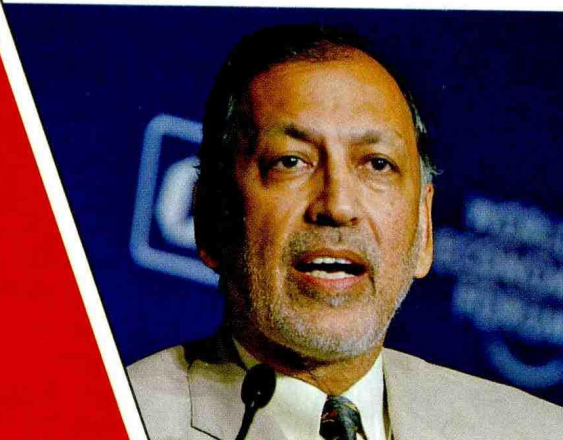


## FROM ZERO TO INFINITY

How talent created growth for the Indian IT industry and continues to provide the critical workforce



Rajendra Pawar has not only revolutionized the IT training industry, but is also recognized as a global technology thought leader



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India has been credited with the invention of the numeral zero, a critical and path-breaking contribution to the world by its Mathematicians and Astronomers who did their magic with numbers as far back as 3 AD. It is perhaps this very fact that has enabled India to become the star of the Binary Code, which is the very foundation for all computing.

### **BRINGING PEOPLE AND COMPUTERS TOGETHER**

The journeys of the Indian IT and IT Training industries as well as NIIT are in fact inextricably intertwined with the 0 and 1 phenomenon and of course the technological wave, which the nation took at flood, to achieve fortune. It was in the early 1980s for instance, that India—a

country that had given the Industrial Revolution the go-by—began slowly waking up to the Binary Code and the computer era.

It was at this time, in 1981 in fact, that NIIT came into existence and became in a significant way a facilitator and enabler of the IT revolution in India. Founded with the objective of bringing “People and Computers Together, Successfully”, the company’s mandate was also to build skilled workforce which, as its foresight suggested, would be needed by the nascent IT sector to fuel its growth in the years ahead.

This was possibly the very first time that an educational institution from the private sector had taken the initiative and decided to play a proactive role in the modernization

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of India. It had realized and anticipated the demand for IT professionals, well before there was an actual demand, and even readied this workforce.

This early effort generated a large-scale supply of talent. It additionally laid the foundation of a brand new industry in India—the IT training segment, well before the computer boom began. It would not be wrong to say that the cart was placed before the horse, for indeed the crucial expertise and skilled professionals were made available many years before the Indian IT industry actually took off.

#### **GROWING WITH THE BIG LEAP**

Later, as the IT industry grew by leaps and bounds, it was this huge pipeline of talent—including software programmers, database specialists, communications and networking workers—that nourished the sector and led to the rise of this behemoth. Interestingly, it took the formal educational system almost 15 years to play catch up and respond to the training needs of the IT industry. The Training industry ensured that the IT sector always had talent that exceeded demand, thus keeping the environment competitive.

Also, with its entrepreneurial-orientation, the Training segment set the path that others could follow. It was responsible for unleashing a wave of entrepreneurship in India owing to path-breaking business models such as Franchising, that were pioneered by one—NIIT—but later embraced by many.

Yes, the market leader's many achievements and early bird moves were acknowledged by Dataquest, the premier Indian publication that has continued to track the growth of the ICT as well as IT training sectors in the country to this very day. As a company that topped all DQ charts and received the 'Top IT Training Company Award' for 20 years in succession, NIIT led the Training brigade for the entire time that this category appeared on its roster. In 2014, when it received its 20th award, and competition seemed non-existent, it agreed to the removal of the awards category itself.

A reason for its long run at the top, especially post the '80s, when the IT Training industry was growing and

expanding, was the absence of players that were large enough and recognized as strong and trusted brands. While this decade witnessed a massive influx of Training companies, it also had an equally impressive share of exits. Both small and large, companies entering the training market attempted to carve niches for themselves and build traction. However, it was really one brand that stood out consistently, sustaining its edge, setting all the industry benchmarks and driving global trends. This was borne out over the years by the many accolades that the Training industry won for being trustworthy.

The Training industry maintained trust and momentum during the 1990s as well, as globalize or perish became the survival chant for the Indian industry. The IT Training sector decided to cross-geographic boundaries, looking Westward and Eastward.

#### **THE Y2K IMPACT**

And then came Year 2000, yet another turning point in the annals of the world, which became the obsession of all nations and set the Training sector on a fresh trajectory. The Y2K bug or Millennium Bug, an anomaly in the coding of computerized systems, appeared on the horizons of all self-respecting companies, and threatened to derail their computers and networks as the date changed from 99 to 00. Here too, it was the number 0, which India had first rights to, that had to be tamed and won. And with its proclivity for the 'zero', India's highly skilled talent did so in style.

As the world fretted over the impending disaster and chaos that was expected to result from the software glitch, the Indian IT industry, supported by the IT training sector, in fact transformed the challenge into a great opportunity.

A mega effort by the Indian IT training industry helped create a programming workforce that could re-write code that would make software Y2K compliant. These skilled professionals were then hired by IT companies who in turn staked a claim to what IDC in its Project Magellan described as a \$320 bn Y2K remediation spend over seven years, and a 1999 expenditure alone of \$101 bn! The workforce, shaped and nurtured by the Indian IT



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Training industry, built up a formidable reputation across the globe.

Bolstered by its success in the Y2K domain, the sector added more meat to its product range, providing a wide spectrum of learners with a full breadth of courses. From advanced programming courses for specialists, to career programs for graduates to entry-level courses for people seeking basic computer knowledge, it offered something to everyone.

Above all, it leveraged the winning tools of innovation, creativity and out-of-the-box thinking, surviving and thriving in the high mortality IT market. The IT Training industry committed itself to delivering meaningful learning content to millions of people across the globe by innovatively using technology. For the industry and its leader, NIIT, innovations flowed out on all fronts.

In the '80s for instance, it was CD ROMs and multimedia technology in education, the Franchising model of learning, the Computerdrome (to provide unlimited computer time to students), GNIIT, the industry endorsed program for career seekers, Bhavishya Jyoti Scholarships for meritorious and socially challenged students, and above all, the Hole-in-the-Wall project for underprivileged children, which set the organization apart. Hole-in-the-Wall in fact, earned global acclaim and several patents.

Moving into the '90s, it was all about the futuristic nGuru solutions for schools, initiatives such as Netvarsity, a pioneering virtual university and innovative market entry strategies across international geos.

#### BEYOND TRAINING

In the last decade, the company diversified beyond IT training, entering into partnerships with domain experts in fast growing verticals. These included IFBI's alliances with ICICI and other banks for the BFSI sector, a tie-up with Genpact for BPM training and collaborations between India's top B-Schools, the IIMS and Imperia for training professionals. It also launched the 'NIIT Inside' model in China, forging innovative partnerships with the country's universities. In 2005 the organization launched Edgeineers to boost the career prospects of Engineering graduates, many of who were considered "unemployable" by the industry.

Another important landmark in the history of the IT training industry was the dot com era, when suddenly hundreds and thousands of innovative Internet start-ups erupted into existence. The dot com trend ignited the requirement for the next generation of skill sets. Within months, companies were seeking people with Internet expertise—Web developers, Java programmers, app developers, communications specialists who could implement online payments, and a host of other such new job profiles.

The IT Training industry helped the rapidly mushrooming dot coms to meet their talent needs by providing training in these new technologies and platforms.

In the last decade, the global business and technological terrain has seen yet another and possibly its most significant upheaval. Called Digital Transformation (DT), it has set up a chant of 'Go Digital' and skyrocketed the need for people with skills fitted for this scenario.

DT requires an all-new breed of people, who can envision, design, manufacture, operate, service and support this trend. These professionals will include scientists and innovators who can create a continuous stream of new DT products and services. They in turn will require technological skills across various applications domains as well as product life cycle management, cross-disciplinary collaboration and creative skills.

Recognizing the potential that the DT movement is expected to unfurl in the years ahead, the IT Training industry too has launched a range of products that will create workforce for the DT age. In the case of NIIT, it includes its digiNxt Series of programs to build software engineers, a multi-modal learning platform, Training.com, and StackRoute, which is helping build the world's elite full-stack programmers and a pool of Digital innovators for the IT industry.

Clearly, the Indian IT Training industry, a key global talent development provider, continues to provide the critical workforce and solutions that are emerging as the core strength of nations. Having rapidly moved into the DT landscape, we now see infinite possibilities of building on the success that was achieved in IT Training from ground zero. For this industry and the training world, the best is yet to come.