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# THE OTSUKA WHATS & WHOS

Otsuka  
people creating  
new products  
for better health  
worldwide

## 60 Years Anniversary Oronine Still Grows



**Oronine – Launched From Tokushima in 1953**  
“I burned myself on the teapot.” “Put Oronine on it.”  
“I fell down and skinned my knee.” “There’s Oronine in the medicine cabinet.”  
If you are Japanese, this probably sounds familiar, bringing you back to your days as a child, when cuts and scrapes were a near-daily occurrence.

“Oronine Ointment,” the medicine mentioned in so many such households, was born in a small pharmaceutical factory in Naruto City in Tokushima Prefecture. And in its 60<sup>th</sup> year of sales, it topped the sales chart last year.

### How Oronine Ointment got its start

Otsuka Pharmaceutical Factory, Inc. founded by Busaburo Otsuka in 1921, made bulk ingredients for the pharmaceutical industry using magnesium chloride obtained from the salt industry in Naruto. After the end of the war, Otsuka Pharmaceutical Factory started manufacturing not only bulk materials, but also its own pharmaceutical products – solutions for injection for medical use – and expanded the scale of its operations.

However, it was clear that, with injection solutions and distilled water as Otsuka’s only branded products, business would be much tougher after the demand caused by the Korean War ended. Mr. Masahito Otsuka, who had originally joined his father’s business as the eleventh employee, took the helm of Otsuka Pharmaceutical Factory in 1947, and was struggling to develop new products when he heard about something from Mitsui & Co. An American company, Oronite Chemical, had discovered a new antibacterial agent; what about trying to make a product using that?



### But what could it be used in?

Masahito thought of ointments. At the time, the over-the-counter drugs Mentholatum (“Menturm” in Japan) and penicillin ointments were hit products, and Masahito thought that sales would be more stable with these kinds of products.

Masahito asked three professors at Tokushima University to develop a product for Otsuka. The new product was ready for sale in 1952, and was marketed the following year, in 1953. Otsuka Pharmaceutical Factory’s long-awaited first original product was christened “Oronine Ointment,” after the name of the company that manufactured the raw material.

### Bold Marketing Strategy

Oronine Ointment was therefore the result of a joint collaboration between industry and academia. However, unlike the products marketed by large pharmaceutical companies, brand recognition was poor – at first. Otsuka therefore engaged in various sales and promotion activities in order to teach people about Oronine and get them to use it.

For example, in the year it was launched, Otsuka announced in an informational newsletter targeted at hospitals, the “Otsuka Pharmaceutical News,” that Otsuka was holding a “Miss Nurse Contest.”

Then, the following year, Otsuka sent a marketing truck on a nationwide tour, something that was extremely rare at the time. During the first year, Otsuka’s president traveled for 26 days out of every month, visiting major hospitals across the nation, relentlessly promoting Otsuka’s first original over-the-counter medicine. Sales grew steadily, reaching 30 million yen a month, but then plateaued.



Otsuka also began hearing complaints from customers saying they didn't like the way it smelled. To solve the problem of flattening sales, Otsuka came up with a plan to give test sample packets containing 2.5 g of ointment to children in kindergartens and elementary schools nationwide. *Otsuka sent a marketing truck on a nationwide tour to increase Oronine Ointment brand awareness.* This was an unprecedentedly bold move for the time.

The formula was also modified to eliminate the unfavorable smell and this, combined with the free sample distribution strategy, the initial outlay for which exceeded sales, was successful: from 1957 on, sales of "Oronine Ointment" resumed their rapid rise.

Masahito said that "The best form of promotion is the product itself; if the product is used just once, that is more effective than ten advertisements." This one move turned a crisis into an opportunity.

### Marketing – Communicating the Brand

In addition to the promotion of sales to hospitals and the marketing truck and free sample distribution campaigns, Otsuka also marketed Oronine Ointment aggressively in the media.

Otsuka placed advertisements in newspapers and magazines, and enlisted Keiji Sada and Keiko Kishi, who had starred in the movie version of the radio drama "Your Name Is," which was hugely popular at the time, to sell Oronine using the catch phrase "Your Name Is Oronine."

In the radio program "Daimaru Racket – Humorous Street Recordings," a Japanese stand-up comedy duo who performed using the stage names Nakata Daimaru and Nakata Racket made audiences laugh with a clever back-and-forth comedy routine about Oronine.

1953, the year Oronine Ointment was launched, was also the year that television broadcasting started in Japan. The first television commercials were broadcast live by performers during the programs.

Then, starting in 1963, Otsuka advertised Oronine using enamel billboards. These were put up by salesmen as part of their job, and are now greatly prized by collectors.

In 2003, the 50th anniversary of Oronine's market launch, Otsuka sold a limited quantity of Oronine Ointment in 50th anniversary commemorative packaging, and also sold "Oronine Sanitizer," a spray-type sanitizer that was the first new Oronine product in 50 years.







From 2009 onwards, newer take on how to use the ointment was reflected in modern ads.

The tube packaging proved to be a success making it compact for carrying around. It became popular among the young generation that is outwardly mobile. While the traditional jar of Oronine is still kept in homes in medicine cabinets as a tried-and-true remedy for families.

<sup>\*1</sup> Under the current Pharmaceutical Affairs Law, such promotional distribution is not allowed.