ESG promotional content
produced by The Japan Times Cube

sustainable japan

CEO Paul Jones says SoftBank-backed entity helps enterprises, disabled

ThinkAR creates glasses with 'assistive' intelligence

Name: Paul Jones
Title: CEO, ThinkAR
URL: https://www.thinkar.com/en
Hometown: Melbourne, Australia
Years in Japan: 25

Leaders & Readers

MIKA OSAKI
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

ThinkAR creates AI wearables, including AiLENS specialized smart glasses designed for specific enterprise solutions and people with disabilities. While its camera-equipped glasses are aimed at enterprise customers, the camera-free AiLENS V1 is already available to consumers in Japan.

Paul Jones became the CEO of the SoftBank-invested entity in 2025. The glasses are "basically a smartphone," he said. "We were tasked with taking that ... and trying to put it into a new form factor. We had to convert 150 grams into 50 grams, which is a fairly challenging task."



For Jones, AI should stand for 'assistive intelligence,' with technology developed to genuinely help people. COSUFI

For example, ThinkAR created smart glasses for the deaf that were used in the Deaf Olympics. While the athletes are deaf, many people involved in the games are not. The glasses display audio as text in real time, greatly lowering the barriers to communication. Jones recalled how happy and excited participants were to have this kind of experience for the first time and reflected on the importance of easy communication for creating human connections.

They have also created "hearables," smart devices for the visually impaired that look like wireless headphones. But even people with perfect eyesight can benefit from them. Jones gave the example of getting directions from Google Maps, saying only about 18% of people actually look at the map and everyone else just listens to the directions. "We realized we don't always need the display," he said.

Glasses that assist

In the commercial sphere, ThinkAR's glasses can be useful in areas including security, manufacturing, sanitation, healthcare and navigation. Jones mentioned the example of the automotive manufacturing industry, where the use of smart glasses could free the hands of workers. Rather than having to pause to use tablets and smartphones for data entry and similar tasks, "we can move the same basic functionality into the glasses," Jones said.

Another example Jones gave for the problems addressed by AiLENS was as an aid for the medical industry. Healthcare workers would be able to remotely check patients' vital signs by connecting monitors to the glasses. It would even be possible to remotely administer medications, which in emergencies could save lives.

As development of the glasses continued, inevitably a camera was added to the front of some of them. Cameras on AI glasses available to the general public have been highly controversial, as their uses are very hard to control. "I have a 13-year-old daughter, and it is this generation that are going to inherit what we do today — it is important we get these devices right," Jones said.

"We felt the camera was still seen as intrusive by consumers and decided to pursue the pathway, where it can be used far more effectively," Jones said. He acknowledged the usefulness of cameras, especially within manufacturing, where proper usage of equipment is essential and having a camera can protect workers in case of an accident or security issues. They are also able to tweak the functions of the cameras, such as only allowing them to scan QR codes. "It's my job to make sure the technology stays within the guardrails," Jones said.

Keeping tech responsible

Because privacy and the risk of data breaches are always among ThinkAR's primary concerns, the company gives users the choice to opt in or opt out of data storage, allowing them greater control over their personal information.



COSUFI

One of the top concerns the general public has around AI is its environmental impacts. As much as possible, Jones repurposes materials that would otherwise go to waste or are already on hand within the SoftBank ecosystem. "Because SoftBank has so many entities, we're encouraged to stay within our ecosystem. We're not really creating new waste. ... We're encouraged to go to our other partners that share some overlap and ask, 'OK, what can you give me?'" he said. Keeping the sourcing for materials internal cuts out a lot of waste.

"We do everything we can to close the loop," he said. ThinkAR asks users to send glasses back instead of throwing them out when there is a problem. It repairs them if possible, and otherwise repurposes raw materials so they don't go directly into a landfill. "There's a responsibility we have to take those items back and close the loop," Jones said.

Finance, tech leader, golfer, sake brewer

Originally from Australia, Jones has lived on and off in Japan for the past 30-plus years. The first time he lived in Japan, he came as a professional golfer from 1992 to 1996. After returning to Australia to finish his education, he returned to Japan in 2002.

Since returning, he has spent his career in leadership and founding roles across the financial and tech sectors, and began a professional partnership with SoftBank in 2020, creating the smart temperature scanners that were used to help manage the COVID pandemic.

In 2025, he became the CEO of ThinkAR, bringing his business expertise to the growing world of AI wearables and compute. Aside from his work at ThinkAR, he has a key interest in a sake brewery, golfs reguarly and enjoys spending time with his wife and daughter.

AI with a purpose

Looking toward the future, Jones feels a moral obligation to not only use both software and hardware responsibly, but to make sure ThinkAR is helping people. "As long as the technology is helping people, then I think it's a good thing," he said. "To me AI is not 'artificial,' it's 'assistive' intelligence, so unless we can create something that's helping people, we won't go to market."

By providing enterprise solutions for a wide range of industries and allowing people to work more hands-free, smart glasses in the workplace can reduce accidents, increase accuracy and create a more intuitive workflow. There will always be concerns around privacy and environmental impacts, but addressing them openly and honestly will set the stage to address these issues and innovate future solutions.

Event explores pairing sake with cheese, global dishes

Media partner

KEIKO ADACHI
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Japanese sake, whose traditional brewing methods have been registered in UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list, is now expanding beyond its classic settings to be enjoyed with a variety of dishes across the globe. Some of these possibilities were witnessed by attendees at Discover Japanese Sake 2026, subtitled "an experience of Japanese sake and global cuisine," at Tokyo's Akasaka Prince Classic House on Oct. 26.

Sponsored by the Japan Sake and Shochu Makers Association (JSS), the event brought together 17 sake brands from around Japan for attendees to enjoy with cheeses and dishes from different countries. Representatives from the embassies and business communities of 16 countries in Europe, Asia and Latin America gathered to experience the tastes of different sake brands and how well they pair with food.

The event kicked off with a lecture on sake basics by Wayne Shennen, the first New Zealander to be certified as an Advanced Sake Professional by the Sake Education Council. Attendees learned that sake is classified into categories such as *daiginjō*, *ginjō* and *junmai* according to criteria including how much the rice is polished, brewing methods and whether brewer's alcohol is added. These classifications do not indicate differences in quality. Shennen also explained how adding a small amount of distilled alcohol in the production process, resulting in *honjōzō* premium sake, allows the brewer to control the taste and flavor.



Wayne Shennen COSUFI

He also introduced scientific findings about sake. For example, sake goes well with a wide variety of dishes thanks to its rich umami, a product of fermenting rice with *kōji* mold. In another finding, he said, sake enhances the delicate taste of fish dishes because it contains no iron, unlike wine.

A tasting session followed Shennen's lecture. This part of the event started with the traditional *kagami biraki* ceremony, in which the lid of a sake barrel is broken open with a wooden mallet. The lid is likened to a mirror (*kagami*), and opening it is believed to open a way to good fortune. Ambassadors from Ecuador, New Zealand, Haiti, Albania and Mexico, clad in *happi* festival jackets, broke the lid with the shout "One, two, three, *yoisho*!" to loud cheers and applause.

Then JSS Managing Director Akira Koga led a toast. "Autumn is the time when sake with an increased umami flavor is shipped, and it's a time of year when we Japanese often say to each other, 'it's now the season when sake tastes great.' Please enjoy delicious sake to your heart's content today," he said, raising his glass and shouting "*Kanpai*!"

The drink used in the toast was Masumi Sparkling Origarami. In addition, 16 other sake brands were placed on the table: three of them fruity, four light and smooth, four full-bodied, four matured and one brand of *nigori* sake, which retains fine particles of rice and kōji, giving it a cloudy appearance. Attendees were asked to try them with six different cheeses and vote for the combinations they liked.

The cheeses were the hard mimolette, semi-hard Gouda, washed-rind Pont-l'Eveque and bloomy-rind Camembertand, the goat cheese Sainte-Maure and the blue cheese Fourme d'Ambert.

"I usually prefer sparkling sake because it's a bit like champagne and I think it's easy for us to drink," an attendee from New Zealand said. "But today, I tried nigori for the first time and realized how good it is. It has a rich flavor, and I think it goes well with goat cheese with a light taste."

Also on the table were a variety of dishes, including curry, roast beef, roasted pork, garlic shrimp and sauteed sea bream. The organizers' intentionally excluded Japanese food and instead offered dishes that are favored overseas so attendees could explore how well sake pairs with them, according to a JSS spokesperson.



Mexican Ambassador Melba Pria gives a few remarks. COSUFI

"Sake goes well with anything. It's an all-rounder. When you drink it with food, it makes your food so good," a participant from Panama said. "I also didn't know there are so many kinds of sake. I now feel like trying different kinds while I am in Japan."

According to a staffer who was pouring sake at tables, the most popular sake was Kenbishi Zuisho 5-Year Aged, a blend of sakes that have been aged for at least five years. Slightly yellow, it has a smooth mouthfeel and lingering umami, according to its maker.

The voting results revealed many attendees preferred combinations of Fourme d'Ambert cheese with light and smooth or matured sakes, while others preferred Camembert with fruity sakes.

The event, which lasted about 2½ hours, concluded with remarks by Mexican Ambassador Melba Pria. "Sake is a symbol of Japan's traditions, and talking about sake leads to learning about Japanese history and culture. It also gives us an opportunity to think about the environment where topics like rice and water are concerned," Pria said. "Today we learned a lot from the sake. My wish is that you will go on to play an active role as ambassadors of sake."

The event ended on a high note amid lively conversations among attendees that felt like they could go on forever.

Seino Holdings works with rivals for better, cleaner transportation

Sustainable Japan Network

MAIKO MURAOKA
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In Japan's logistics industry, companies have maintained independent delivery networks, with trucks from multiple companies operating in the same areas. In addition, due to smaller shipments and underused return trips, the "loading efficiency" of freight vehicles has remained at around 40% of what they could carry for the past 15 years or so. This is not only inefficient, but also hinders efforts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in the industry.

Meanwhile, a shortage of truck drivers due to the declining and aging population has become a chronic issue nationwide. The introduction of new regulations in 2024, aimed at improving working hours and conditions for truck drivers, has further exacerbated the problem, resulting in insufficient transportation capacity becoming a critical challenge for society.

Seino Holdings Co. Ltd., a top logistics company, recognizes that this problem cannot be solved by a single company alone, and is therefore promoting the "co-creation" of new initiatives with other companies both within and outside the industry, including its direct competitors.

In the company's "2025 Value Report," President and CEO Yoshitaka Taguchi stated, "An approach in which logistics companies seek to remain competitive solely by staying within their own closed networks is no longer sufficient to meet societal expectations or ensure economic rationality." In order to transform the conventional structure of the industry, Seino believes it is necessary to transcend corporate boundaries, share assets and data, and optimize networks.

This belief is embodied in Seino Holdings' "Team Green Logistics" vision, which emphasizes industrywide collaboration to optimize logistics. The first of the vision's three pillars is "Green." By leveraging digital technology to improve loading efficiency and minimize environmental impacts, the company aims to "clean the air, not carry it."

The second pillar is "One Stop." The company believes that optimizing the entire supply chain involves providing customers with a comprehensive point of contact offering logistics and peripheral services while also giving them the convenience of being able to consult on a wide range of related issues.

The third pillar is "Support." By taking over clients' time-consuming peripheral operations and helping them to focus on their core business, the industry can grow together with its clients.

Two specific strategies have been developed based on these three pillars to evolve logistics from "simply the task of moving goods to a foundation for the creation of value," Seino says. One such strategy is the Open Public Platform, a framework that connects various stakeholders to encourage the shared use of logistics resources. By sharing resources such as vehicles, warehouses and information across the industry, the O.P.P. optimizes the entire logistics network, reducing environmental impacts and improving efficiency simultaneously.

The other strategy is called On Behalf, which signifies a commitment to "solving problems on behalf of clients." This commitment goes beyond simply providing outsourcing services. Rather, it involves taking on various logistics-related burdens that arise on the client side, becoming an indispensable long-term partner and supporting clients' growth based on a relationship of trust.

One initiative that has emerged from these strategies is the collaboration between Kyushu Seino Transportation, a Seino Group company, and JP Logistics. Starting this March, the two companies have shared a single delivery hub at Kyushu Seino's Nobeoka branch in Miyazaki Prefecture. Under this arrangement, Kyushu Seino is responsible for deliveries within the city of Nobeoka, while JP Logistics handles all deliveries to the city of Hyuga. They expect this to reduce monthly mileage by 1,950 kilometers and cut emissions of carbon dioxide by 1,300 kilograms.



Kyushu Seino's Nobeoka branch in Miyazaki Prefecture SEINO

In April, a consolidated subsidiary of Seino Holdings and a consolidated subsidiary of Fukuyama Transporting established a joint venture called TGL Sanin. Tottori and Shimane prefectures, which make up the Sanin region, had the lowest and second-lowest populations of Japan's 47 prefectures as of 2025. These prefectures were among the first to experience an aging population and now face a population decline as well. This has raised concerns about a decline in transportation efficiency and created a growing need for efficient logistics services that transcend corporate boundaries. The two companies aim to optimize and enhance the logistics network in the region by building a collaborative framework that leverages their respective strengths.

Also in April, Seino Holdings signed a basic agreement on a business partnership with Az-Com Maruwa Holdings, a third-party logistics provider specializing in e-commerce logistics, low-temperature food logistics, and pharmaceutical and medical logistics. The two companies have previously collaborated in certain areas on the pickup and delivery of small shipments in certain regions.They intend to expand these efforts further to improve operational and loading efficiency through joint delivery, reduce environmental impacts and develop a resilient logistics infrastructure.

Through these ongoing, concrete initiatives, Seino Holdings intends to evolve from a transporter of goods into a creator of new values that engage the entire industry.

Sustainable Japan Network