



Wattman's [Mini Express](#) Takes Japanese Company On a Ride to Success!

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This is the unique story of a Japanese amusement ride rental company that built an incredibly successful business venture in Tokyo with Wattman's Mini Express [kiddie train](#). Mr. Hisashi Kurihashi, through his company Intersect, presently owns and operates 28 Mini Express in shopping centers located in the Tokyo area. Intersect has a team of 100 employees and the company has experienced fast growth due to the Mini Express' increasing popularity in Tokyo.

A structural change in the amusement park industry partly explains why Intersect's core business went from renting rides to amusement parks to renting and operating Wattman's kiddie trains in shopping malls. Over the last few years amusement parks have started to face financial difficulties because of the increasing availability of alternative entertainment activities, such as electronic and video games.

At the time during which Mr. Kurihashi was facing this change in the industry, he saw Wattman's Mini Express at the International Association of Amusement Parks & Attraction (IAAPA) in Orlando in 1999. As many Wattman's customers, he fell in love with Wattman's kiddie train. Being an expert in the amusement ride market in Japan, Mr. Kurihashi thought that this was totally new. It was beautifully and meticulously designed, made of wood and looked like a custom made train.



Mr. Kurihashi and family in Freight Train passenger wagon.

Japanese are very sensitive to esthetics and quality and the Mini Express reflected exactly those values. Moreover, Mr. Kurihashi felt the train's classy look would generate a sense of nostalgia and be reminiscent of the good old days. He felt this would be very attractive to the Japanese.

Mr. Kurihashi thought that the [Min-Express](#) might very well be the answer to his company's restructuring needs. The five main benefits he saw in the Mini Express were: 1) there were no competitive products; 2) it was beautiful; 3) it was made for children; 4) it was electrically operated therefore pollution-free and 5) being made of wood it was very unique.

As a good business man, Mr. Kurihasi went back to Japan and made a thorough market study to evaluate the interest of the Mini Express for potential customers. It took him six months during which he found out that the Mini Express' best opportunities lied in the shopping mall market, where it would bring a fresh breeze of entertainment for families.

Intersect purchased a first train in 2000, then two more in 2001, and then six per year in the following years. In the spring of 2006, he purchased his 28th train. Virtually all of Intersect's prospects are generated from the window provided by the Tokyo Lala-port Center, where a Mini Express is permanently operated. Lala-port Center is one of the largest and most crowded malls in Tokyo, with 400 shops.

Every train owned and operated by Intersect has a pay-back period of less than one year. This is based on a fee of \$2 - \$3 per ticket, with 30 rides per day. One ride lasts 7 minutes and runs over a 300 meters circuit. Typical operation period is carried over weekends and public holidays. Intersect hires a highly trained and skilled staff to operate its trains. The young operators all communicate and project the company's two leading values: hospitality and safety. They make sure that all riders are greeted with a smile and that the daily safety inspection routine is rigorously followed.



Photo: Courtesy of Intersect

Mr. Kurihasi is very proud of the success he built with the Mini Express in Tokyo. Not only do families experience the nostalgia of the train's golden days, but they also discover that their kids enjoy their day at the mall in a new way.

Mr. Kurihasi says: "I am at the point now where Intersect gets brand recognition in the market. When mall people are looking for a train, they know where to get it. We are the only company that can rent out and operate the Mini Express in the Tokyo area and I sure hope it will stay this way." He adds: "I enjoy dealing with Wattman's Vice-President Gilles Richard. He is very enthusiastic about his Mini Express and he is always there to answer our questions (or see to our needs). He continuously generates new ideas to make the train ride experience increasingly fun. The Mini Express has many merits and it has very strong value. I am very satisfied."

Together Wattman and Intersect have built a strong presence in Tokyo. Thanks to Wattman's Mini Express uniqueness and Mr. Kurihashi strong business acumen and skilled team, Intersect today enjoys a monopoly and a high customer satisfaction in Tokyo's kiddie train market.

Interested in a [Wattman train](mailto:info@wattman.ca)? info@wattman.ca