

# Driving Sales Ideas by Consolidating and Linking Knowledge

## Diamond Lease Company Limited

A leasing company's strength lies in its sales force's ability to solve problems and create ideas. To boost those capabilities, a company needs to communicate the best new information and specialized knowledge on products and leases to its frontline sales force. Diamond Lease Company Limited is utilizing KnowledgeMarket as a platform for addressing these challenges.

### Tying Specialized Knowledge to Sales

Why is Diamond Lease actively introducing knowledge management? "The key to success in our business hinges upon how well we can incorporate various elements such as tax and accounting rules into leasing products and present them to our customers. So, the ability to share specialized knowledge with our sales force and make full use of it leads directly to growing business," answers Naoto Moriyasu, head of the company's planning department.

Diamond Lease has tried various measures to share information and knowledge within the company.

In one attempt, it provided product information and customer proposals on its intranet. The company created a shared regis-

try called knowledge plaza on its intranet for experts from various departments to post answers to queries from sales staff.

But the knowledge plaza's success was limited. One reason was that information could only be posted to a company-wide shared registry, so users shied from posting simplistic questions.

Another was that the knowledge plaza's administrator prepared answers to queries by summarizing conversations with relevant experts. So the administrator bore a large burden in the plaza's operation.

Eventually, natural attrition took its toll on the knowledge plaza as employees returned to telephone and email exchanges that relied on personal connections to get their questions answered, according to the company.

"The time was ripe for us to create a truly useful system by introducing a dedicat-

ed knowledge management solution," says Akira Yagihara, a manager in product development at the company.

### Implanting knowledge management into Everyday Activities

As time to introduce a new knowledge management system ripened, Diamond Lease turned to REALCOM's KnowledgeMarket. Mr. Yagihara explains their reasons for choosing KnowledgeMarket.

"KnowledgeMarket is simpler than other knowledge management products and systems, and much more convenient. We wanted a system our entire staff could naturally feel comfortable using on a day-to-day basis. KnowledgeMarket was the only solution that matched those requirements."

After selecting KnowledgeMarket, Diamond Lease allowed for ample time to launch the system. It needed to consider carefully how to develop a knowledge management system provided the newest information on the one hand, and maintained the highest quality levels on the other. "For example, we required an approval process flow where experts checked the accuracy of knowledge before it got posted to the knowledge management system. It was essential that we prevent mistaken information from getting into proposals and on to the customer," says Mr. Yagihara.

Staff from Diamond Lease and REALCOM met for six months to complete a knowledge management system that answered these needs effectively.

The resulting knowledge management system at Diamond Lease centered on the

following three communities: Expert-FAQs, Sales Q&A, and Customer Proposal Library.

Sales Q&A is a forum for sales representatives to exchange know-how gathered through everyday activities. For example, sales reps often need to deal with various customer needs. If there is another sales rep that has handled similar demands in the past, utilizing that knowledge will enable smoother customer response. Diamond Lease established Sales Q&A as a forum to link this type of knowledge.

Expert FAQs is a forum for employees to submit work-related questions and get answers from the company's experts. Experts review employees' queries, select those that appear frequently or are important, and edit these frequently asked questions to be released to all employees. So, Expert FAQs' role is to standardize the contents of Q&A and present it as a refined knowledge database.

Moreover, because queries to Expert FAQs are released only after they are screened and edited by the experts, users can feel comfortable submitting questions.

Thirdly, on the Customer Proposal Library, employees share sales proposals. Generally, sales staff rarely disclose their own proposals because they view their peers as rivals in a sense. But Diamond Lease made its knowledge management site more convenient for sales staff by combining Expert FAQs and Sales Q&A

with the library. It also provided incentives for postings, using KnowledgeMarket's feedback and ranking functions. These measures encourage active submission of proposals.

### Supporting Increased Sales Force Capabilities

Diamond Lease began full-fledged operation of KnowledgeMarket in June 2002. To prepare for that, the company ran trials using three sales departments and 100 experts. At the same time, Diamond Lease enrolled its experts to list up numerous FAQs. By the time the system began full operation, Expert FAQs had already accumulated 900 questions and answers.

Thanks to these efforts, Diamond Lease's rollout of KnowledgeMarket was a great success. After a half-year of operation, over 7,000 people had utilized the system. Approximately 700 work hours were saved in that same half-year period. (Mr. Yagihara believes the actual effect was two- or three-fold that.) Already there are 250 proposals and other useful information posted on the Customer Proposal Library. The key, though, is how daily practices are changing. Information and proposals that resided with individuals are becoming knowledge shared across the company. Also, sales staff have begun to share their own proposals and collaborate with others. It's also worthwhile to note



Naoto Moriyasu, Diamond Lease's general manager of corporate planning

that a couple of employees have gained recognition within the company for creating and posting proposals with high re-use value.

"Before we completed our Expert FAQs system, experts received similar queries day after day. But things have improved greatly, and experts bear less of a burden. Now, our experts can spend more time on their primary responsibilities," adds Mr. Yagihara.

Considering these circumstances, Mr. Moriyasu summarizes the effects of introducing knowledge management as follows. "In terms of increased sales work efficiency, KnowledgeMarket's effects are immeasurable. With it, we have been able to lift the performance of our entire sales staff to the same high level. Moreover, each employee has absorbed and accumulated specialized know-how and knowledge. This created a foothold for challenging the next level. That is of no small significance."

### CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

#### Purpose of knowledge management

- Increase sales efficiency and success rates by creating a virtual organization and specialized knowledge center of experts dispersed throughout the company
- Make it easier to share and utilize the information and knowledge needed by its frontline sales force

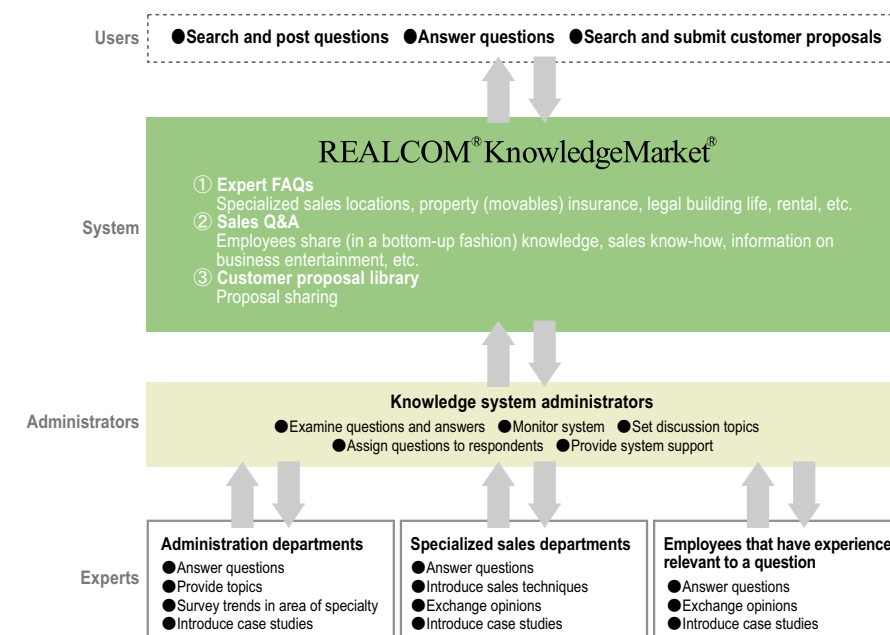
#### Benefits from knowledge management

- Lightened workloads of experts (employees possessing specialized knowledge) by organizing FAQs involving specialized information and knowledge
- Improved sales work efficiency through shared information, knowledge and proposals
- Made expertise visible to the entire organization by storing individuals' knowledge on a database
- Cultivated knowledge-sharing culture

#### Number of users

- Approximately 700 (all employees)

### A Layout of Diamond Lease's knowledge management system



### USER'S PROFILE

Company name: Diamond Lease Corporation

Capital: 16,440,295,000 yen  
Employees: Approximately 700

Areas of business: Leasing and installment sales of various movable property; financing; real estate; sales of investment products; international business.

Places of operation: Head office and 17 branch offices nationwide.

Total assets: 422,527 million yen  
(FY2003 nonconsolidated results)  
URL: <http://www.dia-lease.co.jp/>