

Coventry launches first UK city's mass online brainstorm: CovJam

IBM helps with first steps to becoming a Smarter City

Smart is...

Collaborating to tap into the wisdom of the crowd.

Coventry City Council wanted to engage in deeper, more dynamic conversations with all stakeholders about future directions for the city of Coventry. The city ran a three-day IBM Jam, enabling more than 800 different stakeholders to engage in debate in an interactive online forum. IBM and the Council are using sophisticated analytical tools to dig deep into the resulting data and unearth valuable insight and intelligence that will guide and inspire the city in its journey to becoming a Smarter City.

With a population of just over 300,000 people, Coventry is the 9th largest city in England. Its City Council is responsible for providing statutory local government services to the population, covering such areas as education, housing, public safety, refuse management and social care services.

In what are tough economic times, Coventry City Council is facing significant cuts in public funding, and will need to make difficult decisions as it looks to work more efficiently. At the same time, the Council is looking to the future, aiming to map out a strategy that will guide the development of Coventry over the coming 30 years.

To accelerate decision-making and get the best possible outcomes, the Council wanted to tap into the knowledge, passion and wisdom of all local stakeholders – citizens, businesses and public bodies. When IBM approached the organisation to pilot the first city-wide Jam in the world as part of its smarter cities initiative, CovJam was born: a three-day online collaboration event bringing together people who care about Coventry to brainstorm ideas across five topics.

“We’ve recognised that we need to have deep, honest conversations with all our stakeholders about how we tackle challenges in the current economic climate,” says Martin Reeves, Chief Executive of Coventry City Council. “Under these circumstances, what’s the most effective way to keep these conversations going? We need to do it through creativity, through harnessing people’s imaginations. The IBM Jam is one very good example of new ways of getting hold of people 24/7 and actually keeping in touch with them, rather than using quite outdated forms of communication. The number of people, and the quality and depth and honesty of the conversations surpassed our expectations – we’re really pleased with the overall success of the Jam in Coventry.”



Business Benefits

- First-ever use of the IBM Jam approach in a UK city delivered unprecedented insight into the opinions of local stakeholders.
 - By connecting diverse groups of people and giving them a forum to collaborate and share information, the Jam has generated innovative ideas.
 - Jam format pulls in unstructured information from multiple sources and provides insight that will help drive Coventry's strategic development plans over the coming 30 years.
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Free flow discussions

The CovJam event brought together a wide variety of stakeholders from all walks of life to contribute their ideas and opinions around five key topics: urban design, Coventry's image, fulfilling potential, community cohesion and putting citizens in the driving seat.

“We didn't want to contain the discussions too much; we wanted a free flow,” says Martin Reeves. “We knew that by giving a limited number of themes, we could give some kind of focus and framework for the discussions. In practice, people were able to dip into subjects that interested them, and we found that people had issues, concerns, comments and observations across all of those themes. There was a wealth of conversations between the themes as well as within them, and the Jam technology made it very easy to navigate around.”

IBM hosted the online discussions, which were facilitated by staff from the council, local community groups and IBM subject-matter experts. Participants were able to see existing conversation threads, post questions, comments or responses, and interact with local VIPs. IBM provided real-time dashboards to enable Council senior management to see emerging ideas, track keywords and gain immediate insight into discussions.

On the final day of CovJam there was a competition to generate the best simple and low-cost idea to make a practical, positive difference to the city. Some 48 entries were received and some of the best ideas will be fed into future planning initiatives, while the winning idea – to guide tourists from the station to the city centre – is already being put into action.

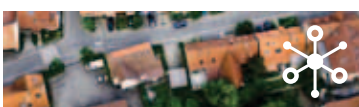
Smarter Cities

Transforming the city



Instrumented

IBM Jam technology gathered questions, responses and comments around five key topics. The information was processed for real-time trending and stored for later, more in-depth analysis.



Interconnected

The Jam brought together more than 800 online participants from previously unconnected groups of stakeholders, enabling them to interact and collaborate in a shared forum for the first time.



Intelligent

After real-time dashboards enabled the visualisation of evolving patterns of thought, IBM software analysed unstructured information, offering genuine insight into Coventry's future strategic path.

Solution Components

Solutions

- IBM Corporate Brand and Reputation Analysis (COBRA)

Services

- IBM Global Business Services – Project Management
 - IBM Jam
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– Martin Reeves, Chief Executive of Coventry City Council.

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“The IBM Jam brought out practical ideas,” says Martin Reeves. “People know that we can’t change overnight, that we need to take baby steps to being a smarter city with low-cost, practical projects. I was really impressed with some straightforward, not very costly ideas that people would like us to implement over the next few years.”

Unearthing hidden treasure

After the event, IBM used its own advanced COBRA text-analysis approach to organise the unstructured information, identify patterns and trends, and help the Council to prioritise the key topics and viewpoints.

“CovJam gave us detailed analysis of what was the consensus view and where there were disagreements between stakeholders,” says Martin Reeves. “We got an idea of what’s really bothering people, what really fires them up – that’s the real benefit of the IBM Jam. It has started to put citizens in the driving seat. The Jam is all about saying, ‘We want to hear from you, we want you to shape your own services, this is your city not ours.’”

He continues, “We’ve certainly learnt quite a bit about what people think about public space and how that affects public safety and crime. People clearly wanted to talk about how in a really smart city it’s about the police, voluntary organisations, neighbourhood groups and the authority itself working together to create a safe environment. The smart city approach is for people to say, ‘Let’s join up even more’. It’s in all of our vested interests to reduce crime, to improve our sense of well-being, and to reduce the fear of crime.”

This idea of collaboration and connected thinking emerged as a significant organising feature across all of the topics in the Jam.

► The Inside Story: Getting There

When IBM and the Council were preparing for the Jam, significant effort went into getting the right people and the right environment. It was critical to get a mix of people that would reflect the diversity of the different stakeholder groups in Coventry, and then to create an environment in which they could feel comfortable discussing the things they care about.

The ultimate goals were to achieve the best possible cross-pollination of ideas during the Jam, and to connect new groups of people in unprecedented ways. For example, rather than restricting discussions about city infrastructure to an internal audience of architects and civic planners, CovJam successfully broadened the debate to include people who live and work in the city.



“There’s no doubt at all that the only way a city like Coventry will truly become a smart city and maximise the benefits for residents, businesses and visitors alike is to join all this up in an overall framework,” says Martin Reeves. “The Jam is enabling us to glue it all this together, to ask, ‘What’s the overall vision for Coventry in 2030 and beyond?’ It’s not about individual plans around housing, transport infrastructure, public safety, inward investment and social cohesion; it’s about how they work together to be an incredibly powerful vision and strategy for the future of this city.”

Wisdom of the crowds

The ultimate goal of CovJam is to tap into the knowledge and imagination of local stakeholders to work out how to deliver more economic development, jobs, equality and prosperity in Coventry. The Jam has shown that citizens and businesses have real passion for pushing this agenda forwards. Historically, the city has bounced back from significant setbacks in the past, not least its near-total destruction during the second world war. The contributions to the Jam revealed a genuine enthusiasm for facing up to the challenges of the future and building a new culture of innovation that will see the city build its status as a global leader in creative and knowledge industries.

“What makes a city great?” asks Martin Reeves. “It’s the people. The IBM Jam has helped us to harness the wisdom, energy and restless ambition of the people of Coventry. It’s a way of saying to people, ‘You are our Unique Selling Proposition. You are the ones that are going to put us on the map’. Coventry has always been a pioneering and aspirational city, and the real indicator of success will be if other cities from around the world come to us and ask us how we did it – how we achieved our goals.”

He concludes, “We’ve definitely built a successful relationship with IBM. Setting up and running the Jam and the evaluation had risks for all parties, and the relationship with IBM came out of some tough asks for each organisation. We hope it’s the start of a much longer and deeper relationship with IBM and, more importantly, with the people of Coventry.”

For more information

To learn more about IBM Smarter Cities, contact your IBM sales representative or visit ibm.com/smarterplanet/uk

To learn more about Coventry City, visit www.coventry.gov.uk

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