06 / AGENCY DECISION MEMO

Validate the buying occasion before buying reach.

Public-source observations checked 20 Nov 2026. The business brief is illustrative; named companies are research subjects, not VCS clients.

RECOMMENDED CLIENT ADVICE

Fund a tightly scoped discovery and product-trial stage. A premium-candle price is plausible within the observed offer set, but the research does not establish demand for this brand or the right channel to acquire it.

The agency brief

An independent marketing agency is advising an overseas home-fragrance brand that already sells in its home market. Before proposing a Japan campaign, the account lead needs local competitive context, a realistic channel hypothesis and a clear statement of what remains unproven.

Modeled client assumptions	Research output
190 g scented candle; intended retail ¥7,700 including tax; no Japanese customers or local partner assumed.	A price/offer map, route-to-trial options, a validation plan and claims the agency can safely use.
Creative assets exist in English; product and packaging can be sampled.	A specific brief for the next stage, rather than a ready-made national launch strategy.

Read offer map p2; positioning p3; channels p4; pilot economics p5; agency handoff p6; sources p7-8. Named brands are research subjects. All client details and private costs are illustrative.

06 / EXHIBIT 01 / OFFER MAP

Premium is already occupied. Show what is different.

Offer	Published price / size	How to use the evidence
APFR Between the Sheets [S1]	¥8,800 / 190 g; approx. 45-hour burn time.	Local premium-candle reference. Manufacturer-stated specification.
Diptyque Baies classic [S2]	¥11,000 / 190 g.	Imported premium reference with visible gift/service cues.
FRAMA 1917 [S3]	¥11,000 / 170 g.	Imported reference; 170 g and approximately 42-hour burn time. Smaller than the 190 g comparison pair.
APFR incense sticks [S5]	Selected offers ¥2,750.	Adjacent way to buy home fragrance; not the same product or use duration.
hibi regular box + mat [S4]	¥825 in Feb 2025 notice.	Historical low-outlay alternative; not included in current candle price calculations.
Proposed candle - MODEL	¥7,700 / 190 g.	A client price hypothesis, not an observed market offer.

The proposed candle is 12.5% below APFR and 30.0% below Diptyque on item price. That creates a price position, not evidence of value preference. Delivery, packaging, brand familiarity and scent experience can change the effective comparison.

JPY consumer prices; shipping and optional gift services excluded. No average market price is calculated from this small purposive set.

06 / POSITIONING JUDGMENT

“European premium” is too broad to be the reason to buy.

What the observed competition makes visible

The named offers already communicate product format, scent and a premium presentation. Diptyque's page also presents gift wrapping and other services [S2]. A new brand needs to explain a meaningful difference without assuming that overseas origin itself creates demand.

Hypothesis to investigate	Evidence that would support it
A gift for a particular occasion	Target buyers can name the recipient and occasion, understand the packaging and accept the delivered price.
A distinctive scent experience	Side-by-side trials identify a repeatable preference or use case; feedback goes beyond “smells nice”.
An accessible first purchase	A viable trial format leads to paid full-size purchases or repeat orders, rather than only free sampling.
A design object for the home	Product evaluation shows that the container, dimensions and appearance matter in the intended setting.

What not to infer

Existing premium prices do not establish how many units sell. A retail directory does not reveal sell-through. A lower item price does not remove the need for trust or scent trial. Broad “Japan luxury market” figures would not answer this brand-level decision.

These are competing positioning hypotheses. The research does not assert a universal Japanese fragrance preference or a proven gap in the market.

06 / EXHIBIT 02 / ROUTE TO TRIAL

The channel must let the buyer evaluate the product.

Route	Why investigate it	What must be agreed
Selected lifestyle retailer / wholesaler	Physical trial and contextual display could help a scent-led product. marcs has relevant category signals [S6].	Buyer interest, range fit, testers, replenishment, wholesale margin and stock risk.
Design / contract supplier	Potential fit for interiors, projects or gifting; SEMPRE describes those services [S7].	Who is the buyer, what quantity, what lead time and what product specifications?
Owned-store pilot	Controls storytelling, sampling and customer feedback.	A credible traffic source, Japanese support, fulfilment and a commercially viable trial offer.
Temporary event or partner trial	Can observe questions and purchase decisions with a limited range.	Venue/partner quote, staffing, safety, insurance and measurement. No venue is booked.

APFR's public retail navigation confirms that the category is presented through brand and retail touchpoints [S8]. It does not tell us which outlets will accept a new brand. The initial objective is to find a workable trial setting, not to claim immediate national distribution.

Channel examples are research leads. No partner has expressed interest and no commercial terms have been obtained. Product safety, import classification, labeling and claims require a separate product-specific review before sale.

06 / EXHIBIT 03 / PILOT ECONOMICS

A sampling programme must earn its next order.

MODEL: one 190 g candle sold at ¥7,700 including a modeled 10% goods-tax reserve. Net revenue ¥7,000; landed cost ¥2,400; fulfilment/delivery ¥800; payment allowance 4% of gross (¥308); service/returns ¥200. Contribution before acquisition and fixed costs is ¥3,292.

Acquisition scenario	Assumed cost per paid order	Remaining contribution
Low-cost existing audience	¥1,000	¥2,292
Paid acquisition / trial programme	¥2,000	¥1,292
Expensive acquisition	¥3,500	-¥208

How to evaluate a sample programme

If 100 sample recipients cost ¥1,000 each to serve, the programme costs ¥100,000. At ¥3,292 first-order contribution, at least 31 full-price orders are needed merely to cover that sampling cost, before fixed launch costs. That is a 31% recipient-to-order threshold in this specific model, not an expected conversion rate.

If the required retained contribution is ¥1,000 per full-size order, only ¥2,292 is available for acquisition; the same programme needs 44 orders. Replace sample cost, paid price and contribution with quotes before offering a campaign forecast.

No repeat purchases or lifetime value are assumed. The calculation excludes agency fees, payroll, creative, premises and taxes other than the illustrative goods-tax reserve. It is a screening model, not a launch budget.

06 / AGENCY HANDOFF

A recommendation the account team can defend.

Client question	Current answer	Next work product
Can we price at ¥7,700?	It sits below two observed 190 g premium references; demand is unproven.	Verified delivered-price comparison plus product/packaging evaluation.
Who should buy it?	A specific gifting or home-use occasion must be selected and tested.	Interview evidence and a defined initial audience.
Where should we launch?	Choose a route that supports trial and viable contribution.	Partner quotations or a costed direct pilot.
What can the campaign promise?	Only substantiated product, origin, ingredient and service claims.	Reviewed claim sheet and Japanese-language creative brief.

Recommended next-stage brief

Run a short discovery stage with one agreed customer hypothesis, a small set of product samples and a fixed decision date. Combine structured buyer conversations, a fair competitor product comparison and route-specific quotations. State in advance what evidence would justify a paid pilot or stop the launch.

What the agency receives from this research

An evidence-linked memo, the observation table and source register, a list of unresolved client inputs, and a clear distinction between facts and campaign hypotheses. The agency can use these to scope strategy and creative work without presenting assumptions as local consumer insight.

This public sample is not a claim of previous white-label client work. Required client inputs: product specifications, safety documents, current economics, existing repeat-purchase evidence, proposed SKUs and available launch budget.

06 / SOURCE RECORD / 1 OF 2

Product and price references.

[S1] APFR: Between the Sheets fragrance candle

Published 190 g product, price and approximate burn time. Stock text is dynamic; purchasability was not confirmed.

apfr.jp/collections/candle/products/fragrance-candle-between-the-sheets

[S2] Diptyque Japan: Baies classic candle

190 g product price and gift/service cues; statements describe the brand offer, not buyer preference.

jp.diptyqueparis.com/ja-jp/products/classic-candle-baies-berries-b2

[S3] FRAMA Japan: 1917 scented candle

Official product page verified in browser: 170 g, ¥11,000 including tax; approximately 42-hour burn time.

frama.jp/?pid=146832224

[S4] hibi: official price-revision notice

Notice effective 1 Feb 2025: regular box with mat ¥825. Historical published price, not a verified current checkout.

hibi-jp.com/archive/20250122kakakukaitei.pdf

[S5] APFR: incense collection

Published incense-stick offers at ¥2,750. Adjacent category, not a like-for-like candle benchmark.

apfr.jp/collections/incense

Evidence qualification

APFR and Diptyque supply the two direct 190 g candle-price comparisons. FRAMA's official page was checked directly; its 170 g size prevents an identical-pack comparison. hibi is historical and excluded from current candle-price calculations.

Sources reviewed 20 Nov 2026. Brand descriptions and specifications are manufacturer statements. No physical scent or burn test was conducted.

06 / SOURCE RECORD / 2 OF 2

Channel evidence and analytical boundaries.

[S6] marcs international: brand portfolio

FARIBOLES and other home/interior brands give an importer/wholesaler screening signal; no interest is established.

www.marcs.co.jp/brand

[S7] SEMPRE DESIGN: business services

Wholesale and contract/interior services; used as a route example, not a confirmed sales lead.

www.sempredesign.co.jp/sales

[S8] APFR: official retail directory

Official retail-channel navigation. Extracted directory headings are not a reliable basis for counting stores.

apfr.jp/pages/stockists

Method

Purposive official-source research for a modeled overseas home-fragrance brief. The set includes local and imported premium candles, adjacent home-fragrance alternatives and relevant channel business models. It does not estimate total market size, customer demand or market share.

How the recommendation was formed

Observed offers establish that a premium price position exists. They do not establish that the proposed brand can sell at that price. The recommendation therefore allocates the next spend to product/occasion validation and route economics before a broad media launch.

Accountability

All financial inputs are identified as model assumptions; calculations are reproducible from the stated values. Potential partners were not contacted. No survey, commissioned interview or proprietary data is implied.

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