

# Earning Trust Overseas

*It was 1976 when, ahead of its competition, Yamato Transport launched a parcel delivery service aimed at general consumers. The convenience and speed of the service proved immensely popular, and parcel delivery services spread rapidly across Japan from the 1980s. Yamato Transport, Japan's largest provider of parcel delivery services, began expanding overseas in 2010, and currently has operations in Singapore, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Malaysia. Toshio Matsubara reports on how the company is taking a parcel delivery service built up over thirty-six years in Japan and utilizing it overseas.*

At one time in Japan, people would have to travel to the Post Office if they wanted to send a package. But in 1976, Yamato Transport was the first private-sector business to launch a parcel-delivery service, called TA-Q-BIN, in the Kanto region. The service meant that even individuals could send parcels easily.

The service entailed the carrier collecting the parcel from the sender's house or office and delivering it directly to the recipient. Thereafter, major transportation companies quickly followed suit and parcel delivery services spread all over Japan. Amid this growth, businesses such as liquor shops and convenience stores started to act as parcel dispatch counters to further expand the frontage for collecting packages, and at the same time, a wide range of related services sprang up, from the shipping of fresh and frozen foods to the dispatch of equipment to ski resorts and golf courses ahead of one's own arrival for later collection.

With so many companies running delivery operations inside Japan, Yamato Transport went a step further in launching parcel delivery services aimed at general consumers overseas as well. In January 2010, the company began operating TA-Q-BIN in Singapore and Shanghai, and

in the following year expanded to Hong Kong and Malaysia in February and September respectively. Two points proved decisive factors in the selection of locations for expansion, that the countries exhibit remarkable economic development and have large populations, as it is under these circumstances that increased activity in the movement of goods develops as a matter of course.

However, unlike back when Yamato Transport launched its parcel delivery service in Japan, today parcel delivery services already exist in every country. "We were newcomers to these markets. Under those circumstances, it wasn't just about delivering parcels; we had to work hard to draw attention to the high quality that comes with the Japanese style of service," explains Keiichiro Atsumi of Yamato Transport's Business Development/Global Sales section.

Yamato Transport introduced the same detailed range of delivery services it offered in Japan at these overseas locations. This meant operating 365 days a year as well as providing a time-zone delivery service where customers specify the time period for parcel delivery, the Cool TA-Q-BIN service that supports the delivery of frozen and chilled goods, a charge-free

re-delivery service which utilizes missed delivery slips and the TA-Q-BIN Collect cash-on-delivery service.

To train its dual driver and delivery staff, known as sales drivers (SDs), Yamato sent a handpicked team of trainers from Japan. Working with trainees on a virtually man-to-man basis, they instilled in them the crucial importance of dealing with customers in a courteous

manner. For instance, when it came to calling out a “thank you” when making a delivery, apparently the trainees didn’t understand why they were thanking the recipient at first. The key is to provide a level of service that delights customers, and while being given examples showing that addressing customers is essential in achieving this, the trainees gradually acquired proficiency with the Japanese style of service.

One example of an initiative that yielded improved visibility early on is an ice cream giveaway campaign conducted in Singapore. As there are no frozen food delivery services aimed at general consumers in Singapore, cold ice cream being delivered to people’s homes generated tremendous interest.

In addition, the accuracy in delivering packages at the designated time and a level of customer service not seen among local parcel delivery services proved popular, and Yamato Transport managed significant growth in the volume of parcels handled in a short time, representing a significant ten-fold improvement



COURTESY OF YAMATO TRANSPORT

Service with a smile: Yamato Transport now provides its delivery service in Shanghai.

over the previous year.

There are also services not offered in Japan being provided in these countries. For example, SDs always wait at the delivery location until the parcel they’ve delivered is opened and its contents confirmed. Depending on the sender, Yamato Transport often gets asked to deliver receipts as well.

“If we read into this, this indicates that in general, consumer confidence in our distribution system hasn’t fully established itself. Yamato Transport needs to earn the trust of customers that these kinds of trouble won’t occur. For this reason, we have started to introduce a system where senders can track the progress of deliveries via computer.”

Atsumi also has this to add. “We place a great deal of importance on the Japanese idea of *omotenashi*, or ‘hospitality.’ Through these unique services, we want customers to experience that there is more to our parcel delivery service than just delivering parcels.” 

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