

ATAGO: Creating technology that measures up

A specialist in devices that measure the sugar content of food and drink, ATAGO listens to what its customers want as it creates well-designed, easy-to-use products.

A company best known for its PAL series of handheld measuring instruments, ATAGO specializes in refractometers designed to determine the Brix, or sugar content, of substances. "The number-one usage of our refractometers is for anything that people put in their mouth, like food, beverages and agricultural products," the firm's president, Hideyuki Amamiya, says. "This is the biggest segment we operate in."

ATAGO's most popular refractometer is the PAL-1, a device typically used to gauge the Brix of fruit, vegetables, jams, sauces, condiments, soups and drinks.

"The issue of diets is a sensitive one for anyone concerned with their health and well-being and, in this sense, understanding the sugar content of foods is very important," Mr. Amamiya says. "Our contribution is to accurately measure such content so that there can be more transparency, and people can gain a better understanding of the Brix levels in the products they consume daily."

In addition to instruments that test for sugar content, ATAGO boasts a range of refractometers capable of performing other measurements on things we eat and drink. This includes devices that can gauge the water content of honey, the concentration of tea and coffee, and the concentration of soy milk.

Although ATAGO's refractometers are chiefly targeted at food and drink, the Tokyo-based company, which was founded in 1940, also offers devices designed for other uses. Its refractometers can test the specific gravity of urine and the make-up of vehicle coolants, for example. Amid the coronavirus pandemic, meanwhile, the PAL-COVID-19 refractometer has been created to measure the concentration of hand sanitizers.

ATAGO's growing portfolio of products also includes pH meters, salt meters and viscometers, as well as hybrid devices capable of multiple functions.

According to Mr. Amamiya, ATAGO's well-designed devices are the result of a creative process in which attention to detail and customer input are key. "In Japan, people are very precise about details, which are what distinguishes a product from others," he says. "These kinds of details define our marketing. We get a lot of feedback from customers, which results in better and more



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Hideyuki Amamiya,
President, ATAGO CO., LTD.

attractive designs on our part, therefore satisfying not only functional aspects, but aesthetic ones too.

"All the products we release are based on the basic philosophy of measurement as an exciting experience. Introducing this good, creative, authentic design is the company's flagship approach. We truly believe these are our best features, and that these bring out the excitement in the measuring process, which can sometimes be perceived as just routine. We can develop the specifications customers require, and the result adds up to a joyful and exciting process."

ATAGO's portable, easy-to-use VISCO viscometer, which measures the thickness of fluids, is a prime example of the firm's dedication to working with its customers to deliver the best possible design. "We introduced the viscosity meter, which can be operated with one hand, after visiting

customers onsite and seeing the issues they were having with previously existing viscosity meters," Mr. Amamiya says.

"For example, women could not operate them well because they were too heavy, and they could not control them properly. This is a good example of how ATAGO was quick to introduce a better design to solve customers' problems.

"Furthermore, disposable containers were introduced for the VISCO viscometer because beforehand, the beaker, the part where materials are inserted, was very hard to handle. You had to take it out, wash it and replace it with a new or existing one, and this was not convenient. As a result, disposable beakers were introduced."

By creating instruments that are not only effective but also easy to operate, ATAGO aims to lighten its customers' busy schedules, Mr. Amamiya says: "We are selling freedom to customers by making the measuring process easier and more efficient, allowing them to spend more time on other things. This is ATAGO's philosophy."

ATAGO's burgeoning selection of multi-functional measuring instruments is further evidence of the company's commitment to making customer feedback an integral part of its design process. "Through our R&D, we are trying to introduce different variations of already existing products by listening to our customers' needs," Mr. Amamiya explains. "For example, we have developed the piccolo product that combines different features – pH, Brix, salt and temperature measurements – into one."

With subsidiaries in Brazil, China, India, Italy, Kazakhstan, Russia, Thailand and the United States, ATAGO has a significant global presence – and has its sights set on further international growth. "The foreign markets where we sell the most are China, the U.S., South Korea and India, as well as Germany," Mr. Amamiya says. "We have also discussed the possibility of returning to Africa, as we had established a company in Lagos, Nigeria, but had to stop operating there because of the outbreak of the Ebola epidemic. While we have still not recruited personnel, we have an office and a car there, so we are already prepared for when the right time to return comes."



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