IBM Mexico

THE CHALLENGE

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 advancement—an executive program not for its own employees but for its customers.

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. They turned to MIT Sloan to collaborate on the design of a learning vehicle tailored to the specific challenges facing IBM Mexico’s customers.

THE SOLUTION

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. IBM staff sat down with MIT Sloan faculty and program directors to create an adaptation of MIT Sloan’s highly regarded executive education program, IT for the Non-IT Executive. The multi-year custom program they devised began as an intensive two-day session for 30-50 executives—in teams of three from each company. The program was held close to Mexico City for the convenience of IBM Mexico’s busy clients.

This team-based experience provided an optimal opportunity for the CEO, CFO, and CIO of high-growth companies to convene and expand their thinking about IT. Specifically, they looked 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 provided critical frameworks and deep expertise in the field, program participants became 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, said the dynamic of the participants made 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 observed. Sanchez noted 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 noted, “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.”

WHY MIT
IBM wanted a program designed to address the specific challenges facing IBM Mexico’s customers and chose MIT Sloan’s IT for the Non-IT Executive program to fit their needs. As a team, IBM staff and MIT faculty and program directors look at IT from a fresh perspective—not as a cost center, but as a strategic resource for profit and growth.

MIT Sloan faculty provide critical frameworks and deep expertise in the field of IT. “Working with professors who clearly have access to 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,” said Sanchez.

THE RESULT
In the end, all parties saw 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 said. “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 said 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, that is what makes the program work so well.”

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