IBM employs digital badges to attract, engage and progress talent across the globe

Acclaim

Overview

IBM is a globally integrated technology and consulting company where innovation is at the core of strategy. The company develops and markets software and systems hardware, along with a broad range of infrastructure, cloud and consulting services. 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

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.

Engaging workers. Research from IBM's Smarter Workforce Institute revealed that recognition is an important component in a company's ability to attract, engage and progress talent. Multi-channel recognition, in particular, can increase employees' level of engagement, which in turn can drastically reduce turnover.

Network coordination. IBM relies on a network of strategic training and industry partners, but coordination across learning, development and recognition programs in diverse global markets was challenging, and the availability of key performance data was inconsistent.

IBM and Acclaim

To address these challenges, IBM looked to digital badges issued in the web standard Open Badge format. In considering which badging platform would meet its key requirements, IBM leaders sought a solution that offered more than seamless sharing to popular online destinations. Acclaim's advanced capabilities met all of those needs:

- Secure, modern architecture with a mobile-optimized user experience
- Intuitive badge template creation, from graphic design to metadata
- Diverse badge issuing and management options including integration through web service APIs and the ability to expire, replace and revoke badges once issued
- Powerful data analytics and reporting features that enable IBM to produce global heat maps of talent
- Unique "authorized issuer" capabilities for central definition and management of badged achievements, while delegating to internal teams and external network partners the ability to issue authorized IBM badges
- Real-time verification of achievements
- Labor market insights matched to badged skills for both IBM and its badge earners

> **"** IBM is taking a leadership position within the IT industry by employing digital badge technology to attract new talent, progress existing employees along a career path, and match people to the jobs they were born to do. **"**
>
> David Leaser
> *Sr. program manager, Innovation and Growth Initiatives at IBM*

Given the company's access to technology experts, why did IBM leaders decide to work with Acclaim instead of building its own digital badging platform? Three distinct reasons emerged as IBM explored its options:

- The time and money needed to re-create features offered by Acclaim, coupled with the ability to maintain future enhancements as standards, markets and social networks change, was determined to be an impractical use of IBM resources.

- A vendor-neutral badging platform offers more value to badge earners who collect achievements from multiple issuers, receive recommendations for learning and job opportunities, and share their badges on professional and social networks.

- Acclaim's team of badging experts bring program-wide oversight by leveraging industry best practices to inform IBM's badging strategy, program design, analytics, operations and customer service.

Solution

IBM partnered with Acclaim to develop, launch, evaluate and maintain an industry-leading digital badge program to increase employee recognition and motivate skill progression across its ecosystem. Acclaim also provides IBM customers an easy-to-use platform that shows that IBM badge earners possess verifiable, in-demand skills and knowledge.

IBM's badge program was designed with concrete business goals in mind:

- Solidify the client base across partners and programs
- Build a loyal developer base
- Proliferate skills in areas important to IBM
- Track skills at the nano level
- Increase license sales through product trial downloads
- Reduce customer service calls through learning that helps customers solve their own problems

IBM offers four types of digital badges across different learning and certification tracks.

Explorer badges represent achievements that occur in the early stages of acquiring knowledge and developing skills for a particular domain. The Explorer category includes instructor-led and self-directed training, workshops, mentoring sessions and other quizzes and assessments.

Advocate badges recognize achievements associated with a learner at a higher proficiency level within a domain. Activities associated with Advocate badges include competing in Hackathons, publishing articles, teaching or mentoring others and applying skills in other real-world settings.

Certified badges are awarded to IT professionals who have earned formal IBM certifications through a high-stakes exam process. The Certified badge earner has demonstrated an exceptionally high level of understanding of the certification topic.

Inventor badges are awarded to those who have proven an ability to design and implement complex technology solutions and applications. Members of this elite group are typically developers who demonstrate mastery-level skills that result in significant real-world development application.
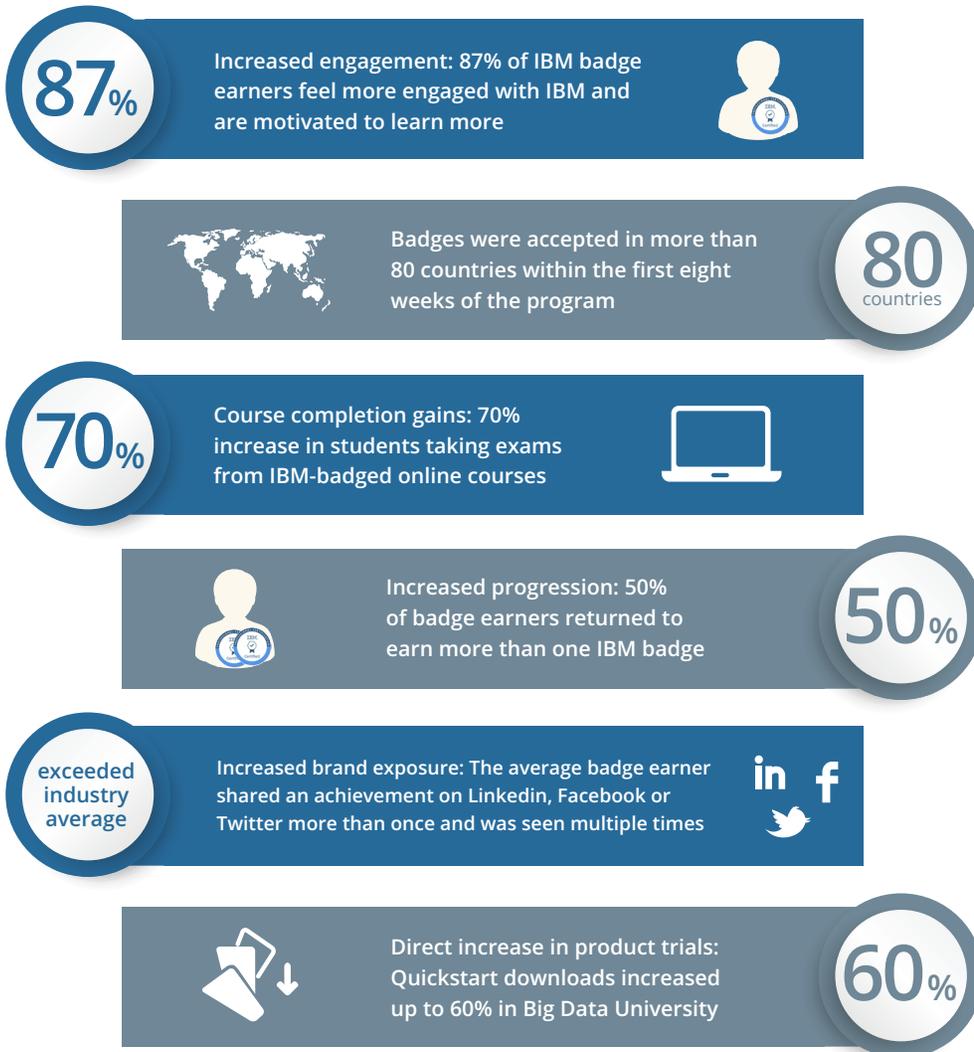
*"*Adobe, Autodesk, IBM, Microsoft: Acclaim has a growing list of private-sector customers, and so far has issued more than 1.5 million badges. For some badges, claim rates... are as high as 90% — a promising sign that the marketplace is seeing value in the credentials.*"*

Fast Company

Say Hello to the University of Microsoft

Conclusions

In the first six months of its program launch, IBM achieved tangible returns on its investment in badging through Acclaim — returns that align with IBM's need to attract, engage and progress employees in order to further its mission of innovation and advancement.

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

80 countries Badges were accepted in more than 80 countries within the first eight weeks of the program

70% Course completion gains: 70% increase in students taking exams from IBM-badged online courses

50% Increased progression: 50% of badge earners returned to earn more than one IBM badge

exceeded industry average Increased brand exposure: The average badge earner shared an achievement on Linkedin, Facebook or Twitter more than once and was seen multiple times

60% Direct increase in product trials: Quickstart downloads increased up to 60% in Big Data University

Discover how your organization can engage employees and drive business results with digital badges through Acclaim at www.youracclaim.com.

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