

Office workers out in front in demand for men's bras

By EDAN CORKILL

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Underwear-maker Masayuki Tsuchiya says he had toyed with the idea of making bras for men for about seven years, but there was always one sticking point: What *function* could they possibly perform?

"Women's bras make breasts look larger or stop them from sagging," the entrepreneur explained. For men's bras to succeed, he reasoned, surely they too would need some clear purpose.



Double whammy: A model shows off one of lingerie-maker WishRoom's best-selling men's bras. WISHROOM

Early last year the answer occurred to him. The few male customers who had called his Tokyo-based company, WishRoom, inquiring about bras did not seem interested in making their pectoral muscles look bigger, or improving their posture. "They said wearing a bra just made them feel more calm, relaxed and revived," Tsuchiya said. From a man's perspective, it turned out, the sole and sufficient purpose of a bra was psychological.

Still, wary that he was venturing where no lingerie line had gone before, Tsuchiya was cautious in placing his first order. Consequently, just 160 of the A-cup bras — in chest sizes 80 cm, 85 cm and 90 cm — arrived at his delivery center in Nerima Ward last November.

Within a week of putting them on his company's store in the online shopping mall Rakuten, the bras had sold out. Within a month they were being featured on

TV programs and in newspapers, and shortly afterward an avalanche of orders arrived. "We got the factory to put more people on, and we can now produce 1,000 per month," Tsuchiya said, explaining that this allowed them to just keep up with demand.

Customer feedback makes it possible to gauge what kinds of men are buying bras. "Japanese salarymen have a lot of stress, and the bras seem to relieve that," said Tsuchiya, identifying office workers in their 30s and 40s as the main clients.

"One customer said when he wears a bra he feels he can 'reset' his feelings. If something bad happens he puts on a bra and feels he can come back and fight another day," he continued.

The second group of customers was more surprising. "We realized we were receiving many orders from people who don't use the Internet and don't have mobile phones," Tsuchiya said. Men in their 50s and 60s, it turned out, were also partial to the calming effects of a bra.

"They were the generation we had been told were 'manly' — they led Japan in the postwar period," explained Tsuchiya. Perhaps, he speculated, they are now reacting against the stereotype.

Still, Tsuchiya is quick to note that men's bras are not likely to turn into a major trend. To date his bras have all sold out, yes, but his total output stands at just 5,000 bras.

One area with apparent growth potential is the overseas market — or at least certain parts of it. "We get a lot of inquiries from Americans who are interested in selling the bras," Tsuchiya reported. "But the British are different — they tend to be shocked by what we're doing."

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