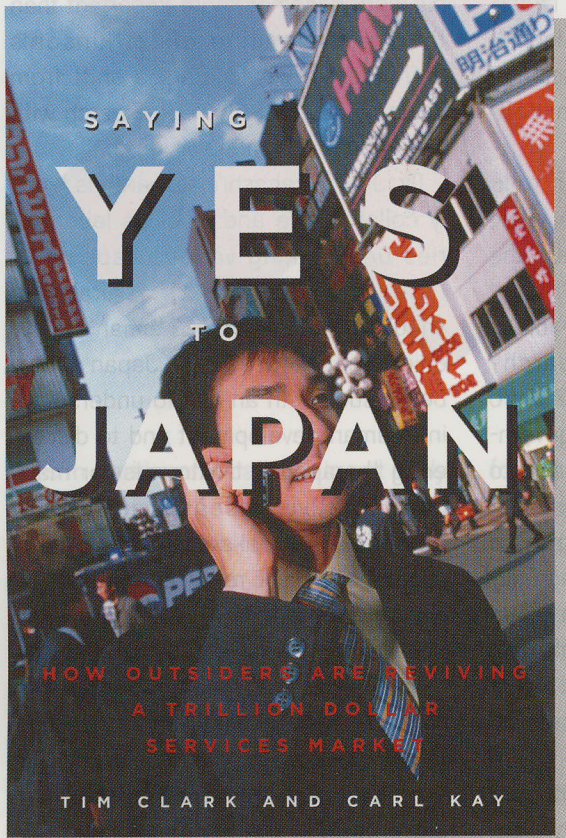


Beyond Every Foreigner's Complaint

Is a Million Dollar Business Idea

Summer 05

Japan Inc



Japanese manufacturing is second to none, and the uninitiated may naturally expect this prowess to extend to the service sector. But those of us who have lived in Japan know this assumption to be dead wrong.

Japanese service is fine, as far as it goes. Japan gets the people part of the service sector perhaps better than most. Gas station attendants make you feel like you're pulling in for a pit stop at the Indy 500 every time you fill up; waiters can be overweening at times but are polite, professional and well-groomed; and McDonald's should force all of its employees in the U.S. to watch a Japanese burger shop in

By Bruce Rutledge

action to learn how fast-food service is supposed to be done. But when you get into the complex, technical aspects of the service sector, it's as if the country as a whole throws up its hands in surrender.

That's why there are so many disconnects in modern Japan: a country known for high-tech gadgetry has some very low-tech corporate offices where workers often share Internet connections and computers; hospitals in the world's second largest economy can be surprisingly shabby and unclean; commuters use smart cards as train tickets, but the trains often stop traffic at busy grade crossings; and back-end operations