

May. 2021





Akihabara sub-cultures have accelerated the launch of restaurants, hotels, and second-hand shops in the area.

Producing an Anime Series to Revitalize a Retail Outlet and Neighborhood

Akihabara is known for its unique transformation over the years, changing with the times from a post-war black market to an area with diverse sub-cultures, including electronic parts, home appliances, computers and software, “idols” (aka entertainers), and anime.

In recent years, Akihabara has also become a popular destination for domestic and inbound tourists due to its “kawaii” (aka cute) culture spots, including idol training centers and maid cafes and its vast offering of anime goods.

In 2018 Ichigo acquired AKIBA CULTURES ZONE (“ACZ”), a retail building in the area. ACZ was built 30 years ago as a computer showroom for an electronic retailer, and after a series of changes in owners and tenants over years evolved into its current form in 2011 as a building for different sub-cultures.

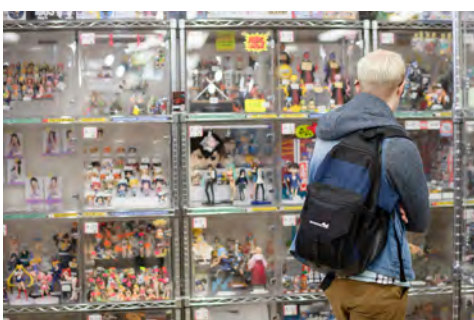
After renovating the building, Ichigo was searching for ways to maximize its customer attractiveness and earnings potential as well as contribute to revitalizing Akihabara, and decided to do something distinctly new and different: produce an anime series as the sole investor, leveraging the anime content to revitalize ACZ.



Ichigo thus established Ichigo Animation as a wholly-owned anime studio under President Yutaka Nakanishi.

“The real estate industry believes you can’t generate high profitability unless you sell the asset. We wanted to integrate content into real estate to increase its value and create a new long-term earnings model that isn’t reliant on asset sales.

Akihabara is a unique area known for anime and other sub-cultures. Other retail buildings in Akihabara that are considered sub-culture landmarks in the area have established a reputation that their tenants can generate a certain level of revenues. In revitalizing ACZ and driving broader recognition with attractive content, we are convinced that we can not only drive revenues for our tenants, but also benefit the community,” says Nakanishi.



Promotional Activities Leveraging Synergies with Anime

Ichigo Animation signed with renowned anime creator Mamoru Oshii, launching the production of a 12-episode anime series about a vampire.

Ichigo explained its objective of revitalizing ACZ and Akihabara via the anime series to the production team. The creators appreciated the artistic freedom from having Ichigo as the sole investor instead of having a traditional production process led by a committee, and were receptive to openly communicating with Ichigo despite Ichigo being new to the anime industry.

The series was completed in a year and a half. As part of promotional efforts for the series, Ichigo released four theme songs, including a theme song sung by LOVEBITES, a popular heavy metal band, promoted the series on TV, and released Episode 1 on YouTube in December 2020 ahead of the official series launch. In February 2021, the series began streaming on various platforms in Japan.

News of the series reached Oshii's large international fan base, and Ichigo began receiving interview requests and enquiries from overseas media outlets, including requests to cover ACZ. Ichigo is currently laying the groundwork for future promotional activities, with overseas markets in mind.

In late 2020, Ichigo also held a screening event at a movie theater in Tokyo and launched an official shop in ACZ and another retail building in Tokyo.

For retailers, the more events and promotional activities held, the greater the opportunity to attract customers. Ichigo leveraged its network within the real estate industry to launch an additional store in addition to the one in ACZ, in a retail outlet that had synergies with anime. Ichigo is testing the effectiveness of these marketing efforts that are targeted to customers that are not hardcore anime fans as a new way to attract customers to retailers.

"Another aspect of Ichigo Animation's business is to leverage our content to work with our tenants as well as companies from different industries that we had never worked with before, and grow each other's businesses. We will continue these efforts in the future," says Nakanishi.



VLADLOVE produced by Ichigo Animation



Official CulZone shop at DiverCity Tokyo Plaza



VLADLOVE screening event at United Cinemas Toyosu

Revitalizing ACZ via Tenant-Owner Collaboration

Ichigo also explained its goal of revitalizing ACZ via the anime to ACZ's tenants, and established a tenant association when starting VLADLOVE promotions. The tenants were looking for new ways to attract customers to Akihabara where the popularity of idol training businesses was declining, so they welcomed Ichigo's efforts.

Along with streaming it on YouTube, Ichigo opened an official Ichigo Animation shop in a vacant space at ACZ. An ACZ tenant agreed to oversee shop operations, resulting in a collaborative effort between Ichigo and the tenant that transcends the traditional owner-tenant relationship. With other tenants agreeing to sell VLADLOVE goods such as CDs, Ichigo established a way to not only raise awareness for the series and ACZ, but also contribute to its tenants' businesses, and will continue this going forward.

ASTOP, which oversees CulZone's operations, has been an ACZ tenant since February 2011 and is familiar with ACZ's history. "Since Ichigo became the owner, it became easier for us to consult them about managing our store and we could feel a growing sense of unity within the building. Although there are tenants that prioritize their own individual stores, we appreciated Ichigo's efforts to drive earnings for the entire building while respecting each store's style and preferences. That's why we decided to help with operating the official shop," says Daijiro Yoshiyama, Managing Director of ASTOP.

Over the course of a year, the tenant association evolved into an organization led by three core tenants actively engaging in promotional activities and ACZ's revitalization efforts, with the cooperation of the other tenants. "We want to think about how to attract customers going forward from the whole building's perspective. As the tenant association, we want to work with Ichigo to improve ACZ via VLADLOVE promotions and other events and tenant collaborations."

Word spread that VLADLOVE had begun promotional activities focused on Akihabara, leading to collaboration offers from other parties. Kunihiro Sasaki, Head of ACZ, says, "As the owner of a retail outlet, it is necessary to think about how to leverage anime on behalf of the outlet, rather than just promoting the anime itself. It is ACZ and Ichigo Animation's role to meet tenants' needs, generate results from new promotional efforts and collaborations, and more broadly promote Akihabara itself."



CulZone at ACZ: Official products from VLADLOVE and other Oshii works



ASTOP's display cases for collectors

Evolving Akihabara, Evolving Retailers

The other two core tenants leading ACZ's promotional efforts are AKIBA CULTURES THEATER, a performance venue, and Lashinbang, a store that buys and sells second-hand anime goods.

Tsukuba TV, which operates AKIBA CULTURES THEATER on the basement floor, has been creating idol-related content and streaming it on satellite broadcasting channels for over 20 years, long before the proliferation of the internet.

Featuring up-and-coming, new idols, Tsukuba TV has established a reputation as an idol training media and has a long history of operating performance venues in Akihabara.

“We used to operate a venue in another facility nearby, but we had to find another location due to circumstances beyond our control. When we heard that ACZ was looking for a tenant to occupy its basement floor, we were confident that we could move to a new location since we had an established base of regular customers,” says Nobuyuki Kinashi, Director of Tsukuba TV. Kinashi had been working in the commercial sector in Akihabara even before the venue’s move to ACZ in 2013.



AKIBA CULTURES THEATER

Although there was a time when Akihabara was a popular place for meeting idols, the popularity has declined, and the Covid pandemic started just as Tsukuba TV was considering their next step.

“Akihabara has recently been attracting talented performers such as former dancers of large amusement parks. Compared to idols that focus on holding events for fans and selling goods rather than their performances, the quality of these performers’ performances and their professionalism are very high. Akihabara has become a city not just for otaku (aka diehard fans), but also for other adults, and we want to take advantage of this opportunity to enhance the level of entertainment we provide and strengthen our operations.”



Nobuyuki Kinashi, Director of Tsukuba TV

Meeting the Needs of Diverse Customers

Lashinbang on the first and second floors opened their Akihabara location at ACZ in 2014. Lashinbang buys and sells second-hand anime goods and gaming software, and has approximately 50 locations in Japan and overseas, with the Akihabara location as their flagship store.

“Akihabara as a city is an otaku culture landmark, and having a location at a popular building like ACZ is beneficial for our company’s image. Although there are a lot of competitors in the area, we see our vast product offering as a competitive advantage,” says Kensho Iwai, Lashinbang’s Head of Akihabara/Kanto area. There is something for everyone at Lashinbang, which has attracted a variety of customers including inbound tourists. Lashinbang has expanded the part of its business focusing on Japanese customers to avoid being overly reliant on inbound tourism.



Kensho Iwai, Lashinbang’s Head of Akihabara&Kanto Area

“Inbound tourists are searching for goods from internationally popular anime like ONE PIECE and DRAGON BALL. On the other hand, there are so many different types of anime and manga, and each work has its own Japanese fan base. We believe we should try to meet the needs of a variety of customers.”

“Since we handle second-hand products, we are also in the service industry. We must provide services that are in line with the high prices of our products. This is becoming increasingly important as we see more customers with families.”

Contributing to Akihabara via the Revitalization of ACZ

Akihabara has recently become a popular tourist destination on the back of growing inbound tourism and TV exposure.

As customer profiles diversify and trends change, how will ACZ change? Ichigo believes this question cannot be answered by Ichigo alone, but rather through cooperating with its tenants who know their customers well. As such, Ichigo regularly discusses strategies for attracting customers and promotional activities with ACZ's three core tenants.



Lashinbang

"Ichigo gives its tenants freedom without interference. We would like to see ACZ become an information and media hub, and want to leverage our media experience and communication skills to help ACZ," says Tsukuba TV's Kinashi.

"ACZ is a retail outlet that allows tenants to have a relatively high level of freedom. We want to think about strategies for attracting customers and promotional activities that meet the needs of both our customers and ACZ. We believe this could be addressed more effectively by a retail outlet as a whole rather than just one tenant. We have high expectations for Ichigo in this regard," says Lashinbang's Iwai.



Given the recent changes in consumer behavior where consumers spend more time at home due to Covid and increasingly value experiences over things, rich content and experiences have become increasingly important to attract customers and drive sales.

On the back of such changes, Ichigo's latest initiative to create synergies between anime content and retail has only just begun.



More Information

AKIBACulturesZONE
VLADVOVE
CulZone
Ichigo Animation

<https://www.akibacultureszone.com/>
<https://www.vladlove.com/>
<https://cul-zone.stores.jp/>
<https://www.ichigo-animation.com/>