

sustainable japan

ESG promotional content produced by The Japan Times Cube

Leuret says Japanese increasingly seek fewer but better products

A store is a ballet stage: LVMH Japan head

Name: Norbert Leuret
Title: President and Representative Director of LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton Japan K.K.
URL: <https://www.lvmh.co.jp/>
Hometown: Bergerac, France
Years in Japan: 41

Leaders & Readers

LOUISE GEORGE KITAKA
 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Norbert Leuret's passion for elevating the luxury brand retail experience is palpable. Every aspect of a store is an integral part of the total package, from the window display and products to the music and temperature. "A store is like a ballet stage, a place where people perform, and I tell my salespeople they are like dancers. They should be seen in a beautiful way and move with grace," he said.

Founded in 1987, LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton is a French holding multinational corporation representing 75 leading



Norbert Leuret's motto is "be optimistic and motivate young people. He often gives talks at universities." HARUO MOTOHASHI

luxury brands. Leuret took the helm at the Japanese operation in 2016, and he is constantly impressed by the well-informed Japanese customers who visit the stores. "The relationship between the client and the sales personnel is a lot like a consultation. It is a high-level relationship, characterized by intellect and passion."

In the right place

A native of France, Leuret's first encounter with Japan was attending summer school at Sophia University as a business student. "The trip over took 27 hours, including the stopovers, and I didn't speak a word of Japanese," he recalled. "But there was a kind of instant admiration [for me]. It was 1981, and the beginning of the bubble era. Everyone was full of ideas and optimism wherever you went."

Leuret came of age at a time when France still required mandatory military service from young men, but with an option to work for 18 months for the French foreign service in lieu. Leuret's first choice was to work in Japan upon graduation, but he was more than happy to be offered Australia. His plans, however, changed abruptly just a week before his departure for Sydney.

"The French Industrial Development Agency decided to open an office in Osaka to attract Japanese investments in France. I was lucky enough that the minister in charge had just visited Japan, and then he asked for a young person to go to the Osaka General Consulate," he explained. The role was an ideal fit for Leuret, who spent a total of three years in the consulate's economic section, honing both his business acumen

and his language skills in the process.

Playing it forward

In the ensuing years Leuret married and started a family while building a career in sales and exports in the private sector. Attending a dinner in Tokyo in 1996, he met a fellow French national whom he credits with changing his life. "He asked me if he could call the next day, and he did — at 8:01 a.m. He said, 'I'm a polite guy, I don't call people before 8!' He wanted to know if I was interested in joining the fashion business," Leuret said, smiling at the memory.

The "fashion business" turned out to be the role of president of Kenzo Japan. The revered Japanese designer Kenzo Takada was still designing for the international firm at the time. Kenzo was part of the LVMH group, and Leuret enjoyed having the opportunity to delve into the luxury brand market and work with associates from Kenzo's stablemates at LVMH, including Dior, Louis Vuitton, CELINE and Givenchy.

He subsequently became president of the Japanese publisher Fujingaho after it was taken over by the French company Hachette in 2003, serving concurrently as the first non-Japanese board member of the Japan Magazine Association. A return to retail followed when he joined Zara, expanding the number of Japan stores from five to 148 during his decade leading the apparel brand.

Having benefited from mentoring in his own career, Leuret has played this forward by seeking ideal matches to replace him whenever he has moved on. He is pleased to report they have gone on to make significant contributions of their own. "It's not



HARUO MOTOHASHI

actually about your success. You are successful only if you know the people who come after you are successful," he noted.

When less is more

Since coming back to the LVMH group in 2016, Leuret has observed the enduring support for luxury brands from Japanese customers, along with a heightened awareness of sustainability that manifests in choosing quality over quantity. "I think more Japanese want to buy something

they are going to keep for the rest of their lives, which they can pass to the next generation. Fewer products, but better products," he said.

This is particularly evident among the younger members of the senior cohort, made up of people between 65 and 80. "They were probably in their 30s during the bubble time, and they know what luxury is. They have become epicureans who want to enjoy life, and this translates into a different shopping attitude — less but bet-

Be optimistic, motivate youths

Norbert Leuret's career spans more than four decades, with a focus on fashion and luxury brand management. A native of Bergerac in France, he majored in international business at l'Ecole de Management de Lyon (EM Lyon) and then began his career at the Osaka General Consulate. He subsequently joined the private sector, working for the Royal Dutch Shell Group in France, Belgium and Japan. His first experience in the luxury brand management field came in 1997 with Kenzo Japan, part of the LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton group. Leuret then took the role of president for the publishing firm Hachette Fujingaho from 2003, followed by president and CEO of Zara Japan in 2006. He returned to LVMH in 2016 upon his appointment as president and representative director. Leuret is so passionate about retail that he frequently visits stores even on his days off. His motto is "Be optimistic and motivate young people," and he welcomes the chance to put this into practice as a guest lecturer at universities in the Kanto and Kansai regions.

ter," Leuret explained. At the other end of the market, he sees a growing interest in expressing individuality among young people in Japan. "It's what I call 'dis-uniformized,' breaking the mold in a good sense. It's not about ignoring or dismissing the trends, but fitting them to your own personality and style and preferences."

Leuret hopes to continue to be a bridge between Japan and Europe through retail and fashion. "I love living in big cities, so it's important for me keep contributing to the beauty of these cities. When we do a flagship store at LVMH, we try contribute to the aesthetic of the city, placing importance on the architecture and the facade. It has to be a place where people would like to visit, and it has to be lasting," he said with conviction.

Times Gallery



South African Chamber of Commerce in Japan Chairman Simon Farrell (left), South African Ambassador Lulama Smuts Ngonyama (center) and SACCJ Director Samukelisiwe Mthembu (right) attend a Heritage Day fundraiser on Sept. 24. SACCJ



Greek Alternate Minister of Foreign Affairs Miltiadis Varvitsiotis (left) talks with former Ambassador of Japan to Greece Masuo Nishibayashi (center) and Greek Ambassador Dimitris Caramitsos-Tziras during a reception for the Greek community on Sept. 25. JUNKO NAGATA @GREECEJAPAN.COM



Cuban Prime Minister Manuel Marrero Cruz meets Prime Minister Fumio Kishida during his visit to Japan to attend the state funeral of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. ESTUDIO REVOLUCION



Urška Klakocar Zupancic, speaker of the Slovenian National Assembly, and Hiroyuki Hosoda, speaker of Japan's House of Representatives, meet to enhance parliamentary collaboration. EMBASSY OF SLOVENIA



Poet Mutsuo Takahashi (center), recipient of the inaugural Seamus Heaney Award Japan, stands with (from left) Andrew Fitzsimons, Mitsuko Ohno, Richard Gorman, Christopher Heaney (son of the late Nobel Prize-winning Irish poet Seamus Heaney) and the ambassador-designate of Ireland, Damien Cole. EMBASSY OF IRELAND



The largest Paraguayan festival on the continent was held on Oct. 16 at Hikarigaoka Park in Tokyo's Nerima Ward. Rep. Shinsuke Okuno, president of the Paraguayan Nippon Association, and Paraguay's Ambassador Raul Florentin (both at center rear, in suits) stand here with participating artists. EMBASSY OF PARAGUAY



Mexican Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard meets with Tokyo Gov. Yuriko Koike. They discussed issues of common interest, such as equality and equity. EMBASSY OF MEXICO



Hungary's innovation minister, Janos Csak (right), and Ambassador Norbert Palanovics visit the Avatar Robot Cafe Dawn in Tokyo to discuss cooperation possibilities with CEO Yoshifumi Ory. EMBASSY OF HUNGARY

NEC uses technology to contribute to sustainability

Mission: Sustainability

OSAMU INOUE
 RENEWS

NEC Corp. is in the process of transforming itself from an information and communications technology company into a "company that contributes to achieving sustainability using information and communication technology."

Many companies have adopted a "realize a sustainable society" slogan or sustainability-oriented business model, but the degrees of their commitments vary. There is a factual basis for calling NEC a "leader that drives the world's sustainability with technology."

NEC is a component company of many of the world's key ESG stock indexes. One of them is the Dow Jones Sustainability Indices World Index, which in 2021 selected 35 companies from Japan. NEC was one of them, and was selected for the second straight year.

Japan's Government Pension Investment Fund, one of the world's biggest pension funds, uses eight ESG indexes in its investment strategy. Of these, five target Japanese stocks. NEC is included in all five.

In the area of carbon neutrality, NEC pledged in fiscal 2021 to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide from not just the company but also its entire supply chains — known as Scope 3 — to net-zero by 2050. The essence of NEC's transformation, however, is not clearly revealed by these evaluations.

Biometric authentication

"NEC is currently in the middle of the 'third founding period.' All of our operations exist for CSV [creating shared value]," NEC Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Osamu Fujikawa said. He also serves as officer in charge of sustainable management. For NEC, working to improve efficiency and convenience by integrating computers and communications was what characterized its second founding phase. Working to achieve sustainability and resolve issues for society using technology is what characterizes its third founding period.

NEC provided biometric authentication technology combining face, iris and fingerprint recognition for a program introduced in 2009 by the Indian government to identify its people. "At the time, a key problem

for the government was that its attempt at distributing money to poor people was undermined by malicious intermediaries who purportedly applied for the service on their behalf just to exploit them, resulting in the money not reaching the intended targets. The problem was resolved using our biometric authentication technology," Fujikawa said.

Biometric authentication technology is often seen as a way to improve efficiency. Less well known is that it also can save infants and people in trouble.

In a 2019 test project that NEC conducted in Kenya, it successfully reduced the error rate of fingerprint authentication for infants on the day of their birth, including babies just 2 hours old, to 0.3%.

In the same year, NEC signed a memorandum of understanding on the use of biometrics to improve immunization coverage in developing countries with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and another entity.

NEC has now also begun to apply AI technology to entirely different areas in order to contribute to achieving the sustainability of humanity.

AI drug development

NEC is currently working with a French biotechnology company on a project to develop a therapy using individualized neoantigen vaccines — vaccines with tumor-specific antigens. It uses AI analysis to optimize the administration of a vaccine that is optimized for the genetic makeup of each patient and triggers the patient's immune response to fight cancer. It also has expanded the scope of the AI technology's application to the development of a novel coronavirus vaccine. "I think AI technology has the potential to contribute to very broad areas of efforts to realize sustainability," Fujikawa said.

In addition, in October 2021, the Green x Digital Consortium was launched. The consortium aims, first, to develop a platform that enhances CO2 visibility across supply chains and, second, to establish new methods of purchasing renewable energy. NEC leads a working group on the first aim, working with a total of 74 companies (as of April).

NEC is not trying to contribute to sustainability or resolving social issues at the cost of its growth or profits. On the contrary, the



At the conclusion of the agreement with the Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance NEC

company is convinced that the nonfinancial value of operations that contribute significantly to society will also drive its enterprise value and growth. "In my view, financial and nonfinancial affairs are ultimately two sides of the same coin that leads to improving enterprise value. My responsibilities as CFO naturally include the nonfinancial domain, not just the existing responsibility for financial affairs," Fujikawa said.

Respecting human rights

In 2019, NEC established the "NEC Group AI and Human Rights Principles," which place top priority on respecting human rights in business activities. "Strict regulations are being introduced in Europe and the United States, and we are leading such activities by getting deeply involved in them and expressing our views," said Yuria Hiroi, director of sustainability promotion.

There are concerns that facial-recognition and AI technologies could be used for purposes that undermine human rights, but NEC has chosen to place top priority on respecting human rights. "Cutting-edge technologies, including AI, could lead to big problems if you use them in the wrong way. In particular, we are a leader in facial recognition and image recognition, which means we must also be a leader in the protection of human rights and privacy," Fujikawa said.

Scan the QR code to read the full article about NEC's commitments to sustainability and improving conditions through biometric authentication.

