Credly

CASE STUDY

Shifting The Up-Skilling Paradigm: Digital badges help IBM create a diverse, inclusive workforce

The global workforce is facing a serious talent shortage. With the emergence of new and rapidly-evolving technology, workers at all levels need new skills to meet the workforce demands. However 51% of industry executives cite finding appropriately skilled workers in local labor markets as the greatest challenge related to skills. And, 71% of corporate recruiters indicated they cannot find applicants with sufficient practical experience.

Innovative organizations such as IBM are not immune to these challenges. This case study looks at IBM's business decision to create a digital badging program to foster employee skill progression and the outcomes of its program adoption.

Background

IBM is a global company where innovation is at the core of strategy. The company focuses on technologies that transform their clients, including AI for business, cloud platforms, cybersecurity and blockchain. With operations in more than 170 countries and a global partner ecosystem, IBM and its network need to attract and retain the industry's most capable, flexible and talented workforce to solve customer problems and deliver dynamic insights for businesses, governments and non-profit organizations. The IBM Global Skills Initiative organizes and delivers the most current learning opportunities to ensure the workforce of IBM and its partners keep their skills current and competitive in the fast-paced IT economy.

Challenges

Emerging technology requires new, liquid skills.

Emerging technology like cloud and cognitive big data require not only new skills, but "liquid skills" to keep pace with rapidly-evolving technology development. In 2014, technology evolved at a rate of 18 months. By 2016, it began to evolve and launch within just 12 weeks or less. IBM had to rethink how they would meet the market demand for talent.

A changing workplace.

New collar jobs that require specialized skills, but not necessarily a traditional college degree, require new credentials. As a global company, IBM needed the ability to find skilled experts with verifiable, timely and portable credentials by location.

Decentralized IT.

Information Technology at an organizational level is changing. Line of business jobs now require IT skills,

and organizations are facing a surge of Shadow IT, in which information-technology systems and solutions are built and used inside organizations without explicit organizational approval. As IT becomes more decentralized, IBM was looking for a way to recognize and verify those skills and competencies.

Developing and verifying talent.

To maintain customer confidence in IBM solutions and meet its strategic goals, developing and verifying competencies and skills is important across the entire IBM ecosystem.

Solution: Digital Badges

These challenges required IBM to create a new credential structure to signal and surface capability. The company looked to digital badges as the solution, as it provides IBM with:

- Timely, verified, and portable credentials.
- Ability to track skills at the nano level and make them discoverable to HR and hiring managers in real-time.
- Being able to differentiate employees by skills, while seeing a complete view of the individual's broader competencies and abilities.

IBM and Digital Badges

IBM leaders sought a digital badging solution that offered more than seamless sharing to popular online destinations. They needed a platform to meet key requirements, including:

- Rigorous and authoritative badging that is verifiable, trusted and evidence-based.
- A complete view of an individual's knowledge, skills and abilities that represents his or her discrete skills along with broader competencies and certifications.
- Diverse badge issuing and management options including integration through web service APIs and the ability to expire, replace and revoke badges once issued.
- Interoperability and openness of badges that can be easily shared to professional networking sites.
- Powerful data analytics and reporting features that enable IBM to produce global heat maps of talent.
- Linkage with talent acquisition and HR systems to enhance visibility and understanding of employee career planning and progression.
- Ability to support IBM in promoting its digital credential program to build awareness.
- Real-time verification of employee achievements.

"IBM will always attract the world's best and brightest. With our digital credentials program, we want to shift mindsets in our industry and make tech more diverse and inclusive. We want to bring in people with non-traditional backgrounds, attract people re-entering the workforce or relaunching their careers. We want to create more jobs for people where tech jobs are scarce to create a more diverse and inclusive workforce."

David Leaser
Senior Program Executive, Innovation and Growth Initiatives
IBM

Outcomes

IBM launched its industry-leading digital badge program on Credly Acclaim with the goals of increasing employee recognition, motivating skill progression, and making the IT workforce more inclusive.

At the pilot launch in 2015, IBM offered four types of digital badges across learning and certification tracks representing foundational, intermediate, advanced and expert-level skills and competency. As badging became more integral to the organization's training and recognition approach, IBM rapidly expanded the types of badged activities. While this expansion has focused primarily on learning and certification,

the program now includes recognition of essential contribution and advocacy-based programs. In 2018, there are more than 1,600 different badged activities available for individuals to engage with.

Since the program launch, the IBM ecosystem of employees and consumers has overwhelmingly embraced digital credentials. As of 2018, the program has more than 350,000 badge earners and 1 million badges have been issued.

The rapid adoption of the badging program has also spurred increased awareness of IBM's learning and certification programs. Digital badges are easily shared to professional networking sites, and as of early 2018, IBM's program has garnered more than 200 million social media impressions. This organic social sharing is equivalent to $39,000 per month in marketing value.

Other key program outcomes:

- IBM uses digital badges to create skill heat maps and identify existing talent pools to quickly ramp up new technology initiatives.
- The program is at the convergence of industry and education, and badges can be issued for credit.
- Badges turn traditional transactions into skills progression that engages and motivates employees. Eighty-seven percent of IBM badge earners feel more engaged with the organization.

Conclusions

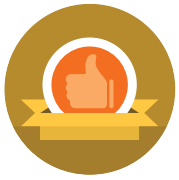
The impact of a digital badging program on both IBM and its employees has been overwhelmingly positive and rapid. IBM achieved tangible returns on its investment in badging—returns that align with IBM's need to attract, engage and progress employees in order to further its mission of innovation and advancement.

Endnotes

1) "Facing the Storm: Navigating the Global Skills Crisis." IBM Institute for Business Value, 2016.
2) Pursuit of relevance: How higher education remains viable in today's dynamic world. IBM Institute for Business Value, June 2015.

IBM's Badge Program Generates Measurable Results

Course enrollments in IBM-badged online courses increased 125%



Certifications achieved a 57% pass rate increase

64% direct increase in product trial downloads.

195 countries are represented in the skills registry

Increased brand exposure: IBM garnered 200M+ social media impressions, worth $39,000/month in digital marketing value

Employability: 92% of badge earners say the badge verifies job skills

Course completions of IBM-badged online courses increased by 694%

Increased engagement: 87% of IBM badge earners feel more engaged with IBM and are motivated to learn more