



## Sitecore Case Study:



# Sankei Digital Inc. – MSN Sankei and Sitecore Launch New Photo Experience In the Cloud. Sitecore’s CMS Azure Edition Delivers Real-Time Photo Website for Japan’s Leading News Portal

## Summary

In January 2011, “MSN Sankei News,” the news site operated jointly by Microsoft Japan and Sankei Digital Inc., who is responsible for managing the media website of the Sankei Shimbun Group, underwent a renewal. The focal point of this renewal is the photo integration site “MSN Sankei Photo” (<http://photo.sankei.jp.msn.com/>), which was launched as a new service. This site takes on a new generation of photo journalism by putting impactful photos that can “be directly delivered from onsite photographers” at its core. In March 2011, when the Great East Japan Earthquake occurred, the overwhelming reality with which the devastation of the disaster-stricken area was delivered through this site caused a huge sensation not only in Japan but worldwide. The system of providing content of Sankei Photo on a 24-7-365 basis is firmly supported by the cloud computing CMS (content management system) of Sitecore called “Sitecore CMS Azure Edition.”

## Challenge

In October 2007, in a joint effort with Microsoft Japan, the Sankei Shimbun Group set up the news site “MSN Sankei News” in an effort to pursue the future of information media in an internet generation. Site operation is managed by Sankei Digital Inc., which also manages the media website of Sankei Shimbun Group. MSN Sankei News is a news site which came about as a fusion of a system that delivers news content on a 24-7-365 basis utilizing the data collection capacity and editing capacity that only a major newspaper company has, and an internet portal that is recognized worldwide as the pioneer of online media. The site has seen a healthy growth in readership right from the get-go, with a current monthly number of page views of 372,000,000 (average between January - December 2010, according to Microsoft Japan investigation), and has grown to be one of Japan’s major news sites within the three years since it was established.

In 2010, in the third year of operation, a renewal plan for the site was brought up, which would promote further expansion of site content and service. The target date for renewal was set for the following year, in January 2011. From around April 2010, the core members from Sankei Shimbun, Microsoft Japan and Sankei Digital involved in the design and operation of the site, began to study various solutions for this renewal.

The final green light for the plan was the decision to attempt to launch a new site/service which puts the main focus within MSN Sankei News on photographs.

MSN Sankei Photo  
[photo.sankei.jp.msn.com](http://photo.sankei.jp.msn.com)



## Sitecore Case Study:



*“There are contents that can only be seen in MSN Sankei Photo – that is of utmost importance, and we were able to bring forth this characteristic as totally new photojournalism. This was made possible precisely because Sitecore CMS was equipped with the mechanism and function that allowed us to flexibly express our thoughts and feelings on site structure and content.”*

**— Ryuichi Togo,  
Senior Producer,  
Consumer & Online  
Operations Division,  
MSN Services section  
of Microsoft Japan**



The idea was not only to target the demographic of such photo websites of the past, but to establish a place for the casual fans, which have increased in number in recent years with the widespread popularity of digital cameras, to browse and display their work, to enjoy and share the depths of the world of cameras and photography. It is from these concepts that the photo integration site “MSN Sankei Photo” was planned.

According to Ryuichi Togo (senior producer of the Consumer & Online Operations Division, MSN Service Section of Microsoft Japan), “After 3 years since the establishment of MSN Sankei News, a renewal was important to continue to be an attractive media. It was necessary to release a new service that would be the focal point of this renewal. After studies were conducted, it was decided that, in addition to news images and videos, we would introduce into the world a photo integration site, where posts can be made by general camera and photography fans. By September, an outline of this service was solidified.”

Right from the start, MSN Sankei News had a solid base of attracting camera fans by actively posting panoramic photos on the site that actualize a “360-degree view.” This time, the aim was to utilize this renewal as an opportunity to further expand the target audience to an even broader demographic, and to push the envelope with a new style of photojournalism.

Once the outline of the service was solidified, it was time to begin research and discussion sessions on specifications with the Photojournalism Department at Sankei Shimbun, which is in charge of producing and updating the content of the new site. This department had strong feelings on site content and display, and site specifications and function requirements were becoming increasingly advanced and complicated. At this point in October 2010, time was running out with only three months remaining until the renewal open date of January 2011.

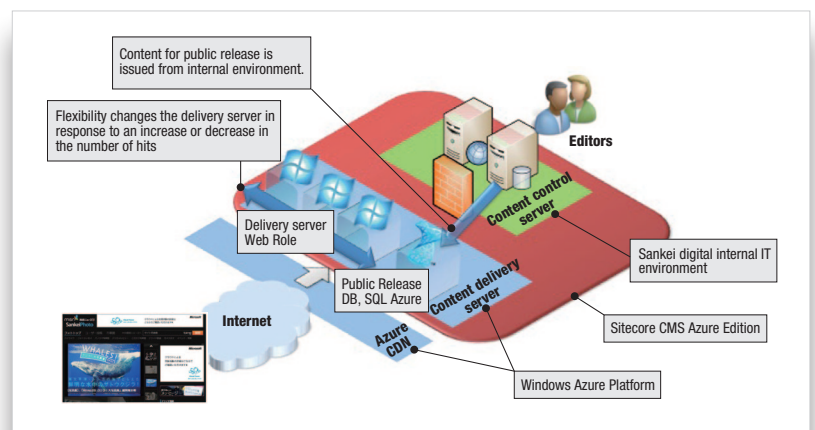
In order to build a site that meets the target specifications and function requirements in this short time period, Mr. Togo, who was overseeing the renewal, and Keiichi Hashimoto, CEO of Sigma Consulting, the company in charge of building the system, took the approach of constructing the site on a cloud platform through Windows Azure. Mr. Hashimoto reflects back on this time saying, “At that point in October, even the structure for posts was not firmly defined, and the genre of articles was not yet established. We even needed to prepare a new blog tool. To build all of this from scratch would result in development costs every time a change was made after site launch. With this in mind, the idea was brought up to build the system utilizing cloud computing based on Windows Azure.” At this time, Sigma Consulting already had several e-commerce sites going that were built with cloud computing on the Windows Azure platform, and they had absolutely no hesitation in building a large-scale commercial media site based on cloud computing.

### Solution

Shortly after the decision was made to utilize cloud computing based on Windows Azure, “Sitecore CMS Azure Edition,” which supports cloud computing, was selected as the CMS to realize the concept of MSN Sankei Photo. Mr. Hashimoto who states that “it was pretty much an immediate decision,” explains the reason behind this selection as follows.

“The first major factor that contributed to this decision was the abundant implementation experience of Sitecore CMS on a global level. The MSN Sankei Photo requirements were quite advanced in terms of both function and time period for building the site. We had heard of Site core’s success with developing in a short time period, a portal site, which although was for a different industry sector had likewise very complex requirements, and we were confident that Sitecore CMS could respond to our needs.”

**MSN Sankei Photo**  
photo.sankei.jp.msn.com



This example that Mr. Hashimoto refers to is the official site of the British soccer team, the Manchester City Football Club. This site needed to be built to support diverse design variations, such as ticket reservations and E-commerce of goods. Despite these requirements, the site was developed in just 2.5 months with the use of a highly functional .NET framework based development platform.

The other reason that Mr. Hashimoto brings up, which can be said to be the best feature of Sitecore CMS, was the highly flexible way in which it can execute customization of the site or site content, and expansion of functions. “Since MSN Sankei Photo is a news site with content supplied by the media, it was already anticipated from this point that frequent changes would occur to specifications and function even after site launch. When we considered a CMS that can respond to these changes quickly, in view of high compatibility with the Windows Azure platform, there was no other practical solution other than Sitecore CMS.” (Keiichi Hashimoto)

Once the method for site building was determined, work to build the system progressed rapidly in a short amount of time to establish a system in which specifications and functions are reflected sequentially as they are defined. As was mentioned earlier, the requirements brought up by the Photojournalism Department in this process were indeed wide-ranging. According to Tetsuji Goto of the Photojournalism Department of Sankei Shimbun, Tokyo Headquarters, the requirements that were presented for building the content included maintaining high image quality without losing resolution of the posted photo data, the ability to flexibly change page layout in response to content, and the ability to freely add subgenres to be setup under each genre. Mr. Goto says “we felt very strongly about wanting to show content, especially photo data posts, as cleanly as possible with the highest possible resolution. Additionally, since it is a site that will meet the specific needs of photography fans, we asked that the site have the ability to support Exif (Exchangeable Image File Format) information, which has various embedded data, such as the type of camera used to shoot the photo, and shooting conditions. Even as we presented these types of demands, which may seem quite selfish on our part, we continued to have concentrated exchanges on function implementation. Supporting these demands on the system side must have surely been an enormous feat, and there were times when I thought that we would not make the renewal deadline. However, we were quite surprised that in a short time period of a mere 2.5 months, the site was completed to a state in which almost all the needs of our Photojournalism Department were fulfilled.” (Tetsuji Goto)

The configuration of the MSN Sankei Photo system is as shown in the diagram. The content delivery server is placed on a public cloud built within the data center in Hong Kong through the Sitecore CMS Azure Edition which is built on a Windows Azure Platform. Content delivery is further optimized using “Azure CDN (Content Delivery Network).” The advantages feature of this approach is the flexibility and expandability that allows the delivery server to be changed flexibly in response to the increase or decrease in the number of hits to the site. This allows MSN Sankei Photo to handle a large capacity of data. Furthermore, this public cloud was initially set up in the North American data center, but was changed to Hong Kong to improve display response of large capacity photo data.

On the other hand, the content management server is set up within the in-house environment of Sankei Digital in Tokyo. This server is accessed by the editors of the Photojournalism Department on a daily basis, and the Sankei Photo page is set up to get updated moment by moment through the editorial management interface of Sitecore CMS. This easy-to-use feature is praised highly by Mr. Goto. “Our job is to release, one after another, the many powerful photographs that continuously get sent in from local onsite photographers. We place great importance on the sense of speed that is unique to a photojournalism site, and the intuitive and easy-to-use Sitecore CMS interface more than fulfills this need. In fact, with a small lesson in basic operation the first time through, the site can be used without outside help from next time.” (Tetsuji Goto)

### Effect of implementation

Two months after the site began operation on January 17, 2011, the true value of MSN Sankei Photo was to be tested as a photojournalism site. In the afternoon of March 11, the Great East Japan Earthquake took place, which resulted in unprecedented damage that swept down upon the Tohoku and Kanto regions. The panoramic photos that were able to convey the devastation of the disaster-stricken area with more detailed clarity than any other news site quickly became a huge sensation, not only in Japan but worldwide. Mr. Goto explains, “In face of the problem of not being able to deliver newspapers to the disaster areas and evacuation centers, cameramen entered the Tohoku area and shot images continuously, day and night, of the devastation of the disaster areas, and of many messages that were written by disaster victims. Sankei Photo took these photos that were being sent in one after another, and presented them as coverage which linked the reader with the disaster area. The feedback exceeded our greatest expectations.” (Tetsuji Goto)



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**— Keiichi Hashimoto,  
 CEO of Sigma  
 Consulting**

Since March 11, the number of hits to Sankei Photo has skyrocketed, and drastically exceeded the target monthly number of hits that was set for one year from start up. Despite this excessive concentration of traffic, the site continued to provide stable service with no loss in response time. This fact is supported by the stability and high performance of Sitecore CMS, which operates on the Windows Azure platform.

A large contributing factor to actualizing this high performance, which handled the huge monthly number of accesses exceeding 20,000,000, was the Windows Azure platform CDN (Content Delivery Network), which was implemented after the site was up and running. This CDN, which automatically caches a portion of the content to a neighboring location, drastically promotes high-speed page display of the MSN Sankei Photo, where many high resolution photos are laid out.

In addition to stability and performance, Mr. Hashimoto was impressed with the flexible response that Sitecore CMS showed to frequent specification changes even after the originally planned start of operations, such as changes in layout. “The management function of Sitecore CMS is highly flexible and can promptly respond every time a change request occurs. Additionally, the sense of awareness of all the editors and designers of the Photojournalism Department is very high, and the division of work and segregation of duties were clear. I feel that we had an ideal situation in which a great system was able to respond to great teamwork.” (Keiichi Hashimoto)

As a future expansion plan of MSN Sankei Photo, port scaling applications and site display optimization for mobile devices are being prepared and studied. For the latter, support of a multi-device display (output),

which is equipped as standard to Sitecore CMS, will be utilized. “Since this is a site with a strong experimental factor for which no other sites that are even similar, the site was completed through improvements that were constantly and continuously being made as we were up and running. There are contents that can only be seen in MSN Sankei Photo – that is of utmost importance, and we were able to bring forth this characteristic as totally new photojournalism. This was made possible precisely because Sitecore CMS was equipped with the mechanism and function that allowed us to flexibly express our thoughts and feelings on site structure and content.” (Ryuichi Togo)

Mrsrs. Togo, Goto, and Hashimoto have even higher expectations for the high scalability, high performance, and flexible customizability delivered through the perfect combination of the Sitecore CMS and Azure platform toward the extension and expansion of the site, content, and service that will continue to be provided in response the growing number of hits.



Sitecore's Web Content Management System (CMS), portal and marketing automation software solutions enable companies to deliver compelling Web experiences. Sitecore's award-winning CMS software makes it easy for businesses to create and update dynamic, full-featured websites of all types. Sitecore's industry leading flexibility and scalability allow companies to better leverage their content, improve customer experience and drive business growth.

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