

## KIKKOMAN CORPORATION

"Itsudemo Shinsen® (Always fresh), freshly squeezed Nama Shoyu (fresh raw Soy Sauce)"

Tabletop Bottle

Design registration: Nos. 1443164, 1459666

Patent: No. 5727888



### **Harmony of legacy functions and design**

In September 2010, Kikkoman Corporation released "*Itsudemo Shinsen*® (Always fresh), freshly squeezed Nama Shoyu (fresh raw Soy Sauce)," a new product characterized by a freshly-squeezed bright and clear color, aroma, sweetness, and umami flavor, thanks to a non-heating manufacturing method, unlike ordinary soy sauce, which is made with a heating method. Preventing oxidation in the process of delivery was the most difficult challenge in ensuring freshness all the way to the table. To address this, the company developed a 500ml container in the form of a stand-up pouch with a non-return valve (cap) and succeeded in maintaining freshness for up to 90 days after opening.

In addition, several container designs were suggested for marketing the product in 200ml bottles, a convenient size for use on the dining table. The

selected design was inspired by the form of the tabletop bottle sold since 1961. This tabletop bottle, featuring a revolutionary spill-free spout angle, was designed by Kenji Ekuan, a pioneering industrial designer in Japan. It has gained wide recognition in Japan and global markets, and has been registered in and outside Japan as a three-dimensional trademark that protects distinctive marks even without any logos or text.

The *Itsudemo Shinsen*® product in tabletop bottles, released in August 2011, sold so well that the company had to ramp up its production from the beginning. This "tight-seal bottle" is a two-layered squeeze bottle comprising of an inner soy sauce bag inside a flexible plastic bottle and an airtight "non-return valve cap." The shapes of the main body (excluding the cap) and the cap are separately registered as partial designs. According to the company, this builds on the significance of the integration of functional features and designs embodied in the tabletop bottle handed down from the past.

Susumu Masuda from the company's Intellectual Property Department says: "We decided to file an application for design registration of the spout cap characterized by its spill-free function, based on the consideration from diverse viewpoints concerning functionality, while also focusing on the silhouette of the bottle. We chose a partial design registration as a way to reinforce protection." Masuda looks back on when the product development team performed packaged cargo tests and freshness tests before and after opening the bottle, "We tried very hard to catch up with their speedy progress and finally succeeded in obtaining design registrations at the last minute." According to Masuda, as compared to a patent which requires a certain length of time for prosecution, a design registration is an "easy-to-access tool IP" as it requires a relatively short time to acquire a right.

As the first step for design prosecution, the development team informs the Intellectual Property Department of any novel forms of products that could be recognized as representing new technologies; however, sometimes developers cannot recognize that their outcomes may amount to creations of designs. So, the Intellectual Property Department also has an important role of identifying potential designs for protection at new product development meetings and other occasions. Informed by these discussions, with inputs from the development team and package suppliers, the Intellectual Property Department decides which parts of a product should be applied for design registration.

Hideyuki Suzuki, General Manager of the Intellectual Property Department,

comments: "For containers used in the food sector, design applications had been less popular than patent or trademark applications, as versatile items were preferred. Recently, as container shapes have become diverse, we also focus on design protection." Masuda talks about future expectations for designs: "Observing a product from a diverse perspective, a design right could be perceived as a practically useful tool. Thanks to the latest revision of the Design Act, the related design system has become more convenient and useful."