

Softbank offers staff one mn yen to learn good English

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Softbank president Masayoshi Son presents the company's first half results in Tokyo in October.

Japanese mobile carrier Softbank, which made headlines over a \$20 billion takeover of US-based Sprint Nextel, is offering employees an incentive to master English—one million yen.

The firm said Friday it is giving the cash reward, worth about \$11,200,

to workers who get top marks in an English-proficiency test for non-[native speakers](#), known as TOEIC, or Test of English for International Communications.

A mark above 900—on a scale from 10 to 990—will make the grade, Softbank said, adding the offer applied to about 17,000 employees.

Those who score 800 or higher will get 300,000 yen, it said.

The company said it has been training employees to give presentations in English, but figured cold hard cash would be an extra incentive.

"We decided to boost (employees') motivation with money," said a spokeswoman.

The move comes as a strong yen and shrinking domestic market have sent Japanese firms on a buying spree abroad.

But the level of English spoken at Japanese companies tends to be far lower than in other regional business hubs such as Hong Kong and Singapore.

Japan's online shopping giant Rakuten, as well as Fast Retailing, operator of Uniqlo cheap-chic clothing chain, are swapping Japanese for English as the working language in their offices as they expand overseas.

Little known outside Japan, [Softbank](#) is perhaps the country's most colourful and dynamic among the major [mobile carriers](#) and was the first to carry Apple's popular [iPhone](#).

Its well-known television commercials star a talking snow-white dog and have featured American actor Tommy Lee Jones.

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