

The MIT Media Lab: A Unique Perspective

Innovation is essential for achieving competitive advantage in today's high-pressure business environment. Yet too few companies have successfully integrated "systematic" innovation into their operating methods and practices. It is often too easy to become internally focused, losing sight of key sources for inspiration, customers' needs, and changing marketplaces, thus stifling creativity and long-term growth.

The MIT Media Lab is a unique resource to help companies address these issues. Its \$30-million annual budget and world-renowned faculty support close to 30 research groups and some 350 projects, ranging from smart prostheses, to computation for kids, to designing the car of the future. Broad research foci include: viral communications, common-sense computing, arts and invention, sensor nets, affective computing, simplicity, and bits and atoms.

At first, much of the Media Lab's research may seem costly or tangential to current business realities, but for more than 20 years, the Lab has demonstrated that seemingly "far out" research can find its way into the most conventional—and useful—applications. Examples range from a sensing system developed for magicians Penn and Teller that became the basis for a life-saving, baby-seat sensing device for automobiles, to electronic ink.

The Lab's faculty and research staff are joined by more than 130 graduate students (many of whom have already completed other advanced degree programs before coming to the Lab) and more than 150 undergraduates who come to work at the Lab each year.

Benefits for Sponsors

The Media Lab works closely with its sponsors to provide them with a springboard for both innovative products and thinking. By pursuing a range of research that no single company could match, the Lab provides an abundance of ideas, technologies, and paradigms for the future. Sponsoring companies can use the Media Lab for:

- **Knowledge Transfer.** One of the Lab's most important benefits, this includes the transfer of creative ideas for the use of a single new technology, or the convergence of several technologies.
- **Interactive Demonstrations.** Coming to the Lab to see research projects firsthand—and to engage in impromptu discussions about the demos—gives sponsors valuable insight into new approaches that can be applied to their own research agendas. The Lab hosts sponsor events in the spring and fall, and sponsors may arrange visits at any time. Lab researchers may also visit sponsor sites and events.
- **Brainstorming, Technology and Product Review Sessions.** Lab input can help sponsors create a new product concept, provide critical feedback during various stages of product development, or help to reframe an existing product line. Faculty members and staff are always available for consultation.
- **Student Recruitment.** One of the Media Lab's greatest strengths is the quality of its students. Sponsors can recruit these students to join them as interns during term breaks or as full-time employees after graduation. Media Lab graduates currently fill significant positions at several sponsor companies, including Microsoft, IBM, Motorola, Samsung, and France Telecom.
- **Intellectual Property.** The Media Lab has spawned dozens of new products for our sponsors, and over 60 start-up companies. In addition, the Lab generates approximately 20 new patents a year. Sponsors at the consortium level and above have royalty-free license rights, in perpetuity, to patents registered during their period of sponsorship.
- **Neutral Meeting Place for Cross-Company Collaboration.** Sponsors recognize the value of meeting other sponsors, opening the possibility for collaboration, or even for using their time at the Lab to organize collaboration with multiple divisions within their own large companies.
- **Business Connections.** Many sponsors use the Media Lab to build business connections and specifically to collaborate with downstream partners, which can enable them to come to market with a more complete product. Plus, connections with Media Lab startups provide a rich source of ongoing technology and product development.

To learn more about becoming a sponsor of the Media Lab, contact us at communications@media.mit.edu, or telephone 617-253-4915.