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Japan Post to expand its social infrastructure services

Unraveling Japanese companies

HIROKO NAKATA
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Japan Post Co. is set to transform itself by strengthening its role as part of the country's social infrastructure, building on its nationwide network of approximately 24,000 post offices built up over more than 150 years.

The postal arm of Japan Post Holdings Co. was established when privatization of the postal services began in 2007. Although mail volume has declined due to digitalization and online communication, mail is delivered to around 30 million delivery locations every day, and the group maintains approximately 120 million ordinary deposit accounts.

This year, a revised set of postal privatization laws added a new task to the group: providing essential community services such as municipal work for the social security system, vacant house survey, online medical care, and lifestyle support services for senior citizens, including face-to-face consultation.

"We provide services that can use the existing post office network to help people in communities. I expect the role of supporting such social infrastructure to grow further in the future," said Japan Post President and CEO Shinya Koike in a recent interview, part of a monthly series by Naonori Kimura, a partner for the consulting firm Industrial Growth Platform Inc.

Koike emphasized that the company's role is becoming increasingly significant as Japan's population ages and the number of older residents grows in both rural and urban areas. "In these circumstances, face-to-face communication at post offices is especially valuable to society," he said.

Koike related one anecdote he heard while inspecting post offices in Chiba Prefecture following torrential rain and flooding in August, about an elderly man in tears because he wanted to see the postmaster of his neighborhood post office, which was temporarily closed for maintenance and disinfection after the floods. Koike said the story revealed a deep emotional bond that went beyond a business relationship.

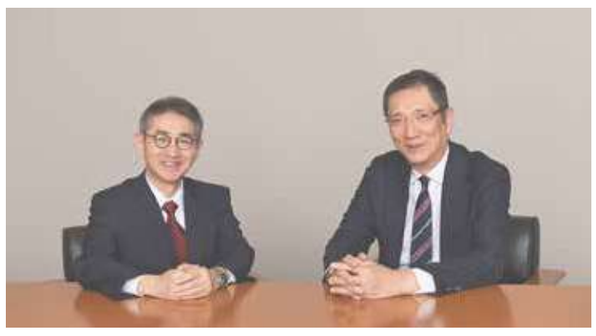
A network built on trust

"It goes beyond postal, savings and insurance services. Post offices offer something extra that local residents can rely on," Koike said. The postmaster may have replaced a light bulb for the elderly man, or run errands for him. "It is highly significant that post offices have become an integral part of their local communities," he added.

The unique bond between residents and post offices, which differs from their ties with places like banks and convenience stores, may stem from the history of post offices.



Japan Post President and CEO Shinya Koike COSUFI



As Japan's population ages, "face-to-face communication at post offices is especially valuable to society," Koike said. COSUFI

The country's postal system started in 1871 as a state-run service. Due to the national government's limited budget in those days, however, most post offices were built in later years through contributions from local notables and landowners who donated property for the offices and were entrusted with the job of postmaster.

To reduce the postal arm's chronic deficits and improve service, a law to privatize the postal group was enacted in 2005 under Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. In addition, although the group's enormous banking and insurance businesses have long faced criticism from the private sector as not playing on a level field, the initial plan to sell off all shares in the group's savings and insurance units remains only halfway complete following a series of political reversals.

Public service and profit

The major lingering issue is how to maintain the nationwide postal network as a public good while keeping it economically viable, since private companies tend to close unprofitable outlets in rural areas. The postal network has remained in the red, and the business environment has become even harsher in recent years, with digitalization reducing communication by letter and postcard.

Experts doubt whether the revised Postal Service Privatization Act will help advance privatization, as the legislation provides for the injection of about ¥65 billion (over $400 million) a year in public funds into Japan Post.

Koike acknowledges the challenge of boosting profitability while maintaining the public good. "Japan Post is a subsidiary of publicly listed Japan Post Holdings, so we need to achieve a certain level of profitability. However, maintaining the common good at the same time is a difficult task," he said. "We are working sustainably by increasing operational efficiency through management efforts while asking users to bear some of the necessary burden."

Japan Post Group unveiled its business blueprint in May by releasing "JP Plan 2028," a medium-term plan that aims to advance a "co-creation platform" that supports customers and local communities in three areas of financial services — comprehensive logistics, overall financing and lifestyle support — while at the same time expanding its real estate business. It also says the group aims to consolidate the current approximately 3,200 collection and delivery bases into 2,700, expecting cost savings of about ¥5 billion.

Beyond traditional mail

Koike said the postal company aims to become an all-round comprehensive logistics company that responds to customers' various needs by strengthening the delivery of goods and using the existing network beyond merely distributing correspondence and cards.

The postal group has laid the foundation for this business. It bought the Australia-based logistics company Toll Holdings Ltd. to reinforce its overseas logistics business in 2015 and acquired the Japanese logistics company Tonami Holdings last year to strengthen the domestic network both for corporate and individual customers.

Yet Japan Post is not focused solely on business efficiency. At the end of the interview, Koike mentioned the significance of sending seasonal greetings to friends and family — a traditional custom that is on the verge of disappearing amid digitalization. "Even if it is only once a year, I hope people will see the value of reaffirming their emotional connections with one another by sending New Year's cards with handwritten comments," he said.

NAONORI KIMURA
INDUSTRIAL GROWTH PLATFORM INC. (IGPI) PARTNER



Japan Post's network of approximately 24,000 post offices and delivery routes extending to every corner of the country holds significant value as social infrastructure that goes far beyond a mere logistics network. Japan Post's local presence, face-to-face consultation services and ability to provide essential services nationwide are major strengths. This network is indispensable social infrastructure. Expanding its role into areas such as municipal administrative services, community monitoring and telemedicine can be seen as an effort to transform this foundation into a "daily-life support platform" that addresses local challenges.

In addition to improving efficiency through digital transformation, Japan Post is confronting the challenge of delivering public services while generating reasonable profits by expanding its logistics operations and pursuing partnerships within and beyond its industry. Even as digitalization advances, the fundamental mission of connecting people remains unchanged. The value of a letter — conveying feelings with a few personal words through something that can be seen and touched — stands out all the more in the digital age. Japan Post is "a company sustained by its people." We look forward to seeing the company preserve the human warmth at its core, reconcile its public mission with economic viability and transform this time-honored yet ever-relevant social infrastructure into a sustainable model for the future.

History of The Japan Times, part 2: Disaster, difficulties and war

130th anniversary series

ERIC JOHNSTON
STAFF WRITER

At 11:58 a.m. on Sept. 1, 1923, an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.9 struck off the southern coast of Kanagawa Prefecture, rocking Tokyo and Yokohama and causing widespread destruction. Over a century later, the exact death toll remains unknown, with estimates ranging from 100,000 to 150,000.

For The Japan Times, it was the worst crisis since the paper's founding in 1897. Between Sept. 1 and 4, damage to the paper's Tokyo headquarters made printing and delivering the paper impossible. On Sept. 4, a typewritten bulletin noted that Yokohama had been destroyed, martial law had been proclaimed, all troops in Tokyo had been mobilized and the navy was in radio communication with the rest of the world.

A Sept. 5 bulletin said that reports concerning illegal acts by Koreans were greatly exaggerated and that many Koreans were involved in relief efforts and doing good work.

The paper also established a point of contact for readers seeking information: A second Sept. 4 bulletin advised that queries should be directed to an editor named Randall Gould at the paper's headquarters in Tokyo's Hibiya area. By Sept. 7, he had relocated to Room 108 at the Imperial Hotel.

In the days that followed, The Japan Times provided disaster-related information in English found nowhere else — a precedent the paper would draw upon decades later after the Hanshin-Awaji quake in 1995 and the Tohoku quake and triple reactor meltdown on March 11, 2011.

Gould was part of a group of foreign news editors and columnists who passed through Japan in the decades between the world wars. One of the most well-known was Hugh Byas, who lived in Japan between 1929 and 1941 and edited the Japan Advertiser. Though he had polarized views of Japan, he was a careful reporter who often displayed sympathy for Japan's position and policies.

Another figure was Burton Crane, a financial correspondent for The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times. He became famous for recording a song called "Sake ga Nomitai" ("I Want to Drink Sake"). For The Japan Advertiser, he penned a financial column called "Song of Sixpence."

By 1930 Tokyo had recovered to a point where the restaurant business in particular was booming. A Feb. 19, 1930, article, "Dining Places for Fastidious People," featured a large selection of photos of some of the city's better establishments. Tokyo Kaikan was hailed as the best place for foreign residents and visitors to find sukiyaki, while Maruya, the paper said, was the place to go for turtle dishes. Those in search of Western-style pastries and sweets could head to Mon Ami, which was popular among embassies and foreign legations.

The 1930s were a difficult time. Following the Feb. 26, 1936, incident, in which Japan nearly experienced a military coup, Tokyo was placed under martial law. At the time, The Japan Times reported the capital was peaceful. But the incident led to an erosion of press freedoms.

On Sept. 28, 1940, The Japan Advertiser announced that Germany, Italy and Japan had signed a mutual assistance pact. That same day, the paper reported the U.S. was banning sales of scrap iron to Japan as punishment for its actions in East Asia, especially its war with China — two of the most fateful moments that led to the Pacific War the following year.



Randall Gould

1940 was also a watershed year for Japan's English-language newspapers. The government ordered papers that it viewed as too critical, like The Japan Advertiser, to merge with the more government-friendly Japan Times.

After the Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941, the U.S. and Japan were at war. But while readers from English-speaking enemy nations had mostly left the country by 1942, others from neutral nations like Sweden, Portugal, Spain and Argentina remained, as did those from Axis partners Germany and Italy.

Forced during the war years to change its title to the Nippon Times, the paper provided news that was little more than government-sanctioned propaganda. But there were also lighter articles like a report on the Tanabata festival that included an essay by the German Buddhist scholar Bruno Petzold on July 5, 1942.

On Aug. 9, 1945, a small front-page story reported that a new type of bomb had caused considerable damage to Hiroshima.

On Aug. 15, The Japan Times reported that peace had been restored and said the continuation of hostilities would have meant the obliteration of the Empire of Japan.

The fighting was over and an uncertain new era was beginning — one that would see The Japan Times mature as a news organ and play a leading role in helping the country rebuild and prosper.


Nippon Times Aug. 15, 1945
HIS MAJESTY ISSUES RESCRIP TO RESTORE PEACE
Joint Declaration of U.S., Great Britain, China and Soviet Union Accepted—Continuation of Hostilities Would Only Mean Obliteration of Japanese Empire
IMPERIAL RESCRIPT

The newspaper was forced during the war years to change its title to the Nippon Times THE JAPAN TIMES ARCHIVES

This article is part of a four-part series commemorating The Japan Times' 130th anniversary and exploring the history of Japan's oldest English-language newspaper.

Paper maker Oji and B. League team up in circular recycling

ESG/SDGs

MAIKO MURAOKA
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A new collaboration between leading paper maker Oji Holdings and the Japan's men's professional basketball league, the B. League, has begun to create a virtuous circle of paper recycling.

Oji formed a group in 2022 that was dedicated to creating closed-loop recycling systems: collecting used products such as paper cups and towels and recycling them into new ones that are distributed back to where they were collected. This initiative was branded as Renewa in 2025 to further advance paper recycling.

Collaborations have taken place with various parties including the fast-food industry, which serves drinks in paper cups, as well as hotels and offices, which use paper towels.

Most paper cups are laminated with plastic film on the inside, and paper towels are designed to withstand water, so they are difficult materials to recycle. However, Oji possesses the advanced technology required to successfully recycle both.

Since its inception in 2016, the B. League has run a social responsibility initiative called B. League Hope. Under its "off-court 3-point challenge," which encompasses the three core areas of "peace, people and planet," the initiative advances the U.N.'s sustainable development goals (SDGs), including helping children with disabilities enjoy sports and providing disaster relief in regions affected by natural disasters across Japan.

Basketball has a relatively short history in Japan compared to other professional sports such as baseball or soccer. Mari Isaka from the SR Promotion Group of the B. League said that deep engagement with communities and active local contributions are indispensable for basketball to gain more fans nationwide and for each of the 55 clubs to gain stronger support from their communities.

The collaboration between Oji and the B. League began with a single email from the league, Isaka said: As part of B. League Hope's environmental efforts, the league wanted to switch from plastic to paper cups at its games, and thought Oji would be the best partner.

Oji welcomed the proposal as a golden opportunity. Yumi Asano, an assistant manager in Oji's Public Relations Department, explained that the proposal aligned perfectly with the company's enthusiasm to collaborate with large-scale events and media partners to showcase the appeal of paper products while fulfilling the desire to boost its brand awareness among young people — its prime recruitment target.

The first initiative was carried out at an all-star game in Nagasaki last January. The arena switched its drink cups from plastic to paper, and spectators were encouraged to put the used cups in special collection bins made of reinforced cardboard provided by Oji. The cups were sent to an Oji Group-affiliated recycling plant to be processed into toilet paper. A similar initiative was carried out at the finals in Yokohama in May.

The toilet paper made from the paper cups and other materials collected at these events was donated to elementary schools in both host cities.

The next all-star event will be held in Nagoya in January. In addition to implementing the same paper cup recycling project, the B. League sought to address other regional issues. "We talked to the Nagoya Environmental Bureau, and learned that although the city had started collecting paper containers such as confectionery boxes separately from burnable trash, public awareness remained low, resulting in a sluggish collection rate," Isaka said.

To address this, the B. League partnered with Oji and the local men's professional basketball team, the Nagoya Diamond Dolphins. They installed collection boxes at an elementary school, encouraging children to bring in paper containers instead of throwing them away. The nearby Oji recycling plant invited students to learn how such containers are recycled into new paper products. Additionally, Dolphins players were scheduled to visit the school on Nov. 4 to hold a workshop for the children about environmental issues.



A spectator places a cup in a collection bin for recycling. B. LEAGUE

Oji operates numerous production sites across Japan, but not all of them have the recycling equipment required for Renewa. "As recycling initiatives like our partnership with the B. League spread throughout Japan, we aim to strengthen Renewa's system. Hopefully the number of our processing facilities will also increase, creating a virtuous cycle," Asano said.

For about a century, Oji has planted trees and maintained forests based on its belief that those who use trees have a responsibility to plant them. Asano suggested inviting children and basketball players to a tree-planting event and then having the children revisit the site several years later to compare the height of the trees with their own, allowing them to experience and learn about forestry.

Isaka is also eager to engage in broader, long-term sustainability efforts. "If we can launch local initiatives with municipalities and expand plastic-free efforts not just through basketball, but across the entire regional sports community — collaborating with Oji, which possesses paper technology, and other local stakeholders — we will be able to create a significant impact on society," she said.

Asano and Isaka, brought together by a single email, never seem to run out of ideas for making a difference through the power of sports and technology.

OJI HOLDINGS

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