US–Japan Commerce: Hitting Higher Orbits

By Andrew Wylegala

My embassy section, the Commercial Service–Japan (CS–J), supported 50 trade and investment events in 2013. Although small beer compared with the 500 produced by the ACCJ, we cover more ground— spatially if not thematically.

Beyond Japan, we work events in the United States and across the globe. Indeed, a growing share of our US–Japan events has an out-of-this-world dimension as we chase opportunities into space.

Take a quick spin through Commerce’s solar system: In our first orbit, close to home and the New Year, sparkles International Jewellery Tokyo (IJT), one of the world’s largest shows for jewelry and watches, to be held January 22–25.

With Tokyo’s stock market surge reviving luxury sales, we expect strong business for the 20 American exhibitors. This year’s event marks the first US pavilion at IJT and we are delighted that ours is the 2014 feature country. Visit the show where even small brands will be giving traditional European powerhouses a run for their money.

For those who want to know more, Chris Ono from the CS-J will be leading this effort.

From February 26 to 28, we will be trading gems for silicon at another Commerce-certified mega-show: World Smart Energy Week.

Here we anticipate 60 American firms to exhibit everything from electric control technologies and the highest efficiency solar panels, to alternative energy products and services.

Misa Shimizu is our point person, while colleagues from the embassy’s Energy and Environment Sections will also be contributing.

We do far more than trade shows, of course. While these projects may keep us in Japan, we are developing opportunities for US business in third markets.

For example, during a November visit to Tokyo by Fred Hochberg, chairman and president of the Export-Import Bank of the United States, we encouraged Japanese engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contractors to use and finance US content in their infrastructure projects from Southeast Asia to Africa. Toward this end, ACCJ President Larry Bates led a thorough update on Japan dynamics for Hochberg.
Similarly, Yokohama and then Chicago hosted recent conferences in which embassy agencies helped firms in Japan and the US to explore engagement in Africa.

Our second orbit carries us back stateside. November was centered on our 50-strong Japanese delegation to the SelectUSA Investment Summit in Washington, and a smaller group we took to California’s American Film Mart.

The latter is one of a couple dozen top US trade shows selected each year, to which Commercial Service colleagues in 70 countries lead foreign buyers. While there, our team counsels the American suppliers on the Japanese market, and looks to match them with our buyer delegates.

November also brought a milestone event in Washington: the 50th U.S.–Japan Business Council conference, attended by Jessica Webster, my colleague in the Economics Section.

In our third orbit, we remained busy outside Japan and the United States in events of global dimension. In Düsseldorf and Busan, our Japanese sector experts counseled and “match made” around the Japanese delegations and US pavilions at, respectively, Medica (a huge medical devices fair held from November 20 to 23), and South Korea’s big annual fisheries show (November 18–22).

Finally, we hit our highest orbits assisting US companies on earth science and space exploration. Utah-based GeoMetWatch is working with us to find customers and partners in Japan for their next generation hyper-spectral Earth observation sensors that will help to mitigate the impact of severe weather with vast real-time meteorological data.

Space Exploration Technologies Corp. (SpaceX), the groundbreaking private space company, is endeavoring to bring its highly regarded launch vehicle service to Japan.

Meanwhile, Japanese engineer and astronaut Koichi Wakata—who this year will be the first Japanese commander of the International Space Station (ISS)—recently deployed three microsatellites from the Japanese Experiment Module (Kibo) on the ISS. Further, an innovative US company, NanoRacks LLC, is working with NASA and JAXA to use the Kibo module to deploy its small satellites.

Where rejuvenated US–Japan commerce is involved, even the sky is not much of a limit.