BEST INTERESTS

- Client focus leads to long-term profits
- Word of mouth drives growth
- Chiba, Kanagawa and Saitama offer investment opportunities

Client-first approach yields results

Dealing with real estate is a daunting prospect for foreigners in any country, with issues of language and culture all serving to complicate what can be a stressful episode even in one's own country. This is particularly true in Japan, which has a number of its own quirks and differences, ranging from regulatory issues through to the nature of properties and the sheer range of districts and neighbourhoods to explore.

A number of foreigner-focused real estate agencies have been set up over the years in Japan to serve this segment of the market. Although such firms can help ease some of the strains that foreigners experience connected to renting, buying or investing in property, the culture, focus and results of these real estate agents can differ substantially. That means foreign residents are still tasked with finding one appropriate for their needs.

But what makes some agencies stand out from the crowd is their adaptability and willingness to serve their clients' wants and preferences. Moreover, some firms have made this central to their business philosophy and operations.

One such firm is Kimita Estate Plan Co., Ltd., which is able to tailor its offerings to client demands across the full range of real estate services—renting, buying, selling, investing and financing. The firm is fully licensed, including for insurance and property management, and can support financing through its strong relationships with Japanese megabanks.



PHOTO: YOSHIKAZU TAKADA

Making a virtue of its small size—Kimita Estate Plan comprises a small number of staff, all of whom have worked for the firm since its founding—the property agent can react quickly to changes in market conditions or client needs. Moreover, it isn't burdened by short-term targets or goals handed down from above. That provides a degree of flexibility that other firms struggle to match.

"We have always put clients first", said Kazutaka Kimita, president and founder of the firm. "If we do that, then the profits will follow".

All of this is backed up by a deep well of experience. Kimita has more than 20 years experience working in real estate, while the firm itself was founded in 1999. And there is a personal element, too. Kimita moved to Dublin in his twenties to study English, an experience that not only helped his language skills, but also gave him an insight into what it is like to live in a foreign country, something that he now draws upon in his professional life when working with clients.

The firm has also maintained an unblemished ethical record ever since its founding, encountering no legal troubles, and it is a strong commitment to transparency and honesty that has won Kimita Estate Plan a range of Japanese and foreign clients, with the firm enjoying strong, organic growth driven by word of mouth. According to Kimita, many clients have provided introductions to individuals who have gone on to deal with Kimita Estate Plan, such was their satisfaction with the real estate agent's services.

"I am always clear about any negative aspects to Japanese real estate first", said Kimita, explaining how he approaches deals with foreign customers. "Then we can move on to the positive elements, such as Japan's low interest rates, and be confident there won't be any misunderstandings".

Foreign clients account for about 80% of the firm's business, said Kimita, and they are mainly senior executives. Many are European, with British and French nationals being well represented. For such clients, when it comes to the complex financial and legal aspects of real estate purchases, Kimita Estate Plan's bilingual services are essential.

The firm also targets different cities depending on the nature of the transaction, with the firm focusing its work on the areas of Kanagawa, Chiba, Saitama and Tokyo, particularly within the Yamanote train line, such as the Minato and Shibuya Wards.

It is this range of locations within the Greater Tokyo area that allows Kimita Estate Plan to offer the array of services that it does. While some small firms may only focus on residential real estate, Kimita Estate Plan's understanding of the markets in Chiba, Kanagawa and Saitama allow them to offer a number of investment opportunities that provide significantly better returns than would be found in central Tokyo.

Such flexibility speaks to Kimita Estate Plan's underlying philosophy—one in which the customer's demands come first.

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