

Blind Japanese woman receives IBM's top award

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US computer giant IBM's Japanese researcher Chieko Asakawa in Tokyo, 2003. IBM has named Asakawa as the first blind engineer -- as well as the first Japanese female -- to receive the company's highest technical honour.

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Asakawa, 50, was named this week as one of eight Japanese to win the title of IBM Fellow for her achievements in making the Internet widely accessible for visually impaired people.

It is the company's most prestigious honour for an [engineer](#), a title given to only 218 technicians in the company's more than century-long history.

"Asakawa's crucial contributions in the area of accessibility technology have enabled IBM to become a worldwide leader in the field," the US-based company said in a statement.

"She has helped to establish awareness, both within and outside [IBM](#), while leading the creation of technologies that have changed the way disabled individuals communicate and interact."

Asakawa developed accessibility software called the "Homepage Reader" which reads aloud words that appear on an Internet window and is now available in 11 languages including English and Japanese.

"I am very happy about the nomination," Asakawa said in a statement. "I will continue working hard towards an even more accessible society."

Asakawa, who lost her vision as a teenager, joined the [computer maker](#) in 1985 and has since worked to increase computer accessibility not only for the disabled but also for the elderly and novices.

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