

# Sakaguchi: sensing innovation

Since its foundation in 1923, Sakaguchi has continued to develop industrial heaters and sensors of unrivaled quality.

Early this year, Sakaguchi joined the ranks of some 30,000 other companies in Japan that have survived in business for 100 years. One of the secrets to its longevity, according to President Mayumi Hachiya, is the firm's management philosophy.

"A crucial aspect of our company's success is that our employees understand our core values," she says. "They understand what Sakaguchi stands for, and our company's principles, which contributes to our strength."

The company, which encourages employees to think of themselves as connected to society, specializes in providing specific, tailor-made products to a diverse client base, and in so doing has accumulated a breadth of knowledge which has helped it overcome a number of challenges over the years.

The latest of these comes in the form of Japan's demographic issues, which are making manufacturing and recruitment increasingly problematic.

"During the period of high economic growth from the mid-1950s to early 1970s," Ms. Hachiya explains, "know-how and technology tended to be concentrated within individual personnel."

To address the issue of knowledge transfer, implementing a new system of internal information sharing thus became vital.

Ms. Hachiya again: "The new system enables personnel to teach and learn from each other, fostering a culture of knowledge exchange. A person who has experience in a process can teach someone who is new to it. This process allows personnel to accumulate successful experiences, which has been a key factor in our success."

Meanwhile, the company has also adopted a fresh approach when it comes to recruitment, taking on graduates as well as career-changers from different industries. Retirement ages, too, have been adjusted, with employees able to work until the age of 70 or beyond, a change which may prove instrumental in passing company assets – both tangible and intangible – to younger generations.

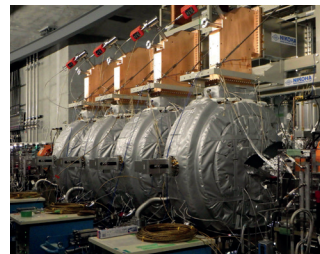


"We continuously cultivate a sense of gratitude for the people around us, and this mindset has stood the test of time."

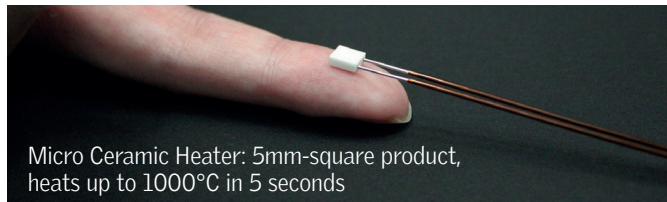
**Mayumi Hachiya,**  
President & CEO, Sakaguchi  
Electric Heaters Co., Ltd.



Minimal Fab: Tools owned by Minimal Fab Promoting Organization



The Heating Jackets for accelerator cavities installed at Nano Terasu. (provided by QST.)



Micro Ceramic Heater: 5mm-square product, heats up to 1000°C in 5 seconds

If facilitating knowledge transfer within the company is vitally important, then so too is maintaining Sakaguchi's network of partner companies.

Ms. Hachiya takes up the thread: "We have a network of over 500 partner companies with whom we collaborate to provide various solutions across different sectors and applications. Each client has unique requirements for heat types and control, and we strive to fulfill those needs. This collaborative approach has been a successful strategy for us, and we are continuing to explore new suppliers with innovative technologies to meet customer demands."

Beyond its industrial partners, the company is also actively engaged in collaborations with academia and the public sector. A flagship project is Sakaguchi's collaboration with the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (AIST), a

public agency, on semiconductor manufacturing technology. Work here includes research on the Minimal Fab project, which involves the construction of a new semiconductor system catering to the demands of high-mix low-volume and variant-variable production. From 2018 to 2021, meanwhile, the company participated in a collaborative development project with AIST and Professor Yoshiaki Kanamori from Tohoku University, a partnership which bore fruit in the form of a new Minimal Laser Hydrogen Annealing tool.

The company, of course, has a long history of collaborating with academic partners, thanks in no small part to its bricks-and-mortar store in Akihabara, which has good access to nearby institutions such as Tokyo University. Tsukuba, an academic and research city, is also connected to Akihabara by train.

"Since the beginning," Ms. Hachiya states, "our capability and tech-

nology have received high praise from academia. Researchers would come to our store whenever they needed heat-related solutions, and through word-of-mouth recommendations, our reputation grew."

There are even stories of Honda's founder, Soichiro Honda, visiting the Akihabara store in a working jumpsuit, on the look-out for whatever he needed to build his latest design.

Given the Akihabara store's role in the dawn of Japanese industrial development, it is perhaps no surprise that Sakaguchi products have been installed in various research facilities over the years, among them SPring-8, in Hyogo Prefecture, where a type of light called 'synchrotron radiation' enables researchers to investigate the structure and function of materials at the atomic and molecular level. A next-generation synchrotron radiation facility – NanoTerasu – has recently been established in Miyagi Prefecture, and the fact that it, too, uses Sakaguchi heaters and control devices is a clear source of pride.

Looking to the future, the company has agents in various countries and is targeting areas with significant growth potential, among them East and Southeast Asia. In terms of trade shows, the focus is on several key overseas markets. According to Ms. Hachiya, these include "Southeast Asian advanced industrial countries, emerging markets, and rapidly growing regions where demand is high."

The strategy is equally clear: "Through meticulous analysis of market needs and competition in each market, we adjust our product development and marketing strategies to meet local requirements, with a strategic approach aimed at expanding market share."

As for her own personal goals and ambitions, Ms. Hachiya takes a more holistic approach. "If, on the last day of my presidency, each and every employee were to say to me: 'Working with Sakaguchi has been a wonderful experience in my life'... nothing would be better than that."

