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Sebastien Cardet helps clients make ideas real with ‘virtual twins’

Dassault Systemes drives broad business innovations

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Leaders & Readers

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Headquartered in France, Dassault Systemes is a multinational technology company that helps its clients transform ideas into reality through “virtual twins” — digital models and simulations that enable testing before real-world implementation. Transformation is also a recurring theme for Sebastien Cardet, the vice president of consulting and services in Japan. Reflecting on nearly two decades in Japan, he shared insights into the changes he has witnessed in Japanese business culture, as well as how his experiences in Japan have shaped his own path.

Looking beyond technology

Dassault Systemes works with leading Japanese companies across industries ranging from automotive and aerospace to consumer goods, infrastructure and cities, energy and life sciences. The firm creates virtual representations of products, factories and even entire value chains, ensuring clients’ designs and processes can be tested and optimized before anything is built.

Because virtual twins must be tailored specifically to each customer’s business,

consulting is a crucial part of Cardet’s work, allowing companies to innovate in more sustainable and efficient ways. “We help customers improve their innovation processes by combining engineering excellence, data and artificial intelligence so they can remain competitive in their markets,” he said.

Cardet joined Dassault Systemes in 2001 as an engineer in the R&D department. While the technology available at the time was vastly different from what his team has at its disposal today, lessons learned in those early years laid the foundation for his career. He quickly realized that technology alone was not enough to help customers succeed.

“I didn’t want to be simply a technical expert who knew how to create virtual twins perfectly,” he explained. “I wanted to understand how our customers work, what their challenges are and how I can help them get the most out of our technology.”

Cardet’s career progressed steadily, but as he approached his 30s, he began wondering what fresh challenges lay beyond Europe. While he initially hoped for a transfer to the United States, in 2008 an opportunity arose to move to Japan.

His subsequent 18 years in Japan have been fruitful ones, and he has seen the company’s operations grow from around 80 employees to almost 1,000. He has also built a family with his Japanese wife, and the couple will welcome their second child later this year.

A long-term commitment

Japan holds a significant place in the Dassault Systemes story. Just a year after the

company was founded in France in 1981, Soichiro Honda, the eponymous founder of Honda Motor Co., reached out to the company. This led to Japan becoming Dassault Systemes’ second market — one that remains important today.

Cardet’s relocation coincided with the company’s expansion in Asia, and he was entrusted with leading the Asia-Pacific region from Tokyo. “I liked the idea of being quite far from my comfort zone — and I wasn’t disappointed!” he quipped.

Although he didn’t fully understand the tenets of Japanese business culture at first, he soon came to realize that many aspects aligned closely with his own core beliefs. “There is a very deep focus on creating high-quality products and services, and I don’t think you can find that anywhere else in the world.”

Along with Japan’s technological excellence, Cardet was impressed by the long-term commitment to relationships and the resulting trust between business partners. These aspects are a large part of why he has chosen to remain in Japan. “Of course, I’m French and I still love France,” he said. “But when I think about what I value most in life and in my professional career — respect, discipline and quality — I find those qualities in Japan.”

He believes that many international companies have struggled in Japan because they expected to quickly become profitable without investing time in building relationships. In his experience, trust is earned through reliability, consistency and genuine engagement. Companies that adopt this long-term mindset are usually more successful in Japan than those



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focused on short-term gains.

Transforming the future

Dassault Systemes’ consulting team in Japan began with just four people in 2008 but has now grown to more than 350 professionals. Looking back over his time in Japan, Cardet is struck by how much the business culture has changed. While Japanese firms had been expanding overseas for decades, he noticed a shift from around 2010 as many leading companies began to recognize that international success required a different mindset.

“They still need, of course, to leverage their

strengths,” he said. “However, they also need to embrace diversity, accelerate the decision-making process and adopt the local culture.” To this end, globalization is not just a matter of business intelligence, it’s a matter of cultural intelligence, too.

As part of this approach, Cardet says, diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is a “business imperative.” Today’s products and technologies are increasingly complex and ultimately used by people with a wide range of needs, so companies must bring together diverse perspectives to design and develop them effectively.

Multiple roles fostering trade

After graduating from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d’Ingenieurs de Mécanique et d’Energetique in Valenciennes with a master’s degree in 2001, Sebastien Cardet joined Dassault Systemes in an R&D role.

A posting to Japan in 2008 to develop the professional services business in the Asia-Pacific region eventually led to a permanent relocation. He assumed his current position as vice president of consulting and services in Japan in May.

Beyond his responsibilities at Dassault Systemes, Cardet plays an active role in strengthening ties between France and Japan. In 2025 he was appointed as a French foreign trade adviser, advising French and Japanese companies, mentoring young professionals and promoting long-term industrial cooperation between the two countries. He is also a member of the French Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Japan.

He points out that internal metrics consistently show that proposals developed by teams with a broad range of backgrounds are more successful than those created by groups with similar outlooks. “What we need is diversity of opinion to build a kind of 360-degree proposal that makes sense for all the people we are going to serve.”

While many companies assume successful transformation requires adding new organizational layers or processes, Cardet believes the opposite is true: Meaningful change comes from simplifying organizations and removing unnecessary layers, allowing people to focus on the activities that truly create the most value.

In line with this, Cardet finds inspiration in the words of French writer and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944). “In his book ‘Terre des hommes,’ de Saint-Exupéry wrote that ‘Perfection is achieved not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away,’” he said.

Times Gallery



Ermal Muca presents letters of credence to His Majesty, Sultan Ibrahim, King of Malaysia, accrediting him as ambassador of the Republic of Albania to Malaysia nonresident. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA

Dominican Ambassador Edward A. Perez Reyes throws the ceremonial first pitch during Dominican Republic Day, celebrating friendship between the Dominican Republic and Japan

HOKKAIDO NIPPON HAM FIGHTERS



Indonesian Ambassador Nurmala Kartini Sjahrir welcomes the honorary consuls from Nagoya, Sapporo and Fukuoka at the ambassador’s residence to strengthen bilateral ties with Japan. EMBASSY OF THE REPUBLIC OF INDONESIA



The celebration Turkish Breakfast Day shared the rich flavors, warm hospitality and culinary heritage of Türkiye. TURKISH EMBASSY



Sword expert Paul Martin is honored with the OSS Ambassador’s Award by Her Imperial Highness Princess Takamado for his contributions to Japanese sword culture and U.K.-Japan relations. MALVERN COLLEGE TOKYO



The Tokyo Diplomats pose with the Waseda Old Boys after a friendly touch-rugby match. EMBASSY OF ROMANIA



Irish Ambassador Damien Cole (left) and EU Ambassador Jean-Eric Paquet mark the launch of Ireland’s presidency of the EU Council with State Minister for Foreign Affairs Ayano Kunimitsu. EMBASSY OF IRELAND



The 29 singers of the Winnipeg Youth Chorus captivate listeners at the Embassy of Canada to Japan. EMBASSY OF CANADA

Unicharm turns used diapers into resources instead of waste

Sustainable Japan Award: ESG Excellence Award

EMI MAEDA
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Unicharm, winner of the Excellence Award in the ESG category at the Sustainable Japan Award 2025, has become the first company in the world to commercialize closed-loop recycling for disposable diapers, working with municipalities and businesses to collect used diapers and turn them into new ones.

Founded in 1961, Unicharm is one of Japan’s leading manufacturers of disposable hygiene products, including diapers, sanitary napkins and pet care products. Overseas sales now account for about 65% of its annual revenue of roughly ¥1 trillion (\$6 billion). “As a company that manufactures disposable hygiene products, achieving the (U.N.’s) sustainable development goals is one of the central priorities of our business,” said Senior Executive Officer Tsutomu Kido.

The project is driven in part by Japan’s aging population. While demand for baby diapers is declining, the use of adult diapers continues to rise, increasing waste volumes and carbon dioxide emissions from their incineration. In response, the Ministry of the Environment has set a goal for 150 of Japan’s roughly 1,700 municipalities to introduce or consider diaper recycling programs by fiscal 2030. According to Kido, municipalities nationwide are already consulting the company about adopting the system.

Unicharm’s recycling initiative, known as Reff (Recycle for the Future), was named by President and CEO Takahisa Takahara in 2019, reflecting its importance as a long-term corporate strategy.



Noritomo Kameda (left) and Takayoshi Konishi played key roles throughout the 12-year Reff project. UNICHARM

Disposable diapers consist of three main materials: wood pulp, petroleum-based superabsorbent polymer and plastic materials such as nonwoven fabric and film. Unicharm has developed technologies to recover and recycle these materials for use in new products.

“A common question is whether materials recovered from used diapers can be recycled hygienically,” Kido said. The company has spent years verifying the safety and hygiene of its recycling process through extensive testing and third-party evaluations. Research conducted by Kitasato University confirmed that the recycled materials meet both safety and hygiene standards.

The recycling demonstration project is being carried out in the Kagoshima Prefecture city of Shibushi and town of Osaki. In both municipalities, used baby and adult diapers are collected separately from households in dedicated collection boxes before being transported to a recycling facility. There, the materials are separated, washed, deodorized, sterilized, bleached and transformed into new products.

The first material to be successfully commercialized was recycled pulp. In 2022, Unicharm launched adult diapers made with recycled pulp, which are now used in nursing care facilities across Kyushu. As processing technology advanced, production expanded to baby diapers and pet pads, which have been sold at Aeon stores throughout the Kyushu region since 2024, and sales have been expanding primarily in the Kanto region since May 2026. Products containing recycled materials carry the Reff logo, making the company’s resource-circulation efforts visible to consumers.

The recycled pulp is also used as toilet paper bearing the Reff logo for Shibushi and Osaki’s public facilities in collaboration with Poppy Paper. In another unusual collaboration between competitors working toward a shared environmental goal, plastic recovered by Unicharm is used by Oji Nepia as fuel for making toilet paper that also bears the Reff logo.

Recovered plastic is also reused in collection boxes and transportation pallets, while new applications continue to be developed for recycled superabsorbent polymer. Although the material has not yet achieved the absorbency required for diapers, it has been successfully commercialized as cat lit-



Senior Executive Officer Tsutomu Kido
UNICHARM

ter since March 2025.

According to the revised Guidelines for Recycling Used Disposable Diapers issued by the Ministry of the Environment in April, recycling 1 metric ton of used diapers instead of incinerating them can reduce carbon dioxide emissions by an estimated 0.4 to 0.5 tons, so the initiative helps lower greenhouse gas emissions as well as reducing waste and making more efficient use of natural resources.

The recycling initiative is also helping address broader social challenges. One example is its collaboration with Tebura Toen (Hands-Free Nursery), a diaper subscription service for childcare facilities. At participating nurseries in Shibushi, used diapers are collected, recycled and returned as new diapers for use within the community. The system not only reduces the burden on parents, who no longer need to take used diapers home, it also demonstrates a closed-loop model in which resources circulate locally.

Another product to emerge from the project is Recycle×Clay, an educational paper clay made from recycled pulp. It is now being introduced in schools across Japan, giving children hands-on experience with resource circulation.

Kido said the project would not have been possible without the cooperation of local residents. “In addition to reducing waste and carbon dioxide emissions, the initiative has helped address a range of social challenges, including supporting childcare and creating jobs through recycling facilities,” he said. “By continuing to work with a wide range of partners, we hope to further expand the ecosystem.”