

Walmart, Rakuten unveil alliance on e-books, groceries (Update)

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Japan's electronic commerce and internet firm Rakuten, whose Tokyo headquarters is seen here, has agreed to a strategic alliance with US retail giant Walmart

US retail giant Walmart and Japanese internet titan Rakuten unveiled a strategic partnership which will include collaboration on digital books in the United States and grocery delivery in Japan.

The two firms will launch a new online grocery delivery service in Japan later this year, and have agreed to a retail alliance making Walmart a key partner on e-books and audiobooks using the Rakuten format Kobo, according to a statement late Thursday.

The deal comes amid a growing international presence by US online giant Amazon, which offers an array of services in different countries including video, e-books and grocery delivery.

"Rakuten is a strong e-commerce business and we're excited to collaborate with the top online shopping destination in Japan," said Walmart chief executive Doug McMillon, who met Rakuten CEO Hiroshi Mikitani in Tokyo to sign the agreement.

"We look forward to expanding our grocery footprint in Japan and launching a new offering of e-books and audiobooks for our customers in the US."

Mikitani said, "As global leaders in e-commerce and offline shopping, Rakuten and Walmart are uniquely positioned to empower our customers around the world with innovative services."

The companies said a joint venture would be established between Japan online grocery delivery service Rakuten and Seiyu GK, a subsidiary of Walmart. The service "Rakuten Seiyu Netsuper" is planned for the latter half of 2018.

The new service will be powered by Rakuten technology, using artificial intelligence "to offer a more personalized merchandise offering," according to the statement.

Additionally, Walmart will be the exclusive mass retail partner for the Kobo brand in the US, which includes e-readers and digital applications similar to those of Amazon's Kindle.

Kobo was created in Canada and acquired in 2011 by Rakuten.

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