

# There's yen in those grimy urinals

**It's a dirty job but somebody has to profit from it**

A company that cleans toilets is rapidly expanding its customer base by offering comprehensive maintenance services designed to ensure that facilities no one wants to think about unless absolutely, unavoidably necessary are always spotless and comfortable. Yokohama-based amenity Co. focuses on a single message: Clean restrooms are vital for a company's image.

The aptly named company is winning new clients with convincing and clearly defined proposals from salespeople who are certified grime inspectors. And it is developing new products, such as deodorizers, in its endeavor to offer total sani-

tary solutions.

As part of its marketing drive, amenity has purchased naming right to a public lavatory in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward from the municipal government. The public lavatory in front of the Shibuya Ward office has a sign showing its name and the firm's corporate logo, with a reference to a term meaning "toilet consultant."

The company is paying ¥100,000 (\$1,020) per year for the right under a three-year contract that commits it to regular maintenance of the public restroom, including cleaning, odor removal and water conservation.

## Marketing laboratories

Inside the public restroom in Shibuya, amenity also puts up a poster describing its services. Think of this place as amenity's perfect advertising vestibule. "We will make the



An amenity toilet diagnosis professional, right, inspects a toilet with a specialized tool. The company's employees, including President Yamato, above, use toilet-themed business names.

public lavatory as clean and comfortable as those in department stores through careful maintenance," amenity President Satoshi Yamato said.

Many amenity employees are certified as toilet diagnosis experts after going through an in-house program, which is one of the company's most effective sales pitches.

Toilet consultants inspect the restrooms of corporate clients and measure dirt, odor and other bathroom buildup with endoscopes, anemometers and other instruments.

They use the results to propose cleaning plans suited to each clients' toilet facilities. They also apply cleaning agents to eliminate urinary calculi, the main source of restroom odor, and install deodorizers, replacing them once a month.

The company's toilet consultants are tested once a year on their expertise and skills, a measure intended to enhance



their motivation.

To endear themselves to clients, amenity employees use toilet-themed business names. Yamato, for instance, goes by the *nom de porcelaine* Ginzo Otearai — *otearai* being a word for a washroom.

There is also an employee whose stall name is Servizio Nakajima (from the Italian term *servizio pubblico*, or public lavatory).

## One of a kind

The service provider sees a great business opportunity in the fact that restrooms in office buildings and commercial facilities are packed with electrical and water systems, and thus require special skills and tools to maintain.

In most cases, these restrooms receive little more than household-level toilet-

cleaning care, according to the company.

Since its founding in 1989 as a company selling toilet-related products, the firm has grown into about a ¥900 million business with a 46-strong work force. It caters to clients like restaurants, railroad companies and hospitals.

The firm operates a nationwide franchise chain of some 60 service outlets. It has set up branches in South Korea and Hong Kong under an ambitious growth agenda, with its sights also set on the vast Chinese market.

In fact, amenity sees fast-growing emerging countries as key markets for its international expansion.

"As a one-of-a-kind company," Yamato said, "we will expand our operations overseas from Yokohama."



A public lavatory in Tokyo's Shibuya Ward that amenity pays to maintain has a sign showing the company's name and logo.