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CLOSE UP: Entertainment Industry

Japan's New Action Plan to Promote the Export of Live-Action Film and TV Content

Key Takeaways

- Japan is committing to public-private partnerships to drive export of live-action film and television content, with policy, funding, and talent development aligned around global distribution and streaming.
- The new government Action Plan creates concrete entry points for streaming platforms and studios through co-production, financing, data-driven development, and talent training collaboration.
- Over the next decade, Japan aims to build a self-sustaining content industry that rewards global reach, reinvests returns domestically, and supports long-term partnerships, rather than one-off licensing.

Overview

On 23 April 2026, the Japanese government published the Action Plan to Strengthen the Development and Distribution of Live-Action Content. The plan sets out a multi-year strategy to expand the international reach of Japanese films, dramas, variety shows, and other live action content, with a strong emphasis on streaming and overseas distribution.

Unlike Japan's animated content, this industry has remained very Japan-centric, and the Action Plan signals a significant shift to an approach that assumes global audiences and digital distribution from the earliest stages of planning and production.

Background

The Action Plan responds to structural changes in how audiences consume content worldwide. While Japan's domestic broadcast market continues to shrink, global demand for streaming content has grown rapidly. Japanese live action content has already seen rising overseas exports, supported by strong global interest in Asian content on international platforms.

Despite this momentum, most Japanese productions remain designed primarily for domestic broadcast. As a result, many titles never reach international markets, or do so without sufficient scale, financing, or strategic positioning. This as a missed economic and soft power opportunity.

The Action Plan is intended to address these gaps by mobilizing public funding from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) and Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), as well as private investment to rebuild Japan's production and talent base to compete at global scale.

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The Action Plan

A Shift to an Export-oriented Content Model

Japan's live-action content exports were worth approximately 9.4 billion yen in 2023, but the government aims to increase that figure to more than 250 billion by 2033.

Expanded Production Support and Financing Pathways

Anticipates larger budgets and longer production cycles for internationally competitive content. To support this, the government plans to scale up production support and improve access to external financing, including debt finance and completion guarantees.

Greater Openness to International Co-production and Platforms

International co-production is positioned as a priority, with enhanced matching support between Japanese producers and overseas partners at the planning and development stages. At the same time, the government encourages producers to use a wide range of distribution platforms, including global streaming services.

Data-driven Content Development

Highlights the use of viewing data from streaming platforms to inform content strategy and downstream expansion. This aligns closely with how global platforms already operate and suggests a growing receptiveness among Japanese producers to data-informed commissioning, audience segmentation, and iterative development.

Talent Development and Production Infrastructure

Talent is one of the plan's major pillars. Roughly 1,000 professionals per year will be trained across producing, production technology, rights management, international business development, and data analysis. A dedicated training center with studio functions is also planned.

Expanding Production Beyond Urban Centers

The plan also emphasizes regional content, local production, and filming outside major urban centers. This includes support for location shooting, archives, and rights clearance, as well as business models that combine streaming with events, merchandise, and tourism.

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Initiatives Underway to Promote Live-action Industry

MIC is currently conducting a range of funding initiatives related to live-action overseas content expansion, which operate alongside separate support measures administered by the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI).

Training Programs to Develop Globally Competitive Drama Creators

A key part of the MIC's action plan focuses on improving the domestic infrastructure, supporting talent, and boosting physical production standards for live-action filming.

In July, Mitsubishi Research Institute (MRI) launched applications for a MIC-commissioned training program aimed at strengthening Japan's ability to create and export high-quality live-action content. The program targets professionals working at domestic broadcasters, production companies, and related organizations, including drama producers, directors, technical production staff, art department personnel, and CG creators.

The program consists of six training tracks focused on both content development and production technology. Topics include Hollywood-style showrunner and drama production methods, lessons from the global success of Korean dramas, international content development and pitching, overseas market expansion, and the use of advanced production technologies. Separate technical and directing courses will cover emerging content-production tools and workflows. The overall goal is to equip Japanese content creators with the skills, industry knowledge, international networks, and mindset needed to produce world-class drama content for global audiences.

Co-production Push for Drama Series

The Visual Industry Promotion Organization (VIPO), under MIC funding, launched the "Japan Drama First Look: Co-Pro Pitch" program in May to help producers secure international co-production partners and diversify financing sources for drama series. The program provides selected projects with pitch training, networking opportunities, and the chance to present their series concepts at leading international content markets in Asia and Europe including Taiwan's Taiwan Creative Content Fest (TCCF), Korea's Broadcast Worldwide (BCWW), and Series Mania (France).

Japanese drama projects will be selected to pitch in English to an international audience of producers, investors, broadcasters, and streaming platforms. In addition to pitch coaching, participants will receive matchmaking support and access to networking sessions with global industry stakeholders.

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IP360 Funding Globally Competitive Content

Separately from MIC, the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) is funding a broad range of games, anime, manga, and live-action businesses through IP360 (Content Industry Growth Investment Support Program). The program supports startup creators and small teams developing new IP, as well as established content companies developing new IP concepts and pre-production projects. It provides funding for large-scale productions capable of becoming global hit franchises, and for companies attracting and supporting major filming projects in Japan.

Beyond content creation, IP360 also invests in distribution platforms that expand market access for content and development platforms that strengthen production capabilities and industry infrastructure. International growth is a major focus, with support for IP ecosystem businesses that help Japanese content expand worldwide, localization providers that adapt content for overseas audiences through translation, dubbing, subtitling, and related services, and marketing and promotional businesses that drive global awareness and audience engagement.

Collectively, these investments span creators, studios, publishers, production companies, platform operators, localization specialists, and international marketing organizations.

Global Growth and Opportunities for Japanese Live-action Content

Japan's live-action industry is entering a new phase in which government policy is focused on building a globally competitive ecosystem capable of generating sustainable export growth.

For foreign investors and production partners, this presents opportunities for more sophisticated financing structures, including co-investment, risk sharing, and longer-term capital commitments. While Japan is seeking to strengthen the international competitiveness of its own platforms and content businesses, the strategy also recognizes the importance of global partners in scaling Japanese content internationally. This should create a more supportive environment for co-productions and cross-border collaboration across development, production, distribution, and marketing.

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At the same time, Japan's globally recognized anime, manga, and game franchises have already demonstrated a strong ability to generate international interest in the locations, culture, and stories that inspire them. By bringing these distinctive settings and narratives to life through live-action productions—supported by partnerships with regional governments, tourism organizations, and local brands—Japan can create compelling new exportable content. This could drive access to unique creative assets, diverse filming locations, and opportunities to connect content production with tourism, place branding, and experiential offerings, while also expanding production options beyond traditional industry centers. The government aims to foster this potential by promoting closer linkages between live-action content and related industries, including J-Beauty, to generate mutually reinforcing overseas growth and expand the international reach of both Japanese content and consumer brands.

Overall, the government's growing commitment to the live-action sector reflects not only an ambition to increase content exports, but also to make it a more attractive and internationally integrated market. If successful, these initiatives could also strengthen the value of Japanese content beyond the screen.

The policy frameworks prioritize accelerating the overseas expansion of Japan's live-action IP through optimized global streaming pipelines."

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