

Japan companies seek hipness through teens posting to Vine

July 18 2016, by Yuri Kageyama



In this July 7 , 2016 photo, Reika Oozeki, Japanese Vine artist, speaks while showing her work on a smart phone during an interview with The Associated Press in Tokyo. Companies attempting to appeal to Japanese youngsters are getting help from teenage stars on Vine, the social network devoted to six-second videos. Oozeki, 19, became a sensation overnight on Vine when she was just 17, offering snarky sketches of life. (AP Photo/Yuri Kageyama)

What's helping turn Japanese youngsters into stars on Vine, the Twitter-owned social network devoted to looping, six-second video clips, is the

stodginess of this nation's business world.

Japan Inc. companies, both big and small, are generally so clueless about appealing to youngsters—especially young women and especially on social networks—they need all the help they can get from teenage Viners for marketing.

Reika Oozeki, 19, became a sensation overnight on Vine when she was just 17, offering snarky sketches of life.

"I was studying for tests, and I was bored," says Oozeki, who started out using her cellphone to shoot videos of herself in pajamas or at school. "I was so surprised it caught on."

Now she has more than 730,000 followers and her videos have looped over viewers' screens nearly 850 million times. Most of her clips are close-ups of her face. She might coo pretending to be with a date, and then suddenly switch to a growl when she is supposedly with girlfriends.

She has appeared on TV shows, got cast in a movie and is signed with a production company. She is also training to become a swimming coach for children, who adore her because she is famous on Vine.

When companies approach her to make Vine clips, Oozeki is often given free rein. She is sometimes not even required to say the company name. In the clip she made for Intel Japan, she merely snarls, "Interru haitteru," the Japanese for "Intel Inside."



In this July 7 , 2016 photo, Reika Oozeki, right, and Hokuto Ikura, left, Japanese Vine artists, speak while during an exclusive interview with The Associated Press in Tokyo. Companies attempting to appeal to Japanese youngsters are getting help from teenage stars on Vine, the social network devoted to six-second videos. Oozeki, 19, became a sensation overnight on Vine when she was just 17, offering snarky sketches of life. Ikura quit his job at a major company, moved to Tokyo from Fukuoka to become a planner at Tokyo-based Grove Inc., which recruits and supports Viners and other online creators. (AP Photo/Yuri Kageyama)

Vine is unique as a social network in that people post entirely video, much of it taken on cellphones. Each clip is a six-second loop.

There are 200 million people who watch Vine videos every month, and, although Vine does not break down viewers by country, Japan is one of Vine's largest markets outside the U.S.

Kota Furukoshi, chief executive of Tokyo-based Web marketing consulting startup Ninoya, says Japanese companies, which still tend to be dominated by old men, are generally resigned to their lack of online savvy. Instead of trying to acquire and build such skills in-house, they tend to turn for outside help for online marketing, he said.

Popular Vine creators in Japan represent a break from old-style Japanese who tend to be shy, inhibited and inept at self-expression, said Kota Furukoshi, chief executive of Tokyo-based Web marketing consulting startup Ninoya.

"They're very creative. They're stylish. They're sharp," Furukoshi said. "They know how to build their personalities online."

Vine translated well in Japan, unlike other companies that had a culture clash.



In this June 30, 2016 photo, Hayatto Noguchi, Japanese Vine artist, speaks during an interview with The Associated Press in Tokyo. Companies attempting to appeal to Japanese youngsters are getting help from teenage stars on Vine, the social network devoted to six-second videos. Noguchi, with about 23,000 followers and 16 million loops or views on Vine, is hoping to leverage Vine as a springboard for his livelihood. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

LinkedIn, for instance, failed, and was even frowned upon in this culture where job-hopping is not as common as in the U.S. and is seen as betrayal by employers, said Furukoshi.

Vine is at a disadvantage compared to YouTube or Facebook as a moneymaker because most Vine users are too young to be big spenders. But some companies—like the Japan unit of Intel and Japanese candy maker Morinaga & Co.—are using Vine, seeing it as a worthwhile investment for brand recognition.

There are signs that the Vine craze may have peaked in Japan. Nobi Hayashi, who consults and writes about technology in Japan, believes Vine's trademark brevity is proving its weakness.

"It becomes just one gag after the other," Hayashi said.

Last month, Vine added a "watch more" option, allowing an attachment of longer video of up to 140 seconds, and up to 10 minutes for some partners. Vine is also starting to support opportunities to make money through the clips.

But Japanese, like Americans, are often turning to rivals like Snapchat. And other social networks, such as Instagram and Facebook, also offer video.



In this June 30, 2016 photo, Hayatto Noguchi, Japanese Vine artist, speaks while showing his work on a smart phone during an interview with The Associated Press in Tokyo. Companies attempting to appeal to Japanese youngsters are getting help from teenage stars on Vine, the social network devoted to six-second videos. Noguchi, with about 23,000 followers and 16 million loops or views on Vine, is hoping to leverage Vine as a springboard for his livelihood.(AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

Oozeki says she is expanding to other platforms, especially YouTube, for self-expression. That reflects the sentiments of many of the Japanese Vine stars, who see their influence on Vine as a springboard for other online or film careers.

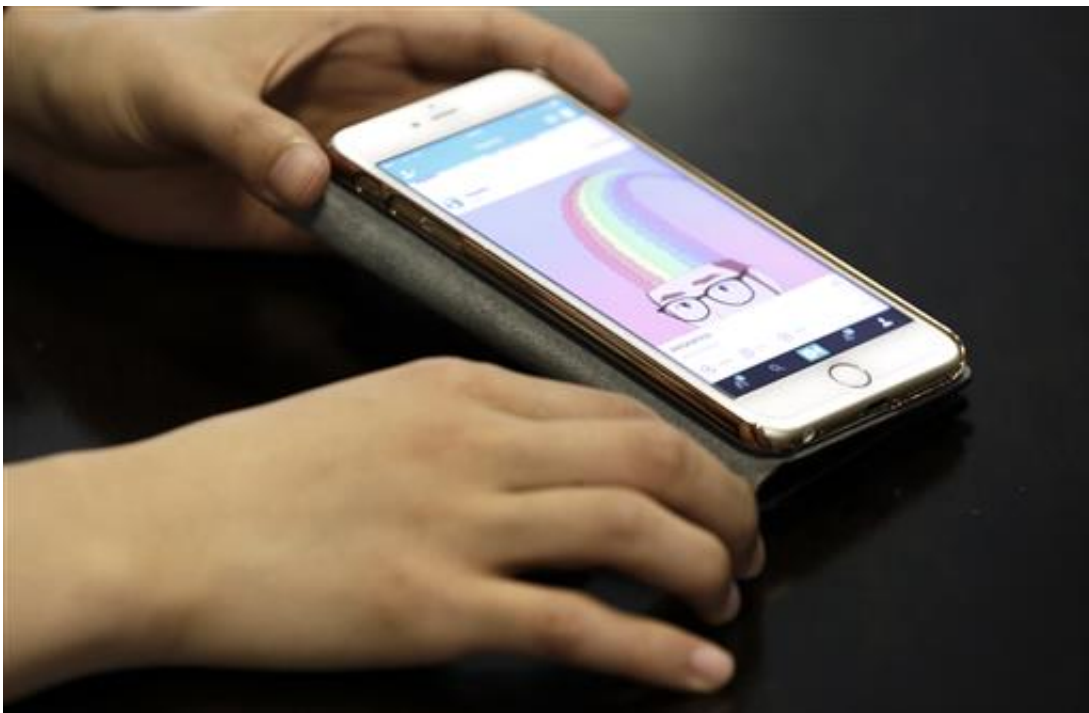
Hokuto Ikura quit his job at a major company, moved to Tokyo from Fukuoka to become a planner at Tokyo-based Grove Inc., which recruits and supports Viners and other online creators.

Vine changed Ikura's life in a personal way, too. Oozeki is now his girlfriend. He says they complement each other well because Oozeki is inspired and creative, while he is more organized and analytical.

Hayatto Noguchi, with about 23,000 followers and 16 million loops or views on Vine, is hoping to leverage Vine as a springboard for his livelihood.

Noguchi uses animation youtu.be/H8mxxbiNaTQ as well as the stop-motion technique of manipulating real-life objects, frames at a time, to create the illusion of movement.

In one, colorful origami-like buildings pop up on a desk. In another, a likeness of Noguchi appears on top of a cake to wish a happy birthday. He has already been tapped by Intel Japan, Tic Tac mints and other companies to create Vine videos, although the pay is relatively small at a few hundred dollars (tens of thousands of yen) per post.



In this June 30, 2016 photo, Hayatto Noguchi, Japanese Vine artist, shows his work on a smart phone during an interview with The Associated Press in Tokyo. Companies attempting to appeal to Japanese youngsters are getting help from teenage stars on Vine, the social network devoted to six-second videos. Noguchi, with about 23,000 followers and 16 million loops or views on Vine, is hoping to leverage Vine as a springboard for his livelihood. (AP Photo/Eugene Hoshiko)

It's a tricky process to fine-tune the looping and craft an eye-catching concept. An overly polished look can backfire because most people are tired of the slickness of TV ads and Hollywood movies, he said.

Noguchi recently quit his job at a cellphone company and is devoting himself full time to Vine. He hasn't told his parents about Vine, dreaming of that day they'll find out on their own.

But he has no illusions about how fleeting the Vine craze might be, and shrugs that time might be running out for him to become a self-sustaining videographer.

"I think this year is it," he said.

More information: Reika Oozeki on Vine:
vine.co/u/996673190115913728

Hokuto Ikura on Vine: vine.co/hokuto

Hayatto Noguchi on Vine: vine.co/hayatto

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