

How NIIT links the college and the corporate



One of the original edtech firms in the country, NIIT has kept up with the times, aiding firms train their workforce and offering talent development courses for individuals, says CEO Sapnesh Lalla

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● TALENT TRAINING

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NIIT helps organisations train their workforce, as well as provides talent development courses for individuals

VIKRAM CHAUDHARY

SET UP IN 1981 to help the then nascent Indian information technology (IT) industry overcome its human resource challenges, NIIT has today evolved into a global training company. With a footprint in over 30 countries, it offers training and development solutions across three verticals: individuals, enterprises and institutions.

In a recent interaction with FE, Sapnesh Lalla, CEO, NIIT, says the unique thing about NIIT is that technology has been central to its education delivery. "NIIT was the first organisation in India to blend video-based education with the traditional mode of teaching at its education centres. It was an edtech company even before the word edtech became popular," he says.

The pandemic year

Most edtech companies that innovated during 2020 have reaped rich dividends. NIIT recorded profit after tax of ₹41.5 crore (up 53% year-on-year) in the October-December 2020 and net revenue of ₹253.4

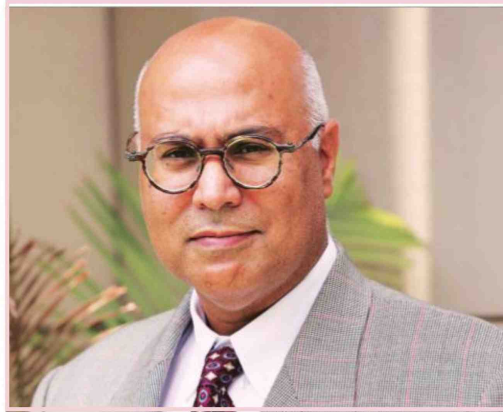
With the proliferation of mobile internet devices, the world has realised that having a physical education centre is not the most important thing, what's important is to create access to high quality education that results into outcomes.

— SAPNESH LALLA, CEO, NIIT

crore (up 4% year-on-year).

During the year, NIIT launched many new courses, including a 5G certification programme with Nokia (over a webinar with the Cellular Operators Association of India) to train industry professionals in India, and the Randstad Skilling Academy (Randstad India) to create a future-ready workforce. It also extended its partnerships with MNCs such as Unilever and Rio Tinto to provide managed learning services and support learning and business imperatives.

Lalla says that when the first lockdown was announced in March 2020, there was uncertainty as far as business continuity is concerned. NIIT has two major training and development businesses. One is the 'man-



aged training services' focused on large organisations who want to outsource their learning and development needs. "Here, the focus is on working with 60 of the world's largest companies, including Shell, IBM, Rolls-Royce, Red Hat," he says.

The second business is the 'skills and careers arm', focused on enabling organisations to achieve accelerated digital transfor-

mation through talent transformation, as well as talent development courses for individuals. "Right after the lockdown we moved to the digital platform across our businesses. While this platform was in place for years, it suddenly became the core to our operations," he adds.

Previously, most customers used the hybrid model, which included digital but

primarily face-to-face training. After the lockdown, digital was the only medium available for corporations' training and learning and development needs. "Almost immediately everyone realised the 'convenience' of digital, and that helped digital adoption pick up," Lalla says.

Thus, while all NIIT physical educational centres shut down on March 23, 2020, that number (about 2,000) of physical centres had started reducing a few years ago with the internet becoming more and more accessible. "Starting March 23, we created an opportunity for our partners to continue their business on the digital platform. The good thing is they have been able to attract students on the digital platform the same way they used to attract students in the physical centres," he added.

NIIT University

With the NIIT University (at Neemrana, Rajasthan; set up in 2009), NIIT has a symbiotic relationship; the university uses the latter's digital platform to offer education to its students, and it offers NIIT programmes that are a mix of corporate training and university education. "A number of our customers look at NIIT as not just a source of short education programmes, but also longer, more formal education programmes that might result into a degree," says Lalla.

While NIIT is famous for providing functional and technical skills (the so-called hard skills), it blends those skills with soft skills. "We provide holistic skills that allow a person to become successful at a job; a student need not be just a good programmer, but should also have the ability to work in a team, and communicate and understand and listen," Lalla said. "We create a connection between the college and the corporate."