

TURNING UP THE HEAT IN EUROPE

PANASONIC EMPHASIZES CREATIVITY AND DARING IN ITS PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT. HOW HAVE THESE QUALITIES PAID OFF WITH REGARD TO PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT?

FUKUSHIMA: A recent example is our position with regard to DVD. We were the first manufacturer to come out with a DVD Navigation system in Japan, and also the first to introduce a Mobile DVD video player. Now, we will be the first to introduce a navigation system in Europe that supports a DVD video player. We hold the #1 position in DVD aftermarket sales in Japan.

PROFILES: So you are great believers that DVD is the wave of the future?

FUKUSHIMA: Without question. Today in Japan, about 60% of all aftermarket sales are DVD. In major markets such as Europe and North America, DVD acceptance, while behind that of Japan, is more and more accepted in computers and home entertainment, and soon the automotive environment. The capacity of DVD is well suited to manage the massive data sizes in map media. NAVI supports CD and DVD to give consumers the choice, and to make it easier for consumers to migrate to DVD when the technology becomes the accepted standard.

PROFILES: Tell us a little more about the new Panasonic navigation system.

FUKUSHIMA: Along with DVD video capabilities, the other important innovation is our use of SDAL Format. With SDAL Format, we take a first step toward cross-platform compatibility, for us an issue of critical importance. We also found that SDAL provided a great deal of latitude with regard to map display and so the system can guide you in different modes, some of them fairly sophisticated. There's also greater data input flexibility: users can request a route by postal code, as well as by the more common street and city search requests. The postal code option makes it faster and easier to enter a route selection and receive door-to-door guidance.

PROFILES: Any other new benefits to the consumer?

FUKUSHIMA: People who use navigation systems are not familiar with the area around them. NAVI recognizes this by offering drivers the option of searching for a restaurant by type of cuisine, Japanese, Italian, French, etc. Navigation Technologies' consulting group helped us take best advantage of the point of interest information in the NAVTECH database and of SDAL Format.

PROFILES: There's been a lot of speculation as to why the U.S. navigation market is behind that of Europe, and far behind that of Japan. What is your opinion?

FUKUSHIMA: By nature all marketing is local and no two markets mature at the same pace. While it's true the U.S. navigation market is about two years behind Europe's, there is no question that the technology is gaining wider and wider acceptance in the States every day. We've seen it both in the aftermarket and factory-installed sectors, where units sales have doubled in the past year. I'd say that Panasonic is well positioned to contribute to and benefit from the maturing U.S. market.