



Customer story
Absorbie 2024 winner

Mike Parr
Manager, Global TMI Operations

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Absorb helps **Rakuten** grow its global training efforts across more than 40 countries

While widely recognized in North America for its rewards business, [Rakuten Group Inc.](#) (Japanese for “optimism”) is a technology conglomerate made up of more than 70 businesses.

Based out of Tokyo, Rakuten boasts more than 30,000 employees worldwide, operating across 30 countries and regions, with a revenue of more than US\$12 billion in 2021. The company’s businesses run the gamut from eCommerce to fintech, digital communications, telecommunications, professional sports teams, and much more.

“Any industry you can imagine, we’re in it,” says Kim Plue, Director of Global Talent Management & Operations at Rakuten. She jokes, “Whenever I take surveys that ask what industry you’re in, I always kind of have an identity crisis.”

Plue is a member of the company’s GTMI (Global Talent Management and Inclusion) team, overseeing talent development, talent management, and DEI (diversity, equity & inclusion) for Rakuten’s 28 businesses outside Japan, representing approximately 10,500 employees across 45 countries.

The GTMI team was started in 2018 and has grown substantially with the company’s needs, with the largest expansion taking place in the last three years. The team now consists of 17 employees across APAC, the Americas, and Europe.

“We are always looking for how can we best engage the employee then how can we best measure that engagement,” Plue says.

Launching the **Optimism University**

Before 2021, the company lacked any Learning Management System (LMS), impeding its reach and ability to offer training on the large global scale required. Mike Parr, manager of GTMI, and the growing team had only manual tools at their disposal, such as spreadsheets and a company SharePoint site.

As the company's global operations grew, the lack of a robust LMS created significant challenges in operations, reporting, and offering consistent training on a global scale. The amount of training the GTMI team could offer employees was limited, as was stakeholder visibility into what the team was offering.

Rakuten needed a way to improve tracking, reporting, assigning, and measuring training.



Launching the Optimism University cont...

“It was basic in the way we administered training, but, with that, there wasn’t that much to be administered,” Plue notes.

“As the need for learning and development grew, obviously so did the need for tracking for compliance, for the ability to see data and metrics, and we've kind of grown along alongside that.”

“Absorb has been critical for us achieving that.”



The company purchased Absorb LMS in 2020, implemented it the following year, and went live with its learning center built on the solution — Optimism University (OptU) — that summer. Since then, Optimism University has evolved from a single webpage designed to integrate Absorb with Rakuten branding into multiple “portals,” pages on specific topics including onboarding, career development, leadership training, and DEI.

The company’s Absorb implementation grew similarly, with new features and capabilities being added to meet growing needs. The real game-changing feature, Parr says, was [Absorb Analyze](#), providing Rakuten with LMS business intelligence crucial to operations. He adds that, by using business intelligence and the budget, Rakuten can directly tie a dollar amount to all aspects of training.

Enhancing global reach and reporting

Rakuten has leveraged its Absorb implementation to overcome challenges around scale, engagement, visibility, reporting, and measurement. It's done so through several key initiatives:

Learning ambassadors

To promote global learning and improve international collaboration, Rakuten introduced "Learning Ambassadors" in 2022. These individuals act as contacts between GTMI and business units, raising awareness of GTMI activities and Optimism University. These Learning Ambassadors were trained on Absorb's admin functions and provided with customized Absorb Analyze dashboards for real-time data insights.

Global communications

The GTMI team partnered with Rakuten's corporate communications team to publish the "Spotlight Courses" newsletter monthly, featuring relevant courses and resources directly accessible through the Absorb-powered Optimism University. In addition, they developed targeted marketing communications tailored to select employee groups based on their position, location, or previous learning history.

Seamless integrations

Taking advantage of Absorb-Workday integration, Rakuten has streamlined data collection and gained instant visibility into learner's history. The company has also integrated its entire Udemy course library via API, so completions flow through Absorb and Workday, ensuring comprehensive visibility into its employee's learning journeys.

Rakuten key initiatives

Stakeholder reporting

Using Absorb Analyze, Rakuten has been able to quickly report on a wide range of metrics via custom-tailored dashboards, enabling different stakeholders to make informed, data-driven decision-making.

“Our reporting capability has gone from strength to strength and we're now in a position where we can comfortably provide insights to all areas of our training,” Parr says.

Global reach support

To facilitate and enhance international support, Rakuten introduced a global Zendesk support email, with the address included in all courses, descriptions, and messaging. Since its introduction in 2021, the GTMI team has resolved more than 350 support tickets. To help learners know who they can reach with specific queries, a “Meet the Team” page was developed providing contact information easily identified by region.

Region-specific courses

To make sure courses were available to employees in all regions, the GTMI team designed the Optimism University courses to be region-specific with times and dates localized. Using Absorb, courses have been deep-linked directly to specific sessions, so learners can enroll with a single click, resulting in an immediate increase in global reach.

The Rakuten GTMI team's many initiatives have paid off. Not only has it seen massive growth in traffic to its Optimism University site — **299% growth in 2021 and 51% in 2022 — but through its Absorb integrations it's been able to see a notable increase in course completions and learner diversity.**

A measurable impact

While the team saw learners completing courses from just 24 countries in 2020, now participants from 41 countries — of the 45 the team serves — complete the company's mixture of online courses & instructor-led courses.

In addition to the expanding training opportunities and reach, **Absorb** has provided the GTMI team with time savings around administration, coordination, and logistics. This time has been spent refining its training programs to meet and exceed learner expectations.

The company uses the Kirkpatrick Model of training evaluation, with surveys provided at the ends of sessions as well as in automated completion emails from Absorb. These in-house developed surveys allow data to be viewed in real-time, helping drive strategy around content delivery.



Since implementing Absorb, Rakuten has seen **consistently high metrics**

including effectiveness, relevance, value, and NPS (net promoter score).

Using data from surveys and Absorb Analytics, Rakuten can determine a wide range of metrics to make strategic decisions around training. This helps greatly, since as a company that has grown primarily through acquisitions, each business unit and its employees may have unique needs that data allows the team to better understand.

Custom dashboards provide incredibly granular information that can be filtered by year, company position, specific courses or specific regions, employee number, and more. A heat map provides a worldview for visibility by HR and learning stakeholders.

Year	Surveys submitted	Learners who found the course effective	Learners who found the course relevant	Learners who believed the course added value	Net Promoter Score
2021	236	94%	88%	88%	55
2022	790	90%	92%	90%	62
2023	1364	93%	90%	89%	57

An optimistic future

“Analyze quickly became the powerhouse we needed and transformed reporting; not just how we could access it, but also how we could present it,” Parr says. “It gave us a connectedness that we’d not experienced before.”

“Rakuten is a complex organization when it comes to business unit reporting and structure,” he continues. “Analyze gives us regional breakdowns, helps us differentiate employee needs, and year-on-year trends became instantly available with an endless number of metrics to analyze.”

In keeping with its company principle of “Always Improve, Always Advance,” Rakuten is using Absorb and LMS business intelligence data to continuously improve its training, reach, and effectiveness.

In the coming years, Rakuten plans to integrate Analyze into a complete Power BI solution to drive strategic business decisions. It’s partnering with content curation company Go1 to provide training material in a variety of learning methods (e-learning, audiobooks, podcasts, and text). The GTMI team continues to partner with HR, corporate communications, and key stakeholders to improve collaboration and communications. The team continues to enhance Absorb integrations and upskill its Learning Ambassadors to improve its global reach.

It all comes back to leveraging the rich data that Rakuten now has at its fingertips.

“We want to integrate the information from Absorb with other sources of information we have in the organization,” Plue says. “We’d like to start connecting the dots.”

“What patterns are there with inactive and active employees taking training? What patterns are there with people with regions and budgets taking training? What patterns are there with people satisfied with their current workload and training?”

“There are infinite ways we can start to use this, but we need to build the tools to connect those on our side.”

With Absorb as its LMS platform, Plue and Parr are confident the GTMI team’s initiatives will continue to grow, and its offerings will continue to be integral to career development at Rakuten.





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