small and mid-sized enterprises have difficulty in nationwide marketing efforts. We believe that the trend is more pronounced in rural areas like Okayama Prefecture.

Given this situation and based on ideas of the officials in charge of business support in the prefecture, we worked on a project to help them in their marketing work.



Tasting focus group

Purpose of Project

Businesses in Okayama Prefecture are permitted to use meeting rooms in the prefectural government building and conduct tasting focus groups on prefectural government staff to encourage marketing activities.

Taking advantage of the resources already

available such as the prefectural office and government officials does not require a budget. Businesses can proceed with projects promptly without the government having to succumb to the typical hurdle of having to first secure a budget. In other words, the project has significant benefits in terms of cost and speed. This method also eliminates some of the costs for businesses, including securing a venue, personnel, and administrative procedures. Through this system, small and mid-sized enterprises can hear the opinions of customers and use that information for product development and improvements.

Outline of Project

This “Product Development Marketing Assistance Project” is intended to collect data that will be useful for the future development and improvement of food and beverage products by conducting surveys in the prefectural government office.

First, a business that wishes to conduct a focus group submits an application form to the prefectural government. If the survey content is approved, the business will discuss with officials at the prefecture and decide the date and survey details, so as to collect opinions on product taste and packaging.

During this discussion, the number of participants (up to 100 people) and their attributes such as gender and age are determined depending on the needs of the business. On the day of the focus group, the tasting and survey are conducted on prefectural government officials who gather at the venue. After the survey, the business analyses the

results to help in the development and improvement of their products.

Since these focus groups are undertaken with employees working in the government offices, they should be held during lunch hours so as to not interfere with government work and allow staff to participate freely. There is no cost to the business, other than materials necessary for providing samples or tasting (small plates, etc.). We established a simple scheme that is as easy as possible for business to use.

Progress and Achievements

The “Product Development Marketing Assistance Project” started in October 2013. As an unprecedented endeavour, it was covered by television, newspapers, and local media.

The total number of prefectural officials who have participated in the surveys over the past four years was 5,722 people as of the end of September 2017. Many prefectural officials cooperated in this project, about 2.5 times more people than the number of staff working in the main government building at any one time.

There were four likely reasons for the success of this project. First, the survey was limited to food and beverages. This was to encourage the participation of the staff. Second, the burden on the business operator was minimised. Third, the burden on the staff was also low because of the effective use of the lunch break, and fourth was the simple structure of the project.

Before the start of the project, there was concern about whether the staff taking part in the survey would actually show up. Through the use of the prefectural government’s online bulletin boards, a staff response level of 93% was achieved, reaching the number of respondents desired by the businesses. We determined that the increase in participation was because of the survey scope being kept to 100 respondents.

The feedback from businesses exceeded all expectations, with many expressing appreciation that the staff of the prefectural government gave their honest opinions on the response sheets.

We believe that this focus group project was a good opportunity for the prefectural staff to learn about the activities and products of local businesses.



Media coverage

Effects of Project

Surveys have been continuously conducted since the Product Development Marketing Assistance Project began. The purpose of the surveys vary, examining taste, packaging, target, and price depending on the participating companies, but the results of each survey have been used for the development and improvement of their products. For example, in a survey of new desserts using the white peaches grown in Okayama Prefecture, there were opinions including, “The amount of white peach is small,” “Lack of fruit,” and “The packaging image doesn’t go with the product.” In response to this, the business increased the amount of white peach pulp and improved the packaging, making it easier to understand before the product was released.

In the case of a bean confectionery using black soy beans from Okayama Prefecture, the business changed their sales strategy to promote it in business meetings across Japan after

receiving the evaluation of “delicious” from 99 out of 100 prefectural staff in the focus group. As a result, the number of business partners more than doubled, and they began trading with high end supermarkets, which have branches nationwide, and sales increased more than tenfold.

Problems and Responses

It is great that the programme provides businesses with concrete results. More importantly, we believe that this project is an opportunity to encourage the prefecture's businesses to actively engage in marketing, which is important for corporate activities. In the future, we will continue to make the project more effective and easy to use while listening to various opinions.

Outlook

The key point of the Product Development Marketing Assistance Project is a slight change in ideas. The tacit assumption that the prefectural government is only good for administrative business can be changed and lead to a different utilisation of its service.

We will continue this project to identify the needs of Okayama businesses, and find and support new businesses effectively, regardless of precedent, assumptions or budget.

Reference URL

<http://www.pref.okayama.jp/page/352680.html>

Contact

Department in charge:

Marketing Office

Industry Planning Division

Department of Industry and Labor

Okayama Prefectural Government

Tel: +81-86-226-7365

E-mail: marketing@pref.okayama.lg.jp