International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) is a multinational computer technology and consulting corporation headquartered in Armonk, New York, United States. Operating through five segments: Global Technology Services, Global Business Services, Systems and Technology Group, Software, and Global Financing, IBM is the world's largest computer company and systems integrator. After selling its PC company division to Lenovo in 2005, IBM concentrated its business operations on providing infrastructure, hosting and consulting services. The company employs over 399,400 employees worldwide and serves clients in 170 countries. In 2009, IBM had annual revenues of USD 95.8 billion.

**Hiring and retention**

IBM includes a non-discrimination statement that references disability in a number of its company policies, such as its Workforce diversity policy, Global employment standards policy, Diverse business relationships policy, and Supplier conduct principles. For example, IBM's Global Employment Standards states that “IBM will not discriminate in hiring, promotion, compensation of employees and employment practices on grounds of race, color, religion, age, nationality, social or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity or expression, marital status, pregnancy, political affiliation, disability or veteran status.” Furthermore, in its workforce diversity policy, IBM emphasizes that the company will make workplace accommodations in order to ensure effective job performance by qualified people with disabilities.

To implement the policy, IBM established a central reasonable accommodation fund to cover costs of adaptive equipment that is not part of the standard workstation or to provide for other accommodations such as transportation and interpreting services. By doing so, IBM managers are able to hire employees based on merit and skill without the disincentive of having cost of accommodation charged to their department budgets.

IBM's efforts to promote workforce diversity and equal opportunity date back to 1899, when the company hired its first black male employee and three women, well before non-discrimination legislation existed. In 1914, IBM hired its first disabled employee and soon after began to recruit disabled veterans of World War I. Ever since, IBM has introduced many different programmes to create an inclusive workforce. For example, in 1943, IBM established a training centre in New York City for 600 disabled people; and in 1972, IBM initiated Computer Programmer Training for the Physically Disabled in collaboration with the US government and NGOs to train and place people with serious physical disabilities as entry-level computer programmers.
In the United States, IBM’s Project Able seeks to increase representation of employees with disabilities. Proactive recruitment of disabled job seekers is carried out through IBM’s relationship with various training and job placement organizations. Once hired, IBM has an established network of “champions” for disabled employees. Through Project Able, IBM also provides internship opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities who are pursuing careers in science, computer science, technology, engineering, or mathematics through its partnership with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) and Entry Point!. Interns are matched with experienced mentors at IBM and offered assistive technology to facilitate their work.

Worldwide IBM offices have proactively sought to increase the number of employees with disabilities through various programs. For example, IBM Australia has developed close partnerships with the National Disability Recruitment Agency, Disability WORKS Australia, and the Australian Employers’ Network on Disability to identify and employ qualified people with disabilities. At IBM Canada, its People Enablement Network Group focused on Persons with DisAbilities provides mentoring and coaching, and supports professional skills development for disabled employees.

To ensure that IBM successfully recruits and retains employees with disabilities, disability awareness training is provided to IBM recruitment specialists, managers and employees.

IBM’s Supply chain diversity program aims to ensure access to the company’s procurement process for groups who have been traditionally left out of the economic mainstream if they have a product or service that adds value to the supply chain. As a result, IBM has worked with businesses owned by diverse groups, including people with disabilities.

Products and services

Over the years, IBM has been equally active in the disability aspects of developing products and delivering services by identifying technology solutions for people with disabilities. In 1975, IBM developed the Model 1403 Braille printer; in 1980, the company introduced a talking typewriter for people who were blind; and in 1981, it invented a talking display terminal. The Executive Diversity Task Force for People with Disabilities was launched in 1995 to drive innovation in developing assistive technologies while helping customers and business partners use accessible technology and products. The company believes that the idea of manufacturing accessible products has created an unparalleled business opportunity and a way to differentiate IBM from competitors.

In 1999, the IBM Board of Directors codified a standard for product accessibility by adopting the Corporation Instruction 162, which contained a mandate to assess accessibility characteristics of all new products. As a result, IBM pays attention to accessibility considerations during the initial product development stage and then conducts accessibility assessments at key checkpoints. Corporation
Instruction 162 applies to not only all IBM products but also those manufactured by its subsidiaries. Accessibility is a key criterion IBM uses to select vendors or suppliers, and is identified as a requirement when procuring components from third parties.

In addition to manufacturing accessible products, IBM provides consulting services for companies that seek to make their corporate products and services accessible. IBM Accessibility Services enable its clients to realize the benefits of taking accessibility considerations into account. It also drives IBM’s accessibility in the product development process and develops technologies that help remove barriers and extend capabilities of disabled users.

In 2000, IBM established the IBM Human Ability and Accessibility Center as a part of its research effort. The Center’s mission is to make information technology and information in other formats easily accessible to people who have visual, cognitive, and motor disabilities by applying research technologies and introducing software solutions. The Center operates in 7 worldwide offices: Australia, Brazil, China, Europe, India, Japan and the United States.

CSR

IBM's annual Corporate Responsibility Report covers the company's priorities and notable activities with regard to corporate citizenship under the following six key headings: employees, communities, environment, supply chain responsibility, governance and public policy. The most recent 2008 report highlights the company's effort to enhance working conditions of its employees with disabilities through Accessible Workplace Connection, a Web application that streamlines the process of accommodation requests for items like computer audio screen readers and live captioning for teleconferences.

IBM’s CSR programme includes the promotion of policies to address societal challenges by working closely with governments, regulators, and standard setters at global and local levels. The company has been active in many of the worldwide regulatory organizations that set accessibility standards. For example, IBM was vice-chair of the committee that helped develop the Section 508 Regulation of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998: Electronic and Information Technology. The law not only requires that all US federal agencies make their information technology accessible to their employees and customers with disabilities but also gives federal employees and members of the public the right to sue if the government agency did not provide comparable access to the information and data available to the general population. The company was also a founding member and sponsor of the W3C Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) and continues to play key roles on the WAI Steering Council and the Web Content, Authoring Tools and User Agent Accessibility Guidelines working groups. In addition, IBM advocates open and consistent accessibility standards through its membership in the W3C and other standards and industry groups, including more than 20 international and US-based groups.
A significant part of IBM’s corporate citizenship work includes its grant programme that supports activities in education, workforce development, arts and culture, communities in need, and environment. Among many on-going programmes, the accessibilityWorks programme provides grants of IBM software applications to eligible nonprofit organizations and schools around the world to promote Web access for seniors, people with disabilities and special education students. Grants have been awarded to almost 200 organizations in 28 countries.

**Other information**

During the last decade, IBM’s contribution to supporting people with disabilities has been recognized in the areas of hiring, policies and product development.

For good hiring practices, IBM was honoured with the New Freedom Initiative Award in the US (2003), the Austin Mayor’s People with Disabilities Award (2006), the Australian Prime Minister’s award for Employer of the Year (1998 and 2002), the US President’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities “Large Employer of the Year” award (1998) and many more. For policy creation, IBM was presented with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Eagle Award (2007), which recognized the company’s leadership role in the creation of technology access policies, such as the W3C and the Web Accessibility Initiative. IBM India was also given the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) Shell Helen Keller Award (2006) for policies and practices that support equal rights and employment for persons with disabilities. Finally, for product development, IBM was honored the Access Award (2004) from the American Foundation for the Blind for promoting accessibility throughout the company in its products and services and the New York Mayoral Advocacy Award (2006).

**References**

- IBM Human Ability and Accessibility Center, [http://ibm.com/able](http://ibm.com/able)

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