

ContentAsia's ongoing focus on Asia's most important buyers explores how they think and what they want.

Max Seki, President, Tank Incorporated, Japan

Max Seki launched Tank Incorporated 40 years ago, and was involved in the TV/VHF broadcasting business even before that. The company today services Japan's TV stations and DVD distributors. Seki's shopping list includes feature films, music/youth, documentary and sports programmes.

What kinds of sales pitches do you respond best to? "It depends on the content."

How much of a programme/episodes of a series do you watch before you decide to buy? "As many as we could receive."

Do you remember the first programme/series you bought and what you were thinking at the time? "Yes, it was 30 years ago from an American motion picture supplier. It was a 10-title movie package."

What is your best buy ever – and why? "Hard to tell, one of them was a boxing programme; a compilation of well-known American boxers, produced in Las Vegas by Top Rank and distributed by a New York-based distributor."

Is there any show you wish you had bought but didn't? "No. Because you can always be sorry for the things you bought but one has to think of the future positively."

If money were no object, which three programmes would you buy tomorrow? "None. If I have a lot of money I will retire and travel the world. It has always been a risky business... content buying is getting worse and worse. TV stations don't have budget and DVD distribution is still niche in Japan. For instance, DVD audiences who are mostly young people have to prioritise their spending (citing cellphone bills) and put DVD watching on their bottom list. How can we incite interest among them when they cannot afford it? Indeed the standard of living gets higher each year but income remains."

What is/has been your greatest television extravagance? "Boxing series"

What do you consider your acquisitions speciality? "Boxing matches are at my fingertips and I know where to get them."

What do you find most difficult about the programming/acquisition process? "To get content that I want on time. For instance, once a satellite TV station ordered 30 different titles (of major boxing matches), so I contacted the supplier. I keep sending faxes and tried calling (because back then there were no emails), but the seller finally responded and disappointedly said our budget

was not enough. So I wrote back saying the conversation started a year ago and that he had promised me that most of the matches can become available for me so based on his words, I've waited patiently. The next day, he replied and gave me a contact person in Chicago and that was when the adventure started. That person in Chicago gave me another contact in New York, and that the person in New York gave me a contact in Singapore, and that person in Singapore gave me a contact based in Tokyo. Finally, after doing the 'amazing race' I got about 35 titles of different heavyweight boxers from ESPN Tokyo at a very reasonable price (did I mention that person in Tokyo was actually one of my friends). That was one of the things that I couldn't forget. It is very easy to give up at any time, the secret is you must ask yourself if you have given your best shot. This applies to love as well."

Was the boxing story you mentioned your memorable deal ever? "Nope, I remember back then, there was a freelance distributor from Los Angeles who sold me a boxing programme and soon after I found out that she was pirating the show because the master received was suspiciously of poor image quality. I sued her and spent a lot of money hiring an



American lawyer. Apparently there were many other victims who were also tricked. She was sued to bankruptcy."

What do you hate most about the acquisitions process? "Slow responses"

Is there anything you wish programme licensing and distribution people would do that they are not doing now? "They should learn more about the different markets they are working in."

What do you think the most important part of your job is? "Promptness. We as a buyer must be prompt and be clear on what we want. As a seller, it is important to keep the clients updated especially when time lag is long. At least things are moving."

What programme do you watch most often for your own enjoyment? "Mystery drama"

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Full list of Asia's buyers and programmers at www.asiaccontentwatch.com