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Austria is an incubator for ground-breaking businesses

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Vienna, Austria's capital, was once called home by Mozart, Beethoven, and Strauss, and it has been associated with creativity for centuries. Today, it has also become synonymous with excellence in innovation and is home to many startups. Even beyond Vienna, Austria as a nation has developed a good reputation for innovative businesses.

With strong public funding and an investment-friendly environment for research, Austria has all the right conditions for innovation to flourish. And many of these boundary-pushing Austrian businesses are making their mark here in Japan. In particular, a number of firms in high-tech industries have met with great success in this market.

Man meets machine

Founded in Linz in 1968, **KEBA** specialises in automation solutions. It aims to make interactions between people and machines as simple as possible.

"In Japan, KEBA offers products for the robotics and plastics industries. As one of the market leaders in human-machine interface solutions, KEBA is always bringing new ideas to the market," says Masakazu Murakami, representative director of KEBA Japan. "Innovation is the most important factor for our firm, and it inspired our corporate message, Automation by Innovation. Today, we offer numerous innovative products in several market segments."

As well as leveraging the skills of its employees to drive technological advances, KEBA goes to great lengths to develop and test cutting-edge ideas.

"In order to differentiate ourselves in the market, KEBA invests 15% to 20% of its profits into R&D, which is quite a lot," Murakami says. "We are now offering our clients the first multi-touch operation panels available in Japan."

The company's roots in Austria have also played a role in KEBA developing a philosophy that emphasises innovation.

"KEBA is located at the centre of Europe, where different cultures gather and create an open-minded atmosphere that fosters innovation," Murakami says. "There are many innovative research companies

and institutes in Austria that are world leaders in innovation across a range of fields. As the Austrian economist Joseph Alois Schumpeter said: 'The entrepreneur cannot survive without innovation'."

Close to the customer

Being part of a culture of innovation is important, but so is listening closely to customers to hear how their needs are evolving. This has been crucial to **EV Group's** success.

"EV Group provides semiconductor production equipment and processing solutions. One of the factors that makes us innovative is the strong partnerships that we have with our customers, which allows us to anticipate and create cutting-edge technologies," says Hiroshi Yamamoto, Japan representative director. "Our aim is to make our customers the first product supplier in the market by supporting them from initial development through to final integration."

In a field such as semiconductor production, where advances are constantly being made, EV Group clearly understands the need to keep innovating.

"As chipmaking technologies continue to evolve, being innovative is the only way to stay at the forefront of technology and identify the market needs and new challenges," Yamamoto says. "We continue to drive innovation and efficiency through best practices in wafer processing technologies, and we help our customers to not only turn new product ideas into reality but also improve production efficiency in established manufacturing processes."

The combination of a headquarters in Austria and a base in Japan — a world leader in semiconductor development — is a huge advantage in staying ahead of the competition, according to Yamamoto.

"As has been regularly confirmed by numerous international rankings, Austria is one of Europe's most innovative countries, with 3% of GDP spent on R&D. This means that Austria excels as a place to foster innovation," he says. "Japan is a hub of innovation, with an ecosystem that consistently links diverse semiconductor needs. Japanese technology companies have comprehensive strengths in areas such as global value chains and production networks. Being present in Japan gives us access to them, and that helps us create our own innovative products."

Having a Japanese branch isn't just good for the bottom line — it also helps improve the company's output.

"Being present in Japan gives us access to and feedback from Japanese customers, who have very high standards, which helps us create ever more innovative products," Yamamoto says.

Showing real metal

Plansee, headquartered in Reutte, creates metal products for semiconductors, especially those made of molybdenum and tungsten. Isao Nishida, the managing director of Plansee Japan, sees Japan as a gateway to take new semiconductor technology to the rest of the continent.

"Japan is a supply chain hub for ion implanter metal products in the semiconductor wafer production process," he says. "We mainly distribute to businesses in east and southeast Asia."

The wealth of resources available in Japan helps Plansee to maintain its place at the top of its industry.

"We make use of Japan's great infrastructure, human resources, technology, and more to keep innovating. Continually advancing is a challenge, but Japan offers a lot of opportunities to innovate," Nishida says.

But it's also the fact that the firm is headquartered in Austria, the heart of Europe, that gives it an edge.

"Austria has close ties to other industrially advanced countries," notes Nishida. "This means we can get industrial information quickly, and also collaborate with academic organisations when necessary."

Plansee is, therefore, well-equipped to keep up with the breakneck pace of development in this sector, according to Nishida.

“Our industry moves quickly, and new innovations come one after another. Against this backdrop, we need to stay current with market trends and smoothly deliver superior service to customers at the right price,” he says. “To achieve this target, we need to innovate constantly in our processes, technology, and human resources.”

Companies founded in Austria continue to produce new technologies that have far-reaching benefits for many. Thanks to investments in R&D, close collaboration with customers, and the wealth of resources they draw on in Japan, Austrian firms will continue to stay at the forefront of innovation.

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