

Building a Better Future

Four innovators making an impact
to build a sustainable future

'Making a Difference' articles shine a spotlight on individuals who are making a difference and leaving their mark in the community, business world and the environment.

Need a helping hand to market your business?



- ✓ Market your business to virtually any potential customer, partner, media or investor
- ✓ Create tailored sales pitches, Bios, articles, profiles, newsletters, etc.

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e: info@businessgrow.net

With so much negative environmental news clogging newsfeeds, it's tempting to curl up into a ball and give up hope. Snap out of it.

Environment writer and urban farming consultant [Jon Walsh](#) introduces four Tokyo-based eco warriors with big ideas and even bigger results who are laying waste to the notion that one person can't make a difference.

Buckle up and prepare to be inspired!



Marisa Gelencser, [Eco Hachi Living](#)

Marisa is the environmental entrepreneur behind Eco Hachi Living, a Tokyo-based start-up that has developed eco-friendly food wraps made from natural materials.

> [Read article](#) > [Bio](#)



James Gibbs, [Tokyo River Friends](#)

James has little time for trashed rivers and runs regular events to clean their banks. His dedication has led to more than 2,000 bags of rubbish being cleared from Tokyo rivers, and there's bigger goals on the way.

> [Read article](#) > [Bio](#)



Jeff Char, [TRENDE](#)

Jeff runs TRENDE, an innovative solar power startup working to disrupt Japan's energy industry by taking on entrenched interests with a bold new model for alternative energy.

> [Read article](#) > [Bio](#)



Rick Grehan, [imageMILL](#)

Rick and creative agency imageMILL use the power of film, branding and design to champion purpose-driven organizations and change the world through enlightened brands.

> [Read article](#) > [Bio](#)

Urban Slow Food

Fueling good health and global sustainability



Creating positive social & environmental impact through sustainable urban farming



Urban Farming Service Stack

[Workshops & Events](#)

[Programs](#)

[Garden Installation](#)

[Gardening Resources](#)

Food is far more than simply sustenance, it can be a powerful tool for change to create healthier people and a healthier planet. How we grow food and [what we do with it](#) can be a game changer for families, communities, and the less privileged.

Contact urban farming expert **Jon Walsh** ([Bio](#)) and dig up some dirt on how to grow fresh food on balconies, walls (vertical farming), rooftops – even in thin air, create food-based [CSR strategies](#), and change the future. Get trained in key skills that can be used and passed on for life, and empower yourself to build a better, more sustainable future!

Tokyo-based [Business Grow](#) provides urban farming [programs](#), [workshops](#), [seminars](#), [lectures](#), and [on-site consulting](#) on [healthy food production](#).

► [Urban Farming Dashboard](#)

Contact Jon: info@businessgrow.net



INFLUENCERS

[Sarah Furuya Coaching](#)
sarahfuruya.com

[Sarah Furuya Coaching](#) provides executive and life coaching to people worldwide and also runs [Tokyo Mega Clothes Swaps](#)



[Foodie Adventure Japan](#)
Japan's #1 in sustainable tourism, inclusive, fresh & fun tours for travelers & Tokyoites. Omnivore, veg(etari)an, gluten-free and halal



Japanese Greats

[Japanese Greats KK](#) focuses on making great enterprises in Japan sustainable through international business development



[CICLO](#) features sustainable individuals, businesses, and ways to make small lifestyle changes to tackle environmental problems



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[The Global Summit](#) unites social, economic and environmental movements in the relentless pursuit of a thriving future for all

Article written and designed by Jon Walsh, Business Grow

Professional [editing](#), [writing](#), [business promotion](#) and [sustainability](#) services

e: info@businessgrow.net

Re-inventing food wrap to cut plastic waste

Marisa Gelencser



10-second briefing

- Created alternative to plastic cling wrap to keep food fresh
- Uses organic Japanese food-safe beeswax, quality Japanese cotton, Jojoba oil and tree resin
- Wants to raise awareness about the devastating impacts of single use plastic on the planet
- Co-founded [EAS-Y Green](#), an online community that aims to educate people about the current environmental crisis.

Learn more

- [Eco Hachi Living](#)
- Article: [Eco Hachi - bringing awareness about plastic waste in Japan](#)

The massively harmful effects of plastic on the environment has become big news, particularly since natural historian [Sir David Attenborough](#) released '[Blue Planet II](#)' in 2017.

But it was when environmental entrepreneur [Marisa Gelencser](#) watched "[A Plastic Ocean](#)" that she was galvanized to step up and take action to help stop our planet literally drowning in plastic waste. In response, she started [Eco Hachi Living](#) and developed eco-friendly food wraps made from natural materials.

"Eco Hachi beeswax wraps are the perfect alternative to plastic cling wrap for keeping food fresh," she says. "They are natural (made from organic Japanese food-safe beeswax, quality Japanese cotton, Jojoba oil and tree resin), reusable and versatile. Beeswax food wraps are excellent for storing items like cheese and prolonging the life of vegetables and fruit. They are also good for covering any leftover food in bowls or for carrying onigiri, sandwiches and snacks on the go." Unlike plastic wrap, Marisa's wraps allow food to breathe, come in a variety of sizes, and maintaining them is as easy as washing them in cold water and hanging to dry.

Why did Marisa start Eco Hachi Living? "I wanted to raise awareness about the devastating impacts of single use plastic on the planet," she explains. "Beeswax wraps provide people with an alternative to reduce their dependency on cling film."

How's business? "So far people have been very receptive to try out the wraps," Marisa says. "I have had great feedback and people have been surprised at how easy they are to use and maintain." She has been invited to sell her products at various markets around Tokyo over the past year,

the largest event being at the Tokyo American Club. "I was able to interact with so many people and get my message out there. It gives me so much joy if I am able to make just one person stop and think and make changes to their lifestyle."

Challenges moving forward

Besides working to launch a website, Marisa admits she has been hesitant to create an online store as it would limit the interaction she would have with customers. "I have really enjoyed meeting and speaking with people. I have found it to be the most rewarding part of starting Eco Hachi Living."

To expand her activities, Marisa has begun looking at other areas of our lives where single use plastic items can be eliminated. "There are so many exciting developments globally for alternatives to single-use plastic products," she says. "In addition to my beeswax wraps, I have available stainless steel and glass straws, bamboo toothbrushes, and hand-made cutlery cases." Together with three other like-minded women, Marisa has co-founded an online community called [EAS-Y Green](#) that helps people live more sustainably all over the world. People are welcome to join the group and share ideas about living more sustainably in Tokyo.

"I truly believe that if everyone makes small changes to the way they live, we will have a major impact on the future of this planet. It's not about perfection but taking steps in the right direction. Working together, we can reduce our plastic waste and care for our world for future generations."



Cleaning up Tokyo's rivers

James Gibbs



Tokyo River Friends

10-second briefing

- Tokyo River Friends (TRF) holds regular monthly clean up events on Tokyo area rivers
- TRF exceeded its 1,000-bag target for 2018 and 2,000-bag target for 2019 with 1,017 and 2,094 bags collected, respectively.
- The 2020 target has been set at 3,000 bags.
- The long-term goal is to exceed a 100,000-bag cumulative total while also encouraging other people around the world to form similar groups.

Learn more

- [Tokyo River Friends](#)

Trash is everyone's problem and one that grows worse by the day. For many people when it comes to rubbish, out of sight means out of mind. Not for [James Gibbs](#), who is tackling the problem head on by spearheading [Tokyo River Friends](#) (TRF, a [Jambo International](#) river clean up group), which holds regular monthly clean up events on Tokyo rivers as well as beach clean ups in Kanto.

What are James' objectives?

After collecting just over 1,000 bags of trash in 2018 and just over 2,000 bags in 2019, James' short-term goal is to take 3,000+ bags of trash off of the Arakawa and Edogawa rivers in 2020. Mid-term, the target is to reach a 10,000-bag cumulative milestone with 30-40 people participating in each event, and to expand regular monthly events to the Tamagawa river and other areas, including beaches. Long term, the goal is to collect a cumulative total of more than 100,000 bags and encourage people around the world to form similar groups with adopt-a-road, beach, river, etc. groups. "Ultimately, the world needs 100 million such groups to put a halt to the global pollution problem," James says.

How are events organized?

James explains, "Using Jambo's membership base, some new organic membership from our website and social media promotion, and promotion by other groups, people gather at

designated train stations, go to the river, and clean up trash for about 3 to 3.5 hours."

How is TRF going?

"Progress has been good," James says. "We achieved a 1,000-bag result for 2018, and surpassed 2,000 bags in 2019. Attendance is also close to doubling from

the average of 4-6 people/event in 2018."

Current challenges

James says the biggest challenge at present is on the Edogawa where no government agencies will assist TRF with trash disposal. "The city refused, citing it was national government land and not their responsibility. But the Edogawa River Management office also declined to assist with trash disposal saying there was no mechanism to do so nor any accompanying budget. A call to the Arakawa River Management office results in a pickup, or as we later decided, when registering with an NPO, Arakawa Clean Aid ([www.cleanaid.jp](#)), they arrange for trash pickup. Up until the present time, I have had to personally dispose of all the bagged trash on the Edogawa. I will continue to try to find a solution."

What does TRF need to expand?

"The main goal was to get a website up, but now some technical assistance with this is needed," James explains. "It is also time to go full throttle with media ads, promotion at government offices, neighborhood bulletin boards, and more."

We also need social media gurus to make our events go viral. Ultimately larger media exposure, e.g., TV, newspapers, etc. should drive large turn outs and very large amounts of trash removal."

Feb. 16, 2019 Edogawa (Myoden) 41 bags (袋) by 4 people (人)



Get involved

Sign up for the TRF mailing list at [www.tokyoriverfriends.org](#) or e-mail James (yaesukita@gmail.com) asking to be added to the mailing list.

Disrupting Japan's power industry

Jeff Char



10-second briefing

- Provides free residential solar panel installation with no up-front fees, operation, maintenance, or running costs
- Raised 830 million yen in 2018 in funding from [TEPCO Ventures](#) and 2 other partner companies
- Goal is to blanket Japan in solar panels and massively increase supply of renewable energy.

Learn more

- [Jeff Char Bio](#)
- [TRENDE website](#)
- [Ashita Denki service](#)
- [Hot Denki service](#)
- [How solar panels work](#)

Standard procedure when people buy houses is to sign contracts with utility companies, move in with furniture, the family and the dog, and start paying power and water bills, seemingly forever. Well, that was then, the future is now, and that future is evolving in ways that are not only saving consumers money but also helping to save the planet.

Meet serial entrepreneur [Jeff Char](#), co-founder and Chairman of Tokyo-based [TRENDE Inc.](#), an online renewable energy retailer with a mission to accelerate the widespread adoption of solar power in Japan, and a key figure behind a new consumer energy model that could change the face of the energy industry.

After raising 830 million yen in 2018 in two funding rounds led by [TEPCO Ventures](#) with strategic investments from Showa Shell Sekiyu K.K. and [Dubai Electricity and Water Authority](#), TRENDE is pushing to implement a new template of sustainable energy in Japan.

Weaning off fossil fuels

What sparked the startup? "We came up with the idea for TRENDE as a response to climate change and the Japanese electric utility industry's heavy reliance on fossil fuels and restarting of the nuclear power plants," Jeff explains. "Our customers enable us to make a difference by generating clean solar power that

they can use themselves and share locally with their neighbors, thereby further reducing the need to generate electricity from burning fossil fuels," Jeff says. "Moreover, customers get immediate savings of about 10-20% on their electricity bill at the same time." But that's only part of the company's '[Hot Denki](#)' package.

There's also free installation, no up-front fees, maintenance, operation, or running costs, and after the customer's fixed-term 10- or 20-year contract expires, ownership of the solar panels installed on their house is transferred to them for no additional fee. From then on, all power generated from their panels is totally free.

"We hear the 'sounds too good to be true' comment quite often," Jeff says. "We intend to change that reaction to 'sounds too good to ignore.' We definitely need to accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels to renewable energy as soon as possible."

"The biggest challenge we currently have is to educate customers that it is now possible to save the environment and save money at the same time," Jeff says.

"Most people still incorrectly believe that they need to pay more for clean energy."

Despite the fact that TRENDE is still a very new company, it is growing quickly and adding several thousand new customers each month. "Our goal," Jeff says, "is to blanket Japan in solar panels and massively increase the proportion of renewable energy, so we have a long way to go."

How can people get involved?


"We are looking for partners to help solve the climate crisis. If you want to help combat climate change and save money on your electricity bill at the same time, visit <http://trende.jp/> and learn more about [Ashita Denki](#) and [Hot Denki](#)."



Changing the world through enlightened brands

Rick Grehan



 imageMILL

10-second briefing

- Create media focused on driving changes in companies' core business
- Branding and communication specialists have real potential to create change and guide companies to help them find purpose
- Use the power of film, branding and design to champion purpose-driven organizations and create conscious brands that leave a good footprint on the planet.

Learn more

- [Rick Grehan Bio](#)
- [imageMILL website](#)
- [What we do](#)
- [Who we are](#)

Successful marketing agencies typically excel at selling us things we never knew we needed until we were convinced we actually did by marketers we'll never meet. But there's a different type of agency in Japan that is more interested in selling us the concept of a better planet than a better product.

"We believe that brands and business can change the world," says [Rick Grehan](#), a native of Belfast, Ireland and founder of Tokyo-based award-winning ethical creative agency [imageMILL](#). "The world is heading towards an environmental and social disaster tipping point, and it's up to brands & business to change it."

What's the strategy? "We help to bring meaning to brands, to find their purpose and then communicate those values in engaging and authentic stories," Rick says. "We use the power of film, branding and design to champion purpose-driven organizations and create conscious brands that leave a good footprint on this earth. We deeply care about the environment and the impact our clients have on it."

How does imageMILL shift the needle?

"We combine creativity and imagination to produce content aimed at truly moving people," Rick explains. The agency creates media with powerful narratives and an innovative blend of journalistic and branding techniques focused on driving changes in companies' core business. "This results in the

creation of real stories that can influence consumers.

One example is imageMILL's '[Save the Beyond](#)', a collaboration with the History channel and Citizen watches, where they explored the ends of the planet, highlighting the work of eco heroes doing their best to protect our natural resources."

Observing climate change

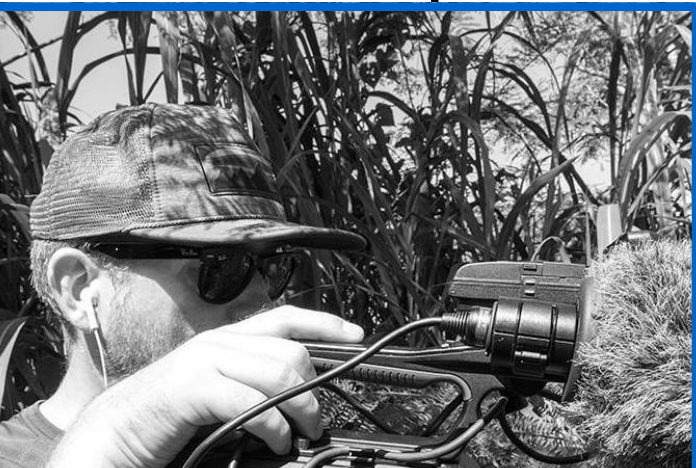
imageMILL staff have traveled the world, searching for environmental advocates to bring their stories into the light. Rick recently met and filmed [Eric Larsen](#), the great polar explorer. "We camped with him at over 3,500 meters high on the beautiful but very cold -25c Crested Butte mountain in Colorado where he gave us a crash course in Arctic survival and told us about the horrific ways climate change is affecting the polar regions."

Rick has also been to the beautiful waters of Indonesia to film the work of [Abam Sianipar](#), marine biologist and protector of manta rays and sharks, and filmed at Australia's Great Barrier Reef where he said he was devastated to witness the destruction of this natural wonder.

What message does Rick most want to spread? "We need to treasure and protect our natural resources. We need to wake up and realize how disconnected we have become from the earth, balance our lives and do what we can to stop the destruction of habitats. I want people to realize their strength, to realize the importance of the small actions they take every day, and that every yen they spend is a vote for the kind of future we want."

What does Rick need to expand?

- Freelancers and consultants: film makers, copy writers, editors, graphic designers, producers, animators
- Spaces to hold events for causes
- Great clients who want to make change by making sustainability and ethics core to their business.



Bios

Marisa Gelencser

[Eco Hachi Living](#)

While living and travelling widely in Australia and Asia over the past 18 years Marisa noticed her beloved beaches and oceans becoming polluted with plastic and harming sea life. Her family watched a disturbing documentary called "[A Plastic Ocean](#)", which had such an impact on them that they took on the challenge of eliminating as much single-use plastic from their lives as possible.

After a friend introduced Marisa to beeswax food wraps, she began experimenting with different formulas to see if she could successfully make her own. After many attempts, she finally found the perfect balance providing durability, effective sealing properties, and functionality. Together with three other like-minded women, Marisa co-founded an online community called [EAS-Y Green](#) that aims to educate people about the current environmental crisis.

James Gibbs

[Tokyo River Friends](#)

James is from Kansas, USA and a graduate of the University of Kansas with a B.A. in East Asian Languages and Cultures and an M.B.A.

Having resided in Japan since 1986, he operates [jobsinjapan.com](#) and works as a translator.

Becoming an avid cyclist along river embankments in recent years has allowed James to see firsthand and up close the volume of trash, thereby providing the impetus to do something about this problem.

Observing never-ending Youtube videos of dead marine wildlife, e.g., whales, birds, etc. with stomachs full of plastic was also a strong motivating factor behind his environmental activities.

Jeff Char

[TRENDE](#)

Jeff is a serial entrepreneur and investor focusing on distributed renewable energy. He is Co-founder & Chairman at [TRENDE](#), an online renewable energy retailer accelerating the widespread adoption of solar power in Japan, and Founder & CEO at [SOGO Energy](#), a global network of innovative energy access companies in emerging markets.

Jeff is also Founder & CEO at [J-Seed Ventures](#). He co-founded and built several successful ventures including Sozon, an online marketing company sold to [ValueCommerce](#), Solis, a domain registrar sold to GMO Internet, SSK Technology, an electronics component company sold to Suzuki Manufacturing, and Pario Software, a network security company sold to Lucent Technologies. Prior to becoming an entrepreneur he was a corporate attorney in Silicon Valley and securities research analyst in Tokyo.

> [More info](#)

Rick Grehan

[imageMILL](#)

Rick is a Creative Director with over 20 years of award-winning experience in managing high-profile, 360 branding and advertising productions including print, video and interactive.

With degrees in both visual communications and marketing, Rick offers a unique blend of creative and strategic skills.

An artist with a passion for new technology, Rick is always pushing the envelope to find new ways to excite and entertain audiences, while communicating important concepts and ideas.

He is a peace and sustainable life activist dedicated to promoting non-violence and preventing abuse: human, animal and environmental, and deeply committed to corporate social responsibility and the next generation of social business.

> [More info](#)