

Marc Fiammante

IBM Technical Director and Cognitician for European Governments and IBM European Data Science Profession Leader

Marc Fiammante has traveled the world many times over—accumulating more than three million frequent flier miles and filling three passports with visas—to directly understand clients’ needs. These journeys have informed many of the 16 technology patents in his name.

While Marc is understandably proud of all his inventions—a list that includes a transaction validation system that’s now prevalent on many websites—there’s one client win that makes him particularly happy. The catch is that he can’t reveal much about it. It was a project involving nine governments and several organizations. Years later, discretion is still required.

What Marc can say, using the lingo of a musician, is that this multinational initiative had as many as 30 people “dancing” separately, but instead of trying to force them to move to a singular “orchestra” around processes, he realized this delicate tango would, in fact, work best if each government continued “moving to its own tune.”

That is, as long as they all used the same “instrument”: IBM technology that enabled them to share videos and photos. As long as they harmonized on technology use, they could keep playing by their own rules.

“It was complex,” he recalls. “You’re facing headwinds because each organization and each government wants to do its own thing. They did not come into the conversation very open. They wanted to work collaboratively, but they felt they had to be very careful about everything. When you can get the buy-in of a crowd like that, you feel proud.”

An Inventive Streak

Of course, this 37-year veteran of IBM and resident of Cagnes-sur-Mer, France, is also proud of his other inventions. While being interviewed about being named to the 2020 class of IBM Fellows, he casually mentioned that he had filed a patent application for an AI invention that very day.

Here’s a sampling of Marc’s list of inventions: He created the Workstation Interactive Test Tool, or WITT. It was the first tool that helped application developers be more productive by automating many of the tasks associated with the graphical user interface (GUI) testing of applications. He was also on an IBM team in 1995 that developed the first Wi-Fi modems that were shaped like a pack of cigarettes and also invented a filter compensating for uneven bandwidth from wired networks.

He then designed a tool that automatically converted GUI to run from one operating system to another. That led an IBM executive to ask Marc to be the technical lead of an IBM Services engagement team in Africa and Europe—and later the lead of the Service Oriented Architecture & Business Process Management team. “When you’re with a team like that,” Marc notes, “you’re always moving with the technology, solving problems nobody has solved before.”

A global bank had one of those problems; it had trouble implementing a trusted corporate payment process. After working with the bank, Marc had an idea, since patented, to invent a solution for validating internet transactions with mobile devices.

“Most of the time, you have to think outside of the box, and IBM facilitates that,” he says. “IBM also has the most powerful AI machines in the world. By having access to that, I could do trial-and-error runs and test approaches that led to patents that I couldn’t otherwise imagine.”

He hopes aspiring IBM Fellows will follow their dreams with passion and a sense of fun, as he has. “Take the opportunity to further your reach,” he recommends. “Know what you are doing and take advantage of everything around you, but also remember to share your knowledge. Make sure what you create is visible and easy to use.”

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