

# Too busy to text: Messaging app Line bets on stickers

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App users rely on Line's huge assortment of animated "stickers", which some too-busy-to-text fans rely on to express their feelings—a kind of animated language

A year ago, Siobhan Stollznow would have scoffed at the idea of using cartoon characters instead of words to chat with friends on her smartphone—until she got hooked on messaging app Line.

The Australian student is now one of millions of converts to Line's huge assortment of animated "[stickers](#)", which some too-busy-to-text fans rely on to express their feelings—a kind of animated language.

"I was surprised at first. How can you have a conversation through stickers?" said the 22-year-old at a store in Tokyo's Harajuku district which sells mugs, t-shirts and other merchandise decorated with Line's cutesy characters.

"I guess it kind of grew on me...Each (character) has got their unique personality."

Japan-based Line is betting on those stickers as it kicks off a dual New York-Tokyo stock listing from Thursday, after an [initial public offering](#) worth about \$1.3 billion, expected to be one of the year's biggest share sales.

The company, owned by South Korea's Naver Corporation, is going public to finance an expansion aimed at boosting its roster of 218 million active monthly users—and help it compete with larger rivals WhatsApp and China's WeChat.

Most Line users are in a handful of countries, including Japan, Thailand, and Indonesia, and so is looking to tap other markets such as the US and Europe where it is not a major player.

Nanako, a 25-year-old tech industry worker from San Francisco, will be taking back good words about Line to the US—along with some socks and a cup decorated with her favourite character, a yellow duck named Sally.

"The stickers are so good at explaining how we feel," she said at the retail store in Tokyo's youth fashion district.

Line can also be used to make free calls, send no-charge instant messages, and post photos or short videos, along with a host of other paid-services.

But what has set it apart so far—particularly in home market Japan where cute is king—are the stickers that friends can send to each other.

Some are free, some cost a few dollars and Line's internet sticker shop sells thousands, from Hello Kitty pop-ups and Super Mario to Manga and Disney characters.

One service allows users to create and sell their own characters, while Line's homegrown stable of stickers include the duck Sally, a sad-face bear called Brown and Cony the rabbit.

"If someone shares some good news with me, I can send them a sticker like "awesome!" or alternatively "I am depressed" when something sad happens," said office worker Akiko Mura.

"You can express yourself not only in words but also in images."

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