BUSINESS school inventor turned management professor Jay Rajasekera patented the algorithm which was used in the world’s first undersea optical fibre cable between the US and Europe.

But after Rajasekera got the patent, and saved his company, AT&T Bell Laboratories, some 10 million dollars in construction costs, he was sent to Japan to see what the Japanese were doing in the optical fibre area.

Rajasekera surprised himself. He found that a different and more cost efficient technology was being employed.

“When I tried to report my findings at Bell Labs, all I found were barriers to stop me by the management,” he recalls. This made him realise that it important both to understand technology and how to make money from it.

“My managers at that time did not see the financial benefits of technology; they did not want to benchmark against the competitors,” he says. “I decided to move to a business school so that I can teach this to managers.”

Rajasekera, who is today Dean of the Graduate School of International Management at the International University of Japan (IUJ) says understanding what IT can do is more important than learning a little Java or Oracle. He believes that once you know IT’s potential, then planning out a good business strategy is just typical B-school stuff. “Remember, the founder of IBM, Tom Watson, was a salesman, not a computer geek,” he says.

Technology is a must at IUJ. As dean, he himself teaches an IT class that introduces students to the power of IT tools. “I teach how simple software can be effectively used to analyse business situations, so that managers can see solutions easily,” he says.

Rajasekera also teaches a course in database management. “Databases have become so important in our lives that we cannot live without them,” he says. “Just storing data does not make money. My course teaches the strategies to make money out of data.”

IUJ added a one-year programme last year, called e-business management. Though the name shouts “internet”, Rajasekera says the programme is really about “how to create value using technology” in non-tech areas like health-care, human resources, and utilities, and in tech areas like logistics, finance and the supply chain. “It is technology that gives the most return for your money,” says Rajasekera.

IUJ’s MBA students work with international firms such as Lehman Brothers and IBM-Japan, an experience that often leads directly to jobs. IUJ has also added an “e-lab” which has facilities for students to make a mini-Yahoo, mini-e-Bay, or to imitate Singapore’s e-Government initiative right at each desk.

Rajasekera says that you don’t need to be a tech guru to use IT, but must understand the strategic use of it.

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