

COMPANIES

Alibaba.com pushes new AI tool to help merchants

Tracy Qu

tracy.qu@scmp.com

Alibaba.com, the international business-to-business wholesale marketplace of Alibaba Group Holding, expects the roll-out of a new artificial intelligence (AI) tool to help the platform's merchants automate their client-facing operations, including writing emails, to entice more customers overseas.

An AI-upgraded version of OKKI, the customer relationship management software-as-a-service (SaaS) offering under Alibaba Cloud, will be available to foreign trade merchants from today, according to Alibaba.com.

It said the response rate of these merchants' overseas clients improved by 32 per cent when their business correspondence was polished by OKKI.

Alibaba Cloud, the digital technology unit of Post owner Alibaba, distributes over the internet a range of software and other digital resources as an on-demand service, just like electricity from a power grid. This Alibaba unit is leading the e-commerce giant's AI development efforts.

The new AI tool for merchants on its international wholesale platform underscores Hangzhou-based Alibaba's sharpened focus on AI and enterprise users, which new group chief executive Eddie Wu Yongming outlined in an internal letter sent to employees in September.

In October, Alibaba Cloud unveiled a suite of new industry-specific AI tools, built on its large language model Tongyi Qianwen, to help enterprises unlock the transformative potential of generative AI – the technology behind ChatGPT and similar services.

The release of a new AI-enabled SaaS offering for Alibaba.com's merchants comes amid increased competition in major overseas markets from the likes of Temu, the US-based discount shopping platform launched by PDD Holdings in September last year.

Alibaba International Digital Commerce, the business group that operates retail and wholesale marketplaces including Lazada, AliExpress and Alibaba.com, has become one of the e-commerce giant's fastest-growing units at a time when domestic retail sales have turned sluggish.