

CASE STUDY

IBM Mexico

Big Blue Thinks Even Bigger

Think. The iconic slogan of IBM founder Thomas J. Watson, Sr. has defined the company for nearly a century. IBM employees have earned five Nobel Prizes, and the company holds more patents than any other technology firm. This culture of innovation inspires IBM engineers and consultants in more than 170 countries. That includes Mexico, where company leaders have collaborated with MIT Sloan on yet another information advance—an executive program not for its own employees but for its customers.

The concept emerged from a philosophy promoted by both institutions—trust-based marketing. When you provide your customers with unbiased information, you build their trust. The leaders of IBM Mexico decided that the most valuable perk they could offer their best customers was late-breaking information that could have a real impact on the growth of their organizations.

So company staff sat down with MIT Sloan faculty and program designers to create a learning vehicle tailored to the specific challenges facing IBM Mexico's customers. An adaptation of MIT Sloan's highly-regarded executive education program *IT for the Non-IT Executive*, the custom program they devised is an intensive two-day session for 30-50 executives—in teams of three from each company. The program is held close to Mexico City for the convenience of IBM Mexico's busy clients.

Now in its third year, this team-based experience provides an optimal opportunity for the CEO, CFO, and CIO of high-growth companies to convene and expand their thinking about IT. Specifically, they look at IT from a fresh perspective—not as a cost center, but as a strategic resource for profit and growth. With the benefit of MIT Sloan faculty who provide critical frameworks and deep expertise in the field, program participants become more aware of the strategic role that IT can play in the larger goals of their organizations.

Roberto Sanchez, Director of Marketing at IBM Mexico, says the dynamic of the participants makes this inventive program especially productive. "While it's true that people learn through experience, at the end of the day, smart leaders also acknowledge that they should be reading more, learning from others, keeping their knowledge fresh," Sanchez observes. "It can be intimidating to have to admit not knowing something, but in a positive environment, working with professors who clearly have access to

PROFILE

IBM Mexico wishes to strengthen its relationships with its best customers, which include many of the top companies in Mexico.

ACTION STRATEGY

Create a custom program that gives clients critical information and perspectives about IT—information that is not biased toward IBM.

LEARNING MECHANISM

A customized version of MIT Sloan's open enrollment program *IT for the Non-IT Executive* that is tailored to the specific needs of IBM's clients.

RESULT

IBM Mexico earns the loyalty of its clients and, through the program, learns a great deal more about their needs. Clients are energized by the strategic possibilities of IT and engage with IBM to make these new ideas reality.



“We have seen an immediate impact from this MIT Sloan custom program—stronger relationships with our customers as they achieve greater success. We are now looking at how this program might be adapted for our clients in other regions of Latin America.”

Roberto Sanchez
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the latest information, this peer group is comfortable asking questions that reveal what they don't know—and they are thrilled to get the answers.”

Sanchez notes that the custom program does not include a single plug for Big Blue. “IBM Mexico is not out to gain anything from this experience,” he notes, “except a better understanding of and relationship with our clients. And we want these executive teams to build stronger bonds with one another—a long-term takeaway.”

In the end, all parties are seeing the benefits. “We are being called earlier to look at projects because customers trust that we are doing everything we can to make them successful,” Sanchez says. “In the case of this custom program with MIT Sloan, we are providing them with vital information. When the program is over, they contact us because the experience sparked new ideas, and they're excited to get started.”

Sanchez says that participating executives appreciate the power of the knowledge they take away from the program—even more so as they gain distance from it. “Our intention is to provide clients with valuable information and methodology. No strings attached. That's quite clear to them. In fact, it is that what makes the program work so well.”

Thomas Watson, Sr. would no doubt be pleased that IBM is, more than ever, inspiring its customers to think—bigger and better.