An Interview with
Micael Cimet, President
Electronic Data Systems, Mexico

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JGIM: Please describe the position you hold and your responsibilities within the Mexican Government and/or Private Industry.

Cimet: At present, I am the President of Electronic Data Systems (EDS) in Mexico. Before then I served as the CIO of CIFRA (largest Mexican retailer). I also worked for the Mexican government in various capacities. As the President of EDS, I am responsible for its vision and the direction it takes in Mexico.

JGIM: How important is information technology (IT) to the Mexican government in general?

Cimet: Very important! In the first place, IT is being used to enhance the credibility of the Mexican government. For example, the national statistics produced by INEGI (National Institute for Geographical, Statistical, and Information) are helping towards achieving that goal. IT can also help the government in improving services to the tax payers by creating databases that contain Mexican demographic information, by enhancing the capability to process election results in a more timely and accurate manner, and by improving public record keeping.

JGIM: What has been the role of IT in Mexico's trade with the U.S. and Canada?

Cimet: One immediate role for IT is in the area of customs. IT has been used for documentation purposes (e.g., for faster and efficient documentation of raw materials and finished products imported into the country and exported out of the country) and for assessing tariffs on products coming into the country and on finished products returning back to the country of origin.

Another area is distribution systems. IT is being used here to track the flow of physical products through different distribution channels.

JGIM: What has been the role of IT in Mexico's worldwide trade?

Cimet: One particular role that comes to mind is in the area of Mexican product and service exports. One example is a joint effort by the name of SIMPEX in which the Commerce Department, Bank of Mexico, and NAFINSA (National Development Bank of Mexico) utilize client/server and database technology to link countries worldwide that need Mexican products and services to Mexican companies that offer those products and services as well as connecting investors with opportunities for foreign investment in Mexico.

JGIM: What has been the most important information technologies that facilitated in Mexican government operation? How?

Cimet: From the technology prospective three come to mind: Relational Databases, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Imaging. In processing public records, these three technologies are important. The importance of relational databases comes from the fact that Mexico has few data standards for identification of people, businesses, and other entities (Mexican citizens have several identification numbers); Relational databases would allow the Mexican government to have control over this situation. Imaging will help with data capturing processes. Once data is captured and precessed into information nationally, GIS and its information analysis capabilities can be utilized strategically for resource management, urban planning and infrastructure development in Mexico.

JGIM: Which do you perceive as the most significant national IT applications in the last five years in Mexico?

Cimet: The Electoral Identification System (Voter Registration ID) is a very significant application since it promotes a more democratic voting process and prevents fraud by uniquely identifying each voter. This is helping to improve the image of the country's voting system.

The automatization of the voting system which goes along with the overall revamping of the Public Records System is another significant application area.

The National Income Tax System is another pivotal application. It significantly streamlined the collection process. This allows the government to collect revenues that were lost before.

JGIM: What have been the key technological challenges and problems in the implementation of these IT applications in Mexico?

Cimet: The key technological problem in the implementation of information systems is the lack of an adequate telecommunications infrastructure.

JGIM: What have been the key management challenges and problems in the implementation of these IT applications in Mexico?

Cimet: The key management issue in the implementation of information systems is the lack of an adequate culture regarding information systems. Though upper management has a good idea of the potential benefits of IT, the process of adoption of the technology encounters cultural challenges in their organization. Lack of industry standards for identifying data entities is another problem. In the U.S. you have Social Security Number to identify a national. In Mexico we have an IRS number, Voter ID Number, and a Social Security Number all to identify the same Mexican citizen.

JGIM: What advice can you offer overseas corporations (especially from the U.S. and Canada) interested in information technology transfer and diffusion in Mexico?
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