



Case Study

BT

“We have a very active, very robust internal research capability that’s coupled with a longstanding open innovation strategy, and a core part of that is our relationship with universities like MIT,” says Steve Whittaker of BT, the London based communication services provider.

Delivering services in over 180 countries, BT is a worldwide leader in telecommunications. Their goal is to use the power of communications to make a better world, and their commitment to innovation is a fundamental aspect of achieving this mission.

As the Head of Strategic US University Research Partnerships for BT, one part of Whittaker’s role is to oversee the relationship between BT and CSAIL Alliances. BT and MIT have been collaborating for over thirty years, and, for Whittaker, the ongoing conversations between BT and CSAIL researchers have been an integral facet of this enduring partnership.

“Computer science has been at the core of the communications industry since its inception in the 1940s – from networking and information theory to interactive media, cybersecurity and collaboration”

“As a shared enterprise, Computer Science is a rich and diverse thing,” Whittaker explains, “and the breadth of the Alliances program allows companies to engage critical developments across a spectrum of issues in computer science and artificial intelligence. Through Alliances, BT has been able to reach more broadly across the lab, providing a comprehensive view of new ideas and emerging technologies.”

BT takes a holistic approach to the partnership “When we approach a partnership like this, we think not just about short-term needs, but also the bigger and longer conversation and the richness of the way it engages with different parts of the organization.” Whittaker explains that BT has utilized a number of different paths of engagement to best harness their Alliances membership. These have included sponsored research, membership of consortia, engaging executives with thought leadership and summer internships. BT has also made extensive use of member discounts on CSAIL professional courses and sponsored the recent “Securing the Enterprise” conference.

Another vital component of BT’s success in the Alliances program has been its collaboration with other member companies. “The affiliate program is great because we’ve got fifty or sixty like-minded companies from a range of different industries and disciplines. That leads to some really vibrant discussions,” says Whittaker. He strongly believes Alliances’ ability to facilitate conversations with peers across a myriad of industries spurs progress for both the companies and the researchers: “Organizations working together in that kind of way moves the ball forward for all of them much more effectively.”

For more information about CSAIL Alliances industry engagements, please visit:

cap.csail.mit.edu