

The academy of the future

IBM's Academy of Technology blazes new trails in collaboration and Inclusion

IBM's leading technical minds overcame budgetary challenges and stretched the boundaries of new collaboration technology to hold a new kind of annual meeting – virtually. And announced increased access to Academy membership.

Unfortunately, the 2008 [annual meeting](#) coincided with the first major signs of trouble in the global economy and financial markets. Academy event organizers and executives agreed that the travel expenditures involved with holding an in-person event might send the wrong kind of message in these circumstances.

Seizing the opportunity

IBM technical leaders from around the globe look forward all year to this event. A creative solution was needed.

Members of the Academy and researchers seized the opportunity to create a new kind of event using leading edge collaboration and social networking tools. All while preserving the spirit and energy of the event.

The event kicked off with a video broadcast on October 30th and was followed by a three-day virtual event two weeks later, utilizing the following tools to conduct different portions of the 72 hour world calendar of activities:

- [Lotus Connections](#) provided the main hub for the event and [Lotus Sametime Connect 8.0.1](#) enabled one-on-one as well as group chats to take place throughout.

- A “miniJam” was held using a version of [IBM's Jam offering](#) resulting in over 2,500 posts.

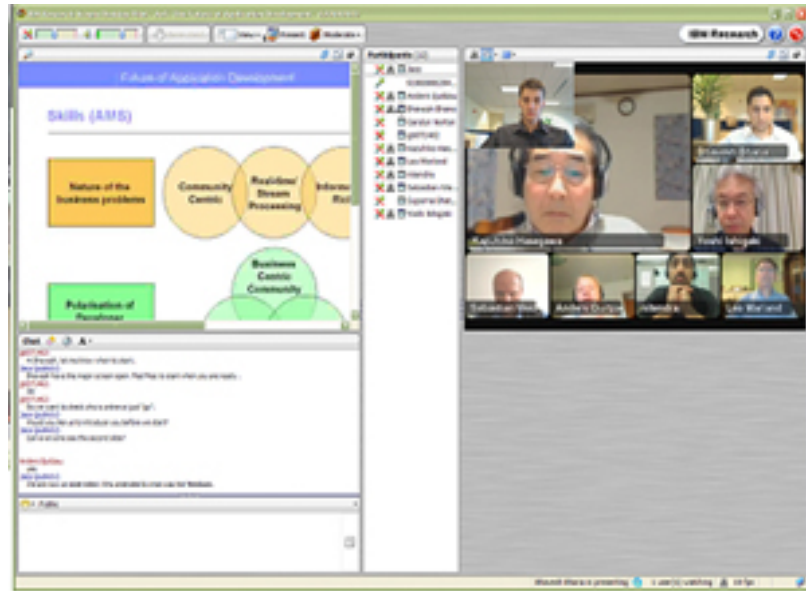


- A variety of senior executive webcasts were pre-recorded and made available through [IBM Jukebox](#).



- Poster sessions and discussions were held in secured areas of [Second Life](#).

- Web-based video conferences and breakout sessions took place throughout using the Scopia web videoconferencing tool currently being piloted in IBM Research.



By using these new technologies, not only were senior technical leaders given the opportunity to try new tools, holding the meeting virtually only cost about 10% of what it would have cost for a traditional face-to-face multi-day event.

Looking ahead

Turning a traditional meeting like this into a virtual event took great coordination and effort, yet was accomplished in only 4 weeks time. But as a result, the event became a proof point for how nontraditional collaborative models can help a community move forward.

Many of the attendees have committed to continued use of the tools which will be important since many of the tools are not quite "ready for prime time." Continued use and refinement of the tools can help with making them more flexible, robust and intuitive. A change in culture is also required to convince others that while face-to-face meetings will always be necessary, many interactions can easily and effectively be transferred into the virtual space.

The changing face of IBM's Academy of Technology

Historically, members were elected to the Academy of Technology by their peers in recognition of their technical excellence and leadership. Membership is an honor, but also carries the responsibility to engage in Academy-sponsored activities and to promote technical growth IBM-wide, in addition to one's regular job.

In the near future, the AoT will be opened for additional membership to include all IBM Distinguished Engineers (DEs), making the AoT more fully representative of IBM's diverse technical leadership community.

A new election process and bylaws are under development. Membership to Distinguished Engineers will be made available shortly after the new bylaws are put in place.