

Yamato Financial Co., Ltd.

The introduction of in-house SNS based on IBM Connections. Taking advantage of the “Compliment each other, Grow each other” culture to promote company-wide information sharing.



Customer Information



Yamato Financial Co., Ltd.

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Yamato Financial supports the growth of sales opportunities with customers through bill collection when goods are delivered within the Yamato Group (the collection business), through presenting services that respond to a variety of account payment methods such as the mail-order business, and through smooth account payments for deliveries between companies. In recent years, attention has been focused on “Kuroneko Web Collection” package services that comprehensively handle payment methods for internet sales, payment management services, and bill payment. Yamato Financial quickly responds to new payment methods such as payment procedures from smart phone mail-order sites and payments from pocket phones. They continue to improve convenience with functions that support payment for repeat customers and reservation sale products.

Yamato Financial Co., Ltd., which engaged in the payment service business of Yamato Group (hereafter, Yamato Financial), which handles the payment service business for the Yamato Group, has introduced an in-company social networking service (SNS) named “Chietter” with IBM Connections as a foundation. This setting up of an information sharing system across business activity areas, for which there previously was no reliable method, promoted the sharing of the kind of know-how that otherwise tends to be known only by individuals. Yamato Financial, following the directions of their top management, developed various ways to promote the use of the system, and took advantage of its “praise each other, raise each other” culture to establish the system throughout the company. In the future, they aim to contribute even more to their business achievements by improving the quality of communication.

Creating an environment for intracompany information-sharing in which all employees can voluntarily participate

Yamato Financial, whose main business is payment services in conjunction with the Takyubin and Kuroneko delivery services for mail-order business agents who use the internet and catalogs, provides various payment methods such as COD, credit card, electronic money, payments at convenience stores, and internet banking, while matching the consumer’s lifestyle and satisfying today’s needs. In the mail-order business market, the goal is not only to be supported by the salespersons but also to be accepted by the end users who make purchases, and Yamato Financial is working on expanding services that are reliable, safe, and convenient. What they strongly desired in order to achieve this goal was the sharing of business know-how. Yamato Financial had established 70 offices in 10 areas throughout Japan, to develop a business that was closely related to local areas, but the opportunities for communication across areas were limited, so that the information sharing was insufficient.

Ms. Tomomi Suto of Yamato Financial’s Management Strategy Division looks back on that time as follows.

“Once each month, the top management from all the areas gathered for a meeting to report on business conditions, but the projects included in the agenda were limited. The information obtained by local salespersons was even more meager, and there were almost no chances for exchanging opinions with other areas or with headquarters. Not just for business matters, but also with regard to items such as simplifying office procedures and reducing costs, there was almost no information sharing between areas.”



“It was necessary to share the know-how that was known only to a portion of the salespersons, to raise the minimum skill level across the entire company.”



Management Strategy Division
Ms. Tomomi Suto

The payment business handled by Yamato Financial is growing, not just for consumers (B to C) but also for payments for shipments between businesses (B to B), and what is needed is a greater “ability to propose” solutions that combine the best forms of various payment methods while taking into account customer needs. Ms. Suto says, “It was necessary to share the know-how that was known only to a portion of the salespersons, to try to raise the minimum skill level across the entire company.”

In May, 2012, actions to solve this problem started quickly. President and Representative Director Toshizo Kurisu provided the concept of “let’s establish and use an environment of in-company information sharing in which all employees can voluntarily participate”. The goal was for each individual employee to publish their own success cases and failure stories in order to share them on a company-wide scale and increase the number of business matters that they understood. Toward that end, the idea was to take advantage of the “praise each other, raise each other” culture that had already taken root in the Yamato Group in order to improve employee motivation and create a system of high productivity.

A big assumption was that employees, having different IT literacies, could start from the same line.

In July, 2012, Yamato Financial set up project teams throughout the company and began investigations into items such as the selection of an IT tool to promote information sharing, usage methods, and operating rules. What emerged out of that was the movement toward an in-company SNS.

Mayumi Watanabe of Yamato Financial’s Management Strategy Division says the following.

“As the result of many discussions about how to implement real-time information sharing, we started to focus on an SNS like Twitter or Facebook in which one could share one’s thoughts freely. In particular, we thought that we absolutely must have within the company a system that made it possible to easily participate in a conversation with a single click, similar to a ‘Like!’ button.” Yamato Financial decided to introduce IBM Connections at the end of October, 2012, as the foundational software to realize this idea.

Ms. Watanabe says, “When we did a comparative study of the packages developed by our company and by other companies, what we emphasized most was a tool that would make it possible for employees with different IT literacies to start at the same line. We decided that IBM Connections was the best because it had a wealth of functions but could also be customized so that in the beginning it could be used with just the required minimal functionality.”

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Management Strategy Division
Ms. Mayumi Watanabe

In addition, Mr. Yusuke Shibata, who works as the Information Systems Manager for Yamato Financial, continued as follows:

“One reason for our decision was the possibility of introduction in a short time. Top management, who considered speed to be important, gave instructions that ‘we do it, get it working as quickly as possible, in three to four weeks’, and IBM responded to our needs. They made IBM Connections work in the IBM Cloud Infrastructure Service, and realized the introduction in a short time. (It now works in SoftLayer.)” The in-company SNS of Yamato Financial, which started formal operations on November 29, 2012, the anniversary of the founding of the Yamato Group, was named “Chietter”, which combines the meanings of “simple twittering and gathering knowledge [chie] within the company”.

The functions that were narrowed down with the goal that “even employees who are not familiar with IT can operate it intuitively” included “blogs”, “forums”, and “files”. In addition to using the flexible customizability of IBM Connections to turn off other functions, they also changed the names to make things easier to understand, such as changing blogging to “knowledge seeds”, forums to “teach me YFC”, and files to “YFC resource center”, when they rolled it out. Ms. Suto explained the following about how it was modified.

“No matter how simple the operation, if it was called ‘blogs’ and ‘forums’ then that alone would have lost the intuitiveness. Naming is important in the sense of clearly showing the purpose of use, so the fact that the specification could be flexibly changed at the system level was extremely helpful.”

Example of a Chietter Screen



The screen is designed with the company’s logo and characters, which help the user become familiar with Chietter as an accessible tool. A button for each function has also been changed to a unique name which makes it easier to understand its application.

“When a sequence of conversations such as ‘Hokkaido succeeded with this method,’ ‘But it didn’t work well in Kanto,’ and ‘So, how about this method?’ can happen, not next month or next week, but ‘now,’ the advantage of Chietter appears.”



Activity Payment Division
Ms. Yuki Inao

The advantage of an SNS is that it is possible to exchange the required information “right now.”

They developed various methods to promote its use across the company.

After the introduction, Yamato Financial took various measures, as shown below, to help Chietter take root within the company and to promote its continued use.

- Creation of a slideshow that compactly summarized how to use Chietter, and publishing it over an intracompany network so that it was always visible.
- Always putting a picture of one’s face in one’s profile to promote communication where “the face is visible.”
- Took action such as launching a project consisting of a dozen members that come from each department, providing information for dissemination, checking if the contents written violate public order and morals, supporting the operation. Since the Administrative Office had formally risen, this member has followed appropriately.
- Top management and other executives took the lead in using Chietter, wrote comments in employee posts and clicked the “Like!” button.

In addition, what’s noteworthy is this is a reward system that has built-in functions for collecting usage history (log) of each individual such as who posted, who clicked the “Like!” button. Based on the aggregate results of the data, it allows evaluation of the employees who use the Chietter positively. “Rewards have been given according to the users’ total points: 5 points for 1 single post, 3 points for a ‘liked’ post and the person who liked the post also gets 1 point. A commemoration badge will be presented as ‘Bronze’ for 1,000 points, ‘Silver’ for 3,000 points, ‘Gold’ for 5,000 points and ‘Diamond’ for 10,000 points. With the goal being to require all the users to earn a Bronze during the first year, we have boosted an atmosphere in which Chietter is going to be used on a daily basis in the company,” explained by Mr. Shibata.



These badges are given to employees that utilize Chietter positively. In addition to the digital world, various mechanisms of the real world are combined to create good feedback.

“The words ‘it was on Chietter’ are being heard during the conversations of the president, managers, and down through ordinary employees. If you put things off, then this kind of system will surely fade away. Constant results are achieved by taking measurements, thinking from the point of view of the user, by encouraging people to post.”



Information Systems Manager
Mr. Yusuke Shibata

If they think it's simple once they click the "Like!" button to the post that they like, that was the point. Moreover, when they enjoy posting by themselves and being "liked" by other people it is special.

“When they have the experience of being praised by someone even just once, they'll overcome the wall very quickly. Within the meaning of building the foundation to take the first step to lighthearted information-sharing, I feel some resistance to obtaining passable success in the first year,” said Ms. Suto.

Now, in December 2013, with one year of experience since it was rolled out, the number of Chietter users has reached a total of about 400, including salespeople and office workers in each area and at headquarters, and the usage rate is over 99%. With regard to the qualitative results, Ms. Yuki Inao of Yamato Financial's Lifestyle Payment Division talks about how “the impression of business speed has changed.”

“When the entire company is fighting for a new market, the chances of success against competitive companies depend on how each area reacts and how fast decisions can be made. When a sequence of conversations such as ‘Hokkaido succeeded with this method’, ‘But it didn't work well in Kanto’, and ‘So, how about this method?’ can happen, not next month or next week, but ‘now’, the advantage of Chietter appears. There is value when the knowledge and thoughts that had been known only to an individual are exposed to others, so that a technique known to an in-company professional related to a specific field becomes known to everyone.” Cases of giving advice are increasing, such as when a salesperson who is having difficulty in dealing with a customer makes a post in Chietter about a “troubling situation”, and other persons with similar experiences reveal examples such as “I solved it like this”. Activities such as having other persons reuse the presentations of successful cases that have been registered in the YFC resource center of Chietter are gradually increasing, and it is expected that this will have a great immediate effect on business. There was also a case where, in a business project, the person in charge of finance spoke on Chietter about a method of processing vouchers, and comments came one after another from the staff at other branches and headquarters. Mr. Shibata also had the following to say about the changes after the introduction.

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From the left: Mr. Shibata, Ms. Inao, Ms. Watanabe, Ms. Suto; on the right is a member when the project started up - Mr. Yoshida, Life Settlement Division Manager

The next step is to improve “quality” which is tied to better results with information-sharing.

As the use of Chietter becomes more established, trying to improve the “quality” of the information being exchanged is the theme for the second year and thereafter.

Improving quality of information exchanged on this system is the theme for the second year.

Ms. Suto says, “As we encourage the sharing of success examples and failure stories, we must connect this to improved business results, which was the goal from the start. For that reason, although we are now using a commendation system based on accumulated points, the plan is to move toward evaluations related to the amount of contribution to content and projects. For example, we are discussing new measures for giving good evaluations to posts such as ‘by making use of this success example I was also able to succeed with a new business negotiation’ and ‘because I learned from this failure story, I was able to make this business improvement’.” Ms. Inao also agrees, and shows her enthusiasm by saying, “After all, in the first year we put all our effort into getting Chietter to be used, but it doesn’t end with the creation of a foundation such as an in-company SNS. How can we raise the level of use in order to get benefits from it for the business? Now is the real work of achieving results from information sharing.” Also, setting up a usage environment so that Chietter can also be accessed from smart devices is being studied from the viewpoint of an IT foundation that can support such a system.

Mr. Shibata says: “There is also the opinion, especially with regard to salespersons who are usually out of the office during the day, that ‘it cannot be called social unless it is an environment that can be used at any time, from any place’, and I want to meet that need as quickly as possible. We are studying methods for how to implement such a system that satisfies the security policies of the entire Yamato Group.” In addition, Ms. Watanabe, who wants the history data that has so far only collected points for Chietter use to see wider application, says, “By introducing methods of data mining and deeply understanding what kind of information is needed for each project, we want to do analysis that encourages invention.”

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Information and know-how that had been known only to individuals is changing into intellectual property that is shared throughout the company, by connecting together freely across areas and generations. Chietter is being developed into an engine for that kind of value creation.

Supplementary information about products and services

■ SoftLayer, an IBM Company

SoftLayer joined the Cloud Infrastructure Services of IBM in July 2013, and is used by more than 22,000 customers over the world. Similar to a cloud of virtual machine-based common sharing, you can start using the required resources easily. In addition, SoftLayer has some features as follows, which were also evaluated in this example.

- Exclusive use of physical server as well as virtual server
- Expanding network between high-speed cloud data centers, use for communication between data centers without additional cost
- By taking advantage of the rich API in both number and type, it is possible to construct and manage the best environment for their services
- Providing all resources of the virtual and physical cloud service in a single interface

■ IBM Connections

IBM Connections is a package of in-house SNS specializing in business applications; it is also called “enterprise socialware.” In addition to promoting real-time information-sharing similar to Twitter and Facebook, it is also feature-rich to “use at work,” such as reusing and accumulating knowledge, planning, sharing issues and solutions, managing ToDo lists, etc. In addition to the access provided by the Web browser from the PC, it is also available for native application to smart devices, providing an environment that you can access at any time, from anywhere.

IBM Connections is offering two forms: on-premise and SaaS-based. In this case study, on-premise IBM Connections was implemented to the Cloud Infrastructure Services of IBM.

Benefits of IBM Connections adoption that have been evaluated in this case

- As a package in which required features are provided all-in-one for business applications, the service can be launched quickly.
- Users can customize the interface, such as changing the name or changing the menu, displaying only the features they want to use, so that they can utilize the software intuitively. Once users become familiar with usage, it will enable them to expand operation by adding more convenient functions.
- If it is on-premise, it can be held in-house including the data. In a way other than taking advantage of API that has been published, add-ons will be possible to develop.



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