



# Do You Have IT in You?

*'The entrepreneur is someone who sights an untapped opportunity, a potential prospect hitherto unexplored by anyone else, and transforms this once nebulous thought into concrete reality.'*

BY RAJENDRA S. PAWAR

I must admit, I enjoy the sound and feel of the word entrepreneurship. It has an energy about it, a sense of power and purpose that in a manner defines the entrepreneur. "Entrepreneur," borrowed from the French lexicon by the English language, was coined around 1800 by economist Jean Baptiste Say. It is said that upon reading Adam Smith's free market masterpiece, *The Wealth of Nations*, Say found in it a key flaw—it omitted and overlooked the enterprising businessman—the entrepreneur!

Usually translated to mean "adventurer," entrepreneur has now come to mean a person who conceptualizes, nurtures and assumes ownership of a unique idea and its risks and impending outcomes. Typically, such a person has an eye on the horizon, and as management guru Peter Drucker has aptly said, "Predicts the future by creating it."

As someone who helped bring into the world a "first-of-its-kind" organization, a business that spawned a new industry and new ventures, I have enjoyed the experience of being an entrepreneur many times over. The heady, dizzying excitement that accompanies the germination of that first thought. The passion, determination and commitment that goes hand-in-hand with every step. The life changing incidents and the blood, sweat and tears that become part and parcel of that one big, evolving idea. When you set on the path of entrepreneurship, nothing is ever the same again.

Much has been written about the birth of NIIT, a company that my friend from IIT Delhi, Vijay Thadani and I founded in 1981, with active support and mentoring of our good friend Shiv Nadar. In those days, the Indian IT industry was still finding its feet, and as a nascent sector, experiencing initial hiccups. One of the key challenges the sector was facing was a paucity of skilled resources. It was

this need, this gap that became the inspiration for NIIT, and shaped its dream and vision. We were quick to realize that the absence of this vital fuel—trained manpower—would actually jeopardize the growth of the IT sector going forward. NIIT was launched with the express goal of "bringing people and computers together, successfully."

NIIT's primary agenda was to provide computer training that would build a pool of professionals that could be harnessed by the IT industry. At the same time, we wanted to help organizations make optimal use of IT investments, and offered them consultancy services alongside training for their personnel, including the CEOs themselves. These activities became the foundation for our two primary businesses in later years—IT education and software services.

If I recall those early days, all I can remember is the brainstorming, the focus on innovation and the obsessive desire to build a robust team. Innovation, in fact, was at the core of everything we did. It defined our content, learning methodologies, and delivery management. It was this culture of innovation, that we consciously fostered in the '80s, that enabled us to attract like-minded individuals—brilliant professionals who were drawn by NIIT's powerful vision and DNA of innovation. The way I see it now, NIIT was a great idea—an idea whose time had come.

We had managed to perceive a new opportunity and seize the moment. NIIT captured the imagination of the industry as well as young India. The organization enabled thousands of graduates, facing an uncertain future, to build careers in the sunrise IT industry and become the pride of their families.

At the same time, we stoked the fire of entrepreneurship among other first-time businessmen as well, using our revolutionary "franchisee

**Rajendra S. Pawar**

*Chairman and Co-Founder, NIIT Group*





model" to build NIIT into a national, and later, global brand.

I have often been asked about what really inspired us—whether it was a desire to join the exclusive club for millionaires by creating a revenue juggernaut, or something that went beyond the yearning for numbers. While I admit that an important goal of business is to achieve financial objectives, it is also about the sheer joy of playing the game. When NIIT got off the ground, our aim wasn't to make the first million. Rather, it was to unleash an idea that would touch and transform the lives of people. We believed in the old adage, "when batting in cricket, keep an eye on the ball and not on the scoreboard." That was our driver in the early years, and continues to be our motivator even today. I have always believed that entrepreneurship is all about creating challenges and overcoming them. I would advise entrepreneurs to go out and actually seek difficult problems that they can solve, in order to make the journey exciting, invigorating and worthwhile.

This fact is getting reflected in NIIT University (NU), our most recent initiative in the domain of higher education. I personally consider NU, a not-for-profit university located in the sylvan Aravalli hills in Neemrana, Rajasthan, our dream venture. NU is a sustainable campus that provides seamless learning and spurs original thinking.

With NU, the cycle of entrepreneurship has come a full circle for NIIT, and we have set off on its unbeaten path yet again. NU has all the hallmarks of an entrepreneurial enterprise, which by its very nature is packed with complexities and difficulties. Grappling with these issues—whether related to maintaining environmental friendliness or acquiring high quality faculty—involves us using creativity, problem-solving skills and most importantly, team work.

With NU, we have decided that drawing rightly-skilled faculty, which is in very short supply, is currently more important than attracting students. First, get the infrastructure and faculty ready, and then the rest, that is our goal. NU is expected to take 10 years before it achieves full capacity. Until then, unsolved problems have to be addressed. It

must become sustainable over time, in order to become a symbol of entrepreneurship within the global academic realm.

Even though NU is one among the many schools of advanced learning in the country today, the way we have defined it, makes it a first. That according to me is the force of entrepreneurship—that it develops unique and enduring organizations and institutions.

Entrepreneurship and the art of organization building: For NIIT, organization building has remained at the heart of entrepreneurship. We have always believed that in order to build a great organization that survives the test of time, remain internationally competitive and come up with offerings that make them the first choice for customers, innovation is the key.

I remember a rather memorable session at the World Economic Forum at Davos, which was focused on innovation in organization building. At this session in 1999, I recalled and articulated how we had done organization building at NIIT over the two decades of its existence. Successful organizations, I believe, are the ones that have embraced a business model based on four vital processes—inspiration, aspiration, respiration and perspiration. Simply put, the first two relate to the heart, the third to the mind and the fourth to the body.

Having seen it work at NIIT, I can define inspiration as the part that has to do with the vision of the organization's leadership, the mission that guides the company and helps it outline its future roadmap.

It is this vision-sharing between the leaders and the followers that raises the aspiration levels within organizations. In order to sustain the euphoria created by the existing interplay of inspiration and aspiration, companies must create respiration, which is essentially about energizing employees through a conducive work environment, where people can think freely for themselves, and challenge their seniors, without the fear of rebuke or ridicule.

Respiration is about providing oxygen for the mind and encouraging employees to ideate in a completely open environment. As for perspiration, well, that's just about the toil and hard work that one must put in to ensure zero-defect execution. At NIIT, when we train

and prepare our young managers for leadership roles, we emphasize on certain crucial factors, which we feel will ignite in them the fire of entrepreneurship and innovation. There is a great commonality between these lessons and the pointers that I am providing entrepreneurs, as they begin their quest for success. My suggestion is for them to become problem seekers—people who are inspired by extraordinary challenges and new opportunities that push them to the very limits of their imagination. They must find and create an unmet need, describe it in the most graphic form which can then be articulated to the team.

It is from this intellectual churn that fresh ideas will emerge. It is these problems, with a high level of difficulty, which will enable entrepreneurs and their people to raise the bar even higher for themselves and achieve what appears impossible.

And when problems come, can solutions be far behind? My second suggestion therefore is for entrepreneurs to become problem solvers. This is the phase of respiration, where the mind couples with great team play to come up with the right answers.

The team, of course, is the center of the entrepreneurial universe. The team members must be selected carefully. Diverse and complementary skill sets are a priority for a business venture. Like-mindedness is not necessarily a great option. After all, it is dissent and conflict that generates light.

As the new ideas begin to flow, entrepreneurs must find ways to meet the identified need, and bridge the gap.

They have to use their creativity to come up with new solutions, products and services that are distinctive and differentiates them in a competitive marketplace. If required, people from outside the team can be involved to generate more ideas.

Once the solution is in place, it must be executed to perfection, using an extended team.

This is the stage where we talk about processes and global quality standards which enable organizations to become zero-defect. In all this time, the role of the team leaders will become more critical. They have to build energy and excitement and ensure it infects their team as well. They have to inspire their peers to gather

courage and scale unbelievably high mountains. Finally, when the foundation is laid, and the brickwork begins, the focus must be on quick feedback at every stage. Testing and experimentation are important and leaders must be hands-on and on-location to observe the implementation process. They

must know instinctively what is going right and what is going wrong, and how corrections can be made, earlier rather than later.

Entrepreneurs have to ensure that their organizations are open to new ideas and new models of working. They have to create nimble and light-footed enterprises that can tune themselves to dynamic market conditions and changing client needs.

Entrepreneurs and their companies have to be unpredictable, inconsistent and highly responsive. In other words, they should be ready to swivel around and alter direction if the situation demands.

Patience and tenacity are the other big virtues of entrepreneurship. For companies that are in it for the long haul, these strengths are a must and will enable them to remain hopeful and optimistic, even during those brief periods when the going gets tough. Above all, the key factor that marks an entrepreneur is his/her die-hard optimism. ■

**'It is this vision-sharing between the leaders and the followers that raises aspiration levels within organizations.'**

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RAJENDRA S. PAWAR is the Co-Founder and Chairman of the NIIT Group, which created a whole new industry segment in India: computer education. Pawar pioneered NIIT's franchise model, which spurred Indian entrepreneurship to new levels. He's also a founding member of NASSCOM and a member of the International Business Council.

# A new part-time course in mathematical finance

**T**he Mathematical Sciences Foundation, a registered non-profit educational society is taking admissions for its part-time programme in mathematical finance.

The course is suitable for under-graduate students, particularly those majoring in mathematics, economics or commerce as well as those taking the actuarial examinations, MBA students and employees in the finance or banking sectors.

The course will be helpful for careers in insurance companies, financial firms and the banking sector in areas such as investor education and counselling, project choice, portfolio management, and risk analysis.

A key feature of the programme is exposure to combined uses of mathematics, statistics and computer science in the financial services industry. Scholarships will be given to deserving students.

Classes will be held in the evenings from mid-September to March 2011 with breaks during the Commonwealth Games and the winter examinations of Delhi University.

Full details are available on the website [www.mathscifound.org](http://www.mathscifound.org).

**T**he Aligarh Muslim University is organising an all-India essay writing competition on the topic: "Sir Syed's Vision of Empowerment through



Character Building and Modern Education."

A first prize of Rs.25,000 will be given away in addition to second and third prizes of Rs.15,000 and Rs.10,000. State level winners will be awarded of consolation prizes of Rs.5,000.

Students can refer to information regarding the life and achievements of the AMU founder Sir Syed Ahmed Khan on the university website [www.amu.ac.in](http://www.amu.ac.in). The last date for submission of entries is September 25. Prizes will be given away in October.

**F**aridabad-based Manav Rachna International University is drawing students from countries such as Afghanistan, Iran, Nigeria, South Korea and Syria for some of its Ph.D., M. Tech, B. Tech and B. Tech courses. The university has also entered into tie-ups with educational institutes in Finland, Canada, the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

**J**aipuria Institute of Management in Noida organised a seminar this past week on "Entrepreneurship: Finding Hidden Opportunities". Youth entrepreneurs of companies and management students participated in the seminar.

The purpose of the seminar was to provide a platform for students to gain practical knowledge regarding entrepreneurship. The event was characterised by brainstorming for new solutions as well as articulation of ideas by students and entrepreneurs.

The seminar projected entrepreneurship as a rewarding career choice and the spotlight was also on emerging trends, markets and opportunities.

**T**he 'Bhavishya Jyoti Scholarship Test' will be conducted across the country on September 19 by information technology trainer, NIIT across the country. This year is also the 20th anniversary of the scholarship which rewards fee-waivers to meritorious students and graduates wishing to pursue careers in diverse industries that require IT skills.

The scholarships will be awarded for NIIT's flagship programme, GNIIT and a few other courses.

NIIT will offer scholarships to students based on their performance in a competitive written test, followed by a personal interview. Application forms for the test are available at NIIT education centres across the country. Students can also log on to [www.niit.com/bjs2010](http://www.niit.com/bjs2010) for more details. The last date for receipt of applications is September 18.

**Urvashi Sarkar**

## Times NIE holds annual Principals' Seminar 2010



The world is at change constantly. Being the most adaptable species, humans have always adapted to every change with time. In today's chaos and pandemonium, the confounded herd of youth needs leaders providing a concrete base to their conjuring thoughts. Times NIE in an endeavour to ponder over the changing trends of leadership in education held its annual Principals' Seminar 2010 at ITC Maurya, Sardar Patel Marg on September 8, 2010. The event perfectly depicted the theme for the day, 'Leadership in Education' as Principals from various prestigious schools from all over Delhi and NCR lent their presence to make the seminar more meaningful. The seminar was sponsored by NIIT, idiscoveri and Heal Foundation.

The lamp of knowledge was lit by chief guest Jitin Prasada (State Minister of Petroleum), Nicholas Brett (Deputy Managing Director BBC), Abraham M Tharakan (Vice President-Design-School Learning Solutions NIIT), Ranjan Roy (Editor, TNN, Times of India) and Sanjeev Vohra (Director-RMD The Times of India). Ronny Gulati (Director idiscoveri) and Mr Oike (Managing Director, Yakult), were the distinguished guests present. Events unfolded as Jitin Prasada spoke about the strong influence that teachers have on students as role models. Mr Prasada appreciated the successful endeavours of Times NIE and the Lead India initiative in being a vital tool in changing educational trends and inculcating reading habits in students. Wishing a promising future for the young leaders, he said, "If right leadership, right education and right content is made available, children will brighten the future of our country."

'BBC Knowledge' magazine launch was announced by Tarun Rai (CEO, World Wide Media) and Nicholas Brett amidst a huge round of applause. It was followed by a panel discussion on the

theme of the day.

Abraham M Tharakan addressed the gathering on changing trends and elucidated, "Earlier space was referred to be the length of fields or building while today there is a virtual space too. Similarly, learning, which earlier was limited to Gurukul has now transformed into a networking zone. Everything is global and we must too wake up to the global era." Talking about the change in the education turf, he explicated, "Role of a teacher is going to change from being a saint on stage to a guide by the side."

Endorsing openness to the change, Chitra Nakra, Principal, Veda Vyasa DAV, Vikaspuri said, "We need to shed off the age old ideology and be adaptable to the changing world."

Seema Sahay, Principal, Ryan International School, Rohini speculated, "We,



as leaders, need to introspect ourselves and see if we are going towards the right direction or not."

While elaborating on the role of a leader, Ronny Gulati insisted, "Unless you change the way you are doing something, you have not learnt." He received a unanimous nod from the preachers when he said, "Relationship between a leader and the led is of emotion."

Agreeing with the thought of having more intriguing teacher-student connect, Harsh Rana from Children's Academy, Ghaziabad said, "To create future leaders, we must show them the realworld by giving positive examples, inspiring them to be honest in a pragmatic way."

A leader needs no mentor, Jyoti Sharma, Principal, Greenwood Public School, Gurgaon observed, "A leader can never be taught, instead he/she



introspects and assesses the situation and applies methods according to the situation."

Munshi Nazmul Hassan (Head Development - School Learning So-

lutions NIIT) left the preachers introspecting their role as leaders.

Talking about effective leadership, Inderjit Singh Monty, Chairman, GHPS, Tilak Nagar and Executive Member Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee said, "Catering to 500 principals here, NIE actually has reached out to 50,000 students and teachers. Education needs to spread out to everyone and everywhere and promising leaders of today will take the cause ahead."

Anustup Nayak (Co-Founder idiscoveri) involved everyone in an invigorating session.

Insisting on effective leadership in education, SS Chaudhary, Principal, DAV Public School, Sec 14, Faridabad said, "Teachers must appreciate students in order to motivate them in doing commendable work."

Wishing a great future for the country, Neera Singh, Principal, Delhi Area Primary School-I, Delhi Cantt concluded aptly, "An amalgamation of technology and effective leadership will facilitate future leaders in the right direction."

Praising the efforts of NIE, Dr D R Saini, Principal, DPS R K Puram said, "It was an enriching, effective and interactive experience."

Ishi Khosla (Health Counselor and Nutritionist, Yakult) and Shifali Sapra (Senior General Manager, Yakult) were also present.

Gift vouchers for principals were sponsored by Kairali. Refreshing drinks were served by Yakult.

## IGNOU launches chess programme

Staff Reporter

**NEW DELHI:** Research has shown that children who play chess have better life skills, are calmer and focused and better at academics, according to chess maestro Viswanathan Anand.

Launching a new "Certificate Programme on Chess as Mind Booster" that is jointly certified by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and NIIT here, Mr. Anand said the course would go a long way in popularising chess among youngsters in India.

IGNOU Vice-Chancellor Prof. Rajasekharan Pillai added: "This new programme will encourage more people to play chess and will help in kindling the creative capabil-



**GOOD MOVE:** "The new programme will go a long way to popularise chess," says chess maestro Viswanathan Anand

ity of children and teachers alike."

The programme, which has an online format, will also be

made accessible for the hearing-impaired.

The course will enable development of minds through chess and help students think logically and improve their life skills.

Students who enrol for the programme will learn the game and its history, be able to solve puzzles, analyse moves and also inculcate the habit of practice. Students successfully completing the programme will be awarded a joint certificate from IGNOU and NIIT.

They can also become members of the NIIT Mind Champions Academy which has been established to contribute to the chess movement in India and will also have opportunities to play with Viswanathan Anand.

## Grand Master launches IGNOU chess programme

**New Delhi:** Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) and NIIT on Thursday launched a joint Certificate Programme on Chess as Mindbooster, to enable development of young minds through chess. The programme was unveiled by world chess champion Viswanathan Anand at the IGNOU campus.

Students will get a joint certification by NIIT and IGNOU, enabling them to become members of NIIT Mind Champions Academy and contribute to the chess movement in India.

Grandmaster Vishwanathan Anand said, "NIIT has conducted research in schools, which shows that children who play chess have better life skills, are calmer and focussed and better at academics. I am confident the new programme will reach millions of students, making use of IGNOU's outreach and will also go a long way in popularising the game."

"Vishwanathan Anand has taken chess to millions of children. This programme will encourage more people to play chess and help in kindling the creative capability of children and teachers alike," said IGNOU vice-chancellor Prof VN Rajasekharan Pillai. **PNS**

Times of India  
New Delhi  
September 20, 2010

### NEW PROGRAMME

NIIT has announced the launch of an 'Advanced Online Advertising' programme for advertising and marketing professionals in association with Google India. As part of this initiative, NIIT will offer a specially designed training programme in online advertising which will be certified by Google. The training programme in online advertising has been designed and customised to equip the Indian advertising and marketing professional with better understanding of Google's global advertising programme Google 'AdWords'. The programme content and module outline has been designed by experts from Google and will cover all aspects of search engine marketing, measuring and optimising online campaigns. As a unique feature, the professionals will be pre-allotted advertising budget to formulate live campaigns, so that they have a rich hands-on experience even while they are undergoing training.

Hindu Business Line  
Mumbai  
September 15, 2010

### NIIT unveils Google-certified programme

New Delhi, Sept. 14

**I**T training major NIIT Ltd on Tuesday announced the launch of an 'Advanced Online Advertising' programme for advertising and marketing professionals, in association with Google India. Under this, NIIT will offer a training programme in online advertising which will be certified by Google. "The training programme has been designed and customised to equip the Indian advertising and marketing professionals with better understanding of Google's global advertising programme 'AdWords'. The programme content and module outline has been designed by experts from Google and will cover all aspects of search engine marketing, measuring and optimising online campaigns," an NIIT statement said. It will be delivered by NIIT Imperia using 'Synchronous Learning Technology.' — **Our Bureau**



HT Mint  
New Delhi  
September 29, 2010

**P. RAJENDRAN**  
**COO & WHOLE-TIME DIRECTOR**  
**NIIT LIMITED.**

**N**IIT was set up in India in 1981, a time when IT was at its nascent stage in the country, and basic computer education was yet to become a part of the educational system. Only very few educational institutions offered computer science as the core subject. However, the system gradually changed and Indian corporates started looking for computer-savvy workforce to introduce IT in their companies and manage the change.

The founders of NIIT identified this as-yet-unfelt need in the market and decided to bank heavily on this opportunity. Finally, with the combined forces of innovation, strategy, and sales spirit, the founders of NIIT along with an inspired team brought the company to where it is today.

Innovation has remained a growth catalyst for NIIT, prompting them to think "out-of-the-box," and bring to market products and training solutions that have often been global firsts. The company constantly strived to transform unique ideas into "on-the-ground" solutions that bring real benefits to learners. The company's franchisee network has earned them the soubriquet of 'McDonalds of the Training sector'. A key element which led to this successful expansion of NIIT centres in India in the last decade was the deployment of Dell PowerEdge servers that offered high-density computing. These servers addressed the challenges of an evolving IT environment of NIIT, by delivering leading enterprise-class features and functionality.

P Rajendran, Co-founder & COO of NIIT, played a crucial role in taking the organization

forward. Today the company is viewed as a leading Global Talent Development Corporation, building skilled manpower pool for global industry requirements in the field of IT and IT enabled domains. It has today grown to be amongst world's leading talent development companies offering learning solutions to individuals, enterprises and institutions across 40 countries. Delivery of these services called for the right technology. So NIIT relied on Dell PowerEdge servers.

NIIT's vast education delivery network spread over 40 countries in the Americas, Europe, Latin America Asia Pacific, China, Middle East and Africa blends classroom and on-line learning. With hundreds of educational centers located across the globe, it was vital that the organization used the right IT infrastructure that can both centralize and consolidate data, and also offer seamless and uninterrupted training to its students. Today, NIIT's training solutions in IT, Business Process Outsourcing, Banking, Finance and Insurance, Executive Management Education, and Communication and Professional Life Skills, touch five million learners every year. NIIT's expertise in learning content development, training delivery and education process management makes it the preferred training partner, worldwide.

To deliver all this, what NIIT was looking for was a highly available, scalable platform for its mission-critical learning management system offered through managed hosting from its different centers. Ease of set-up and monitoring were of paramount importance. Rajendran, along with the other co-founders, zeroed in on Dell PowerEdge servers infrastructure because they wanted a solution that offered seamless integration.

NIIT, which is constantly striving to improve IT

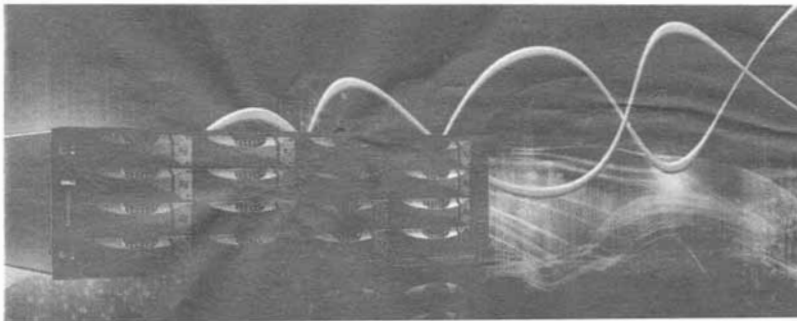
education for both students and working professionals through its learning solutions, comprised both classroom as well as web-based training. This prompted the need for better collaborative and computational abilities. They also wanted to bring to their students operational freedom, financial flexibility and low risks.

Matching NIIT's commitment to education is Dell's commitment to improving the technology experience of students in the classroom. The NIIT-global data centers rely on a scalable platform of Dell PowerEdge blade servers. And many of their customers, impressed with NIIT's almost exclusive reliance on Dell, choose to purchase Dell equipment for use on their campuses/homes as well. Dell's PowerEdge servers with its cost benefits provided the platform for NIIT.

Since the education vertical calls for great accessibility and availability, uptime becomes crucial for customers. Availability translates to information access for students and the faculty, alongside when and where they need it, so learning can continue uninterrupted. Dell PowerEdge blade servers enabled the company to meet its commitment for millions of users.

Remote management was also critically important to NIIT, since its data centers are geographically dispersed and most of the company's employees and management work at different locales. With Dell PowerEdge servers, the company was able to monitor status of remote servers even during a reboot.

One of the most important reasons why NIIT relies on Dell technologies is because of the relationship the company has developed with Dell. And Dell being a client-friendly company has taken a keen interest in knowing where NIIT is heading technologically. And Dell has put its best foot forward to deliver the best operational efficiency and high performance, so NIIT can seamlessly offer high availability learning solutions for its students.



*P. Rajendran serves as Chief Operating Officer and Whole-time Director of NIIT Limited. Mr. Rajendran leads the corporate teams engaged in Human Resources, Commercial Services, Information Resources and Legal Services.*

MID-DAY  
Mumbai  
September 19, 2010

## Hole in the wall

Who would have thought a hole in a wall could be an agent of change? Well, it is. A wall on the NIIT premises in New Delhi, adjoining a slum, has been fitted with computers. The joint venture between NIIT and the International Finance Corporation has more than 450 learning stations across Asia and Africa, and operates in 12 states in India. Formally called Minimal Invasive Education, this tool has proven that it doesn't always require the physical presence of a teacher to impart education. "Today, any child can approach the kiosk and learn things on his own," says Abid Ali, manager government relations, Hole-in-The-Wall Education Ltd (HiWEL).

These computers have become learning wells for the slum kids. "I enjoy seeing my character take a tour of the solar system, sitting on a rocket. Reading about it in books is boring," says 11 year-old Sabina.

The team behind the project now aims to go a step ahead. "We are planning to add software that will help differently-abled children too," says Suhotra Mitra, senior manager, government relations, HiWEL.



THEY MIGHT CALL A CURSOR A SUI (NEEDLE) OR THE HOUR GLASS ICON, A DUMROO. BUT THEY KNOW EXACTLY HOW IT WORKS. AND EVERY THING HAS BEEN TAUGHT TO THEM WITHOUT A TEACHER.

**ABID ALI**

Manager, government relations,  
Hole-in-The-Wall Education Ltd.



Learning doesn't need a classroom, is what Hole in the Wall has proven. PIC/ SUBHASH BAROLIA

Financial Chronicle  
New Delhi  
September 20, 2010

## CompTia plans to set up shop in India

S RONENDRA SINGH

New Delhi

CHICAGO-based CompTia plans to introduce certification programmes on security and others IT fields for Indian firms. The non-profit trade association representing global IT professionals, which has been working with companies such as NIIT, Aptech and CanIndia, is planning to set up an office here.

"We are waiting for clearance from the government and would set up our office probably in Gurgaon," CompTia CEO Todd Thibodeaux told *FC*. "We are also looking at training government and security agencies such as Research and Analysis Wing and Intelligence Bureau," he added.

NIIT's president of individual learning solutions, G Raghavan said: "We provide training, e-learning and content for all these courses globally and also develop the entire certification mapped curriculum for CompTIA," he said.

Aptech Computer Education also provides these certificates. "We offer certificates starting from mini version of A+ to expert courses. We pay a fee of \$65-125 depending on the course," marketing head (N-Power), Aptech, Computer Education, Alok Bajpai said.

ronendrasingh  
@mydigitalfc.com

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EDUCATION TIMES

### ADVANCED ACCOUNTING

NIIT Imperia and KPMG invite applications for an advanced certificate programme in IFRS. This six-week certificate programme seeks to equip organisations and their employees with knowledge of IFRS, the

impact thereof on the financial statements and the convergence approach for Indian entities. It will include interactive technical sessions on the key IFRS topics like presentation of financial statements, property, plant and equipment among others.

Cover Story | BPO TRAINING

**Madhu Bala Sharma**

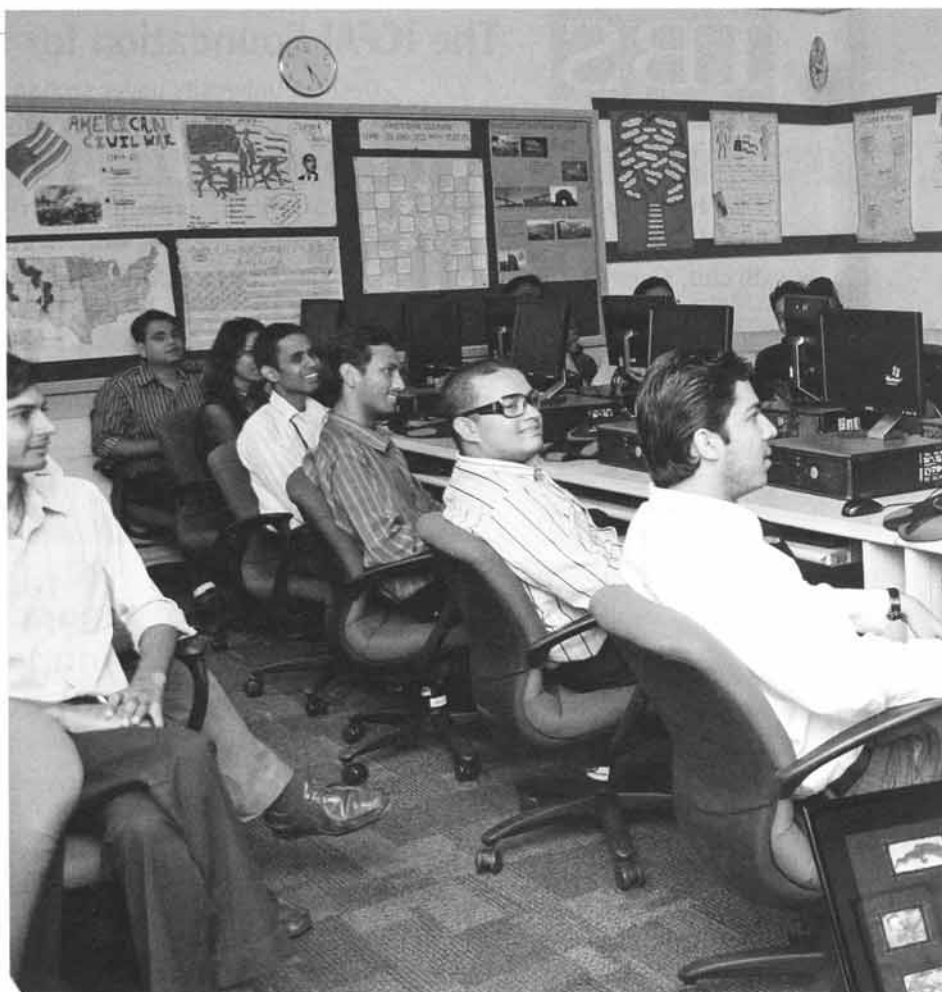
Learning & Development Facilitator,  
IBM Daksh



With a positive attitude, Madhu has carved a niche for herself in training, despite being born with a 100% visual disability. In 2009, Madhu received the National Award for Empowering Persons with a Disability, from the President of India. She currently resides with her three-year old son and her husband, who is also 100% visually impaired.

**B**orn and raised in Delhi, I attended two types of schools - a regular school and a resource school at the National Association for the Blind (NAB) ([www.nabindia.org](http://www.nabindia.org)), which encourages an integrated system of education. They taught me Braille and offered basic guidance. Post, I went to LSR (Lady Sriram College for Women, Delhi) to pursue English Literature. During final year - through NAB - I got a chance to work as a Voice & Accent trainer with Gecis (now known as a Genpact), and interviewed people for the role of Customer Care Executives. It was a part-time job, alongside studies. So I got a break and did it for 10 months. Later, I moved to IBM Daksh as a V&A Facilitator because sitting at a desk is not something that I would like to do! I was introduced to IBM Daksh through a consultant who places PWDs (Person With a Disability). She knew me from my Gecis days, thought I would suit the profile and got in touch. So, I was lucky! I would train new hires in Voice & Accent, soft skills, grammar, etc. I stayed in the role for about 20 months and then moved into Learning & Development. As part of the learning team, I am certified to facilitate workshops. I also develop content modules at times, and ensure that the facilitation is on target, check that the certification of other facilitators is on track, etc.

“I moved to IBM Daksh as a V&A Facilitator because sitting at a desk is not something that I would like to do!”



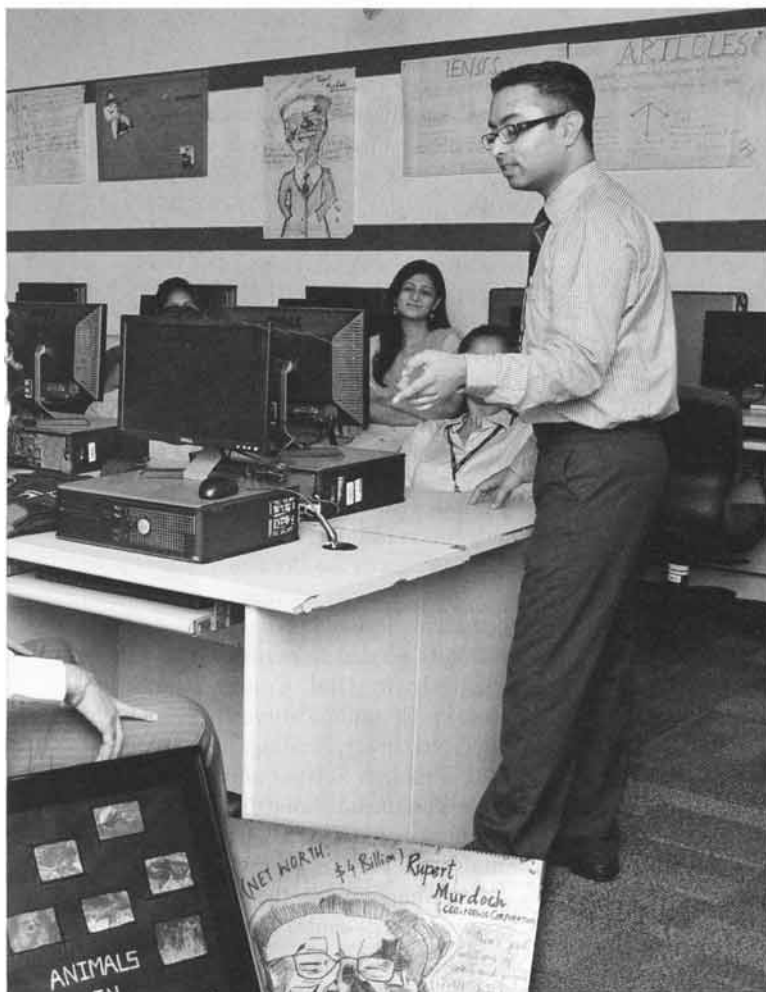
# Get trained even before you are hired!

We take a few voice classes to understand the value of training in the BPO sector

by Merril Diniz

**T**he noise is deafening. In a classroom at NIIT Uniqua's Gurgaon centre, a batch of twenty-some-things are perfecting their tenses and learning how to pronounce the days of the week and the months of the year,

correctly. Some focus so hard, they skip a few days and months in-between. April and August prove to be toughies commonly being mispronounced as “up-ra-eel” and “uuh-gust”. But their trainer is patient and uses these guffaws to lighten the mood and keep her students, motivated. Next, she simulates a mock phone



Photos: Raman Pruthi

**ATTENTION! Trainer Dennis Bob Philip instructs a fresh batch of hires at Convergys**

beavers, looking to improve their communication skills as a means to get ahead. Some of them are not from the Delhi-NCR region and hail from smaller towns in the vicinity.

For the next three months this batch of “near-hires” will undergo rigorous training five days a week, seven hours a day, to make them job-ready for an entry-level position at one of India’s top 20 BPOs. The training is free of cost and is sponsored by the BPO in question, which interviewed them, deemed them not yet ready for a job but having the potential to improve with a little training in communication skills.

“Let me share with you what we call the ‘hit rate’. For every 100 people we interview, we hire seven to 10. So, we divide the errors into fatal and non-fatal. If someone makes a lot of grammar mistakes and also messes up their tenses,

call pretending to be an irate customer calling to get her mobile phone plan changed. A student requests two minutes time to prepare, scribbles furiously on his notepad and proceeds to answer the call, as his classmates listen to the exchange. Post, he receives feedback from his classmates and trainer, who reviews him on how he opens the conversation, content, confidence levels and grammatical errors.

**What is being taught?**

The session is highly interactive (mostly missing from the average Indian college classroom), and students are eager

**Vijrant Bhalla**

**The best part about working @ BPO: Training!**

In January 2010 Vijrant Bhalla joined Citibank along with 18 other recruits as a Customer Care Executive for a credit card process. He was given eight weeks of training, which the 20-year old describes as “the best part of working in a BPO”. The first week involved instructions on communication skills, in which he learned about the US and British English and the difference between them. “Also, the accent and slang the US people use,” adds the BBA student who passed-out from Symbiosis, Pune in 2008. Though the trainees were prohibited from using slang, they were nevertheless informed of the commonly used words to understand the colloquial language. “Holy cow”, for example, Vijrant exclaims. The training covered seven weeks of product information (credit card) and the allied services. But despite progressing well in the organisation, Vijrant left in five months as night shifts were not his cup of tea. The stint, however, proved to be a learning experience. “Now I know how the credit card business works, how interest rates are charged, where the customers falter and where the companies can be smart,” he says. Using his own credit card judiciously was another learning. “I also acquired finesse in communication skills that the training provided,” he admits. But despite an income avergaing Rs 1.92 lacs per annum, he isn’t interested in making a career in outsourcing industry. It’s the advertising world that holds his dream for now.

“The first week involved instructions on communication skills, the difference between US and UK accent

which is very difficult to rectify through training, then it is tough. But basic grammatical errors, we can fix that. So, it depends on whether it’s a fatal error (which we cannot correct through training) or a non-fatal error. In fact, near-hires are hungry to learn and are the most energetic lot!” says Tim Huiting, VP-Human Resources, Convergys.

In the coming months, the batch in progress will learn how to pronounce, expand their vocabulary and be politically correct, so as not to offend customers. But the BPO runs a risk – on one hand these candidates may still not be employable despite rigorous training. On the other, candidates may choose to hop companies and even industries, post the training.

Convergys has a slightly different approach. “We do a hybrid model, where we outsource a third-party trainer who conducts the training on our own campus. A good reason to do it in-house is that they get to see the environment, in

which they will work, and we notice that the stickiness for these people is higher," says Ashutosh Sinha, India Recruitment Head, Convergys.

But training "near-hires" is inevitable and an outcome of the dearth in employable candidates. In another classroom, yet another set of students are seated with headphones over their ears, their laptops simulating a conversation in English with them. These BPO aspirants are not as lucky as the "near-hires". Turned down at various BPO interviews, they are paying good money to improve their chances at securing a job.

### What does it cost?

The fees are between Rs. 6,000 to 15,700 for a programme, which will prepare them specifically for BPO jobs. They are not guaranteed a job, but '100 percent job assistance'. What does this mean? According to the BPO training institute, this means minimum number of placement opportunities (three to five interviews) to each student. NIIT Uniqua, a BPO training company, a joint venture with Genpact, also has tie-ups with IBM, Wipro, Bank of America, WNS and HCL, for placements. According to the company in 2010, they also placed 200+ candidates in organisations, which hire for I2I operations such as Genpact, NetAmbit, Serco, Spanco and Techmahindra, and the entry level salary starts at Rs. 66,000 per annum.

### Jobs before training

"We also have something called a 'Conditional Appointment Letter', which says that you have been found good at the entry point and if you attend a particular programme, there will be a job waiting for you, at say, Genpact. In some cases the money spent by the candidate is also reimbursed by Genpact if the candidate works there for a stipulated period of time," says Chockalingam Murugan, President, NIIT Uniqua.

Cut to another training set-up at the Convergys office in Gurgaon. A fresh batch of recruits are seated in a classroom with rows of computers, a projector and walls covered with colourful chart paper. One depicts a map of the US. Yet another has grammar tips. Trainer Dennis Bob Philip animatedly instructs a fresh batch of entry-level recruits on



Let me share what we call the hit rate. For every 100 people we interview, only seven to 10 get hired

Tim Huiting  
VP-Human Resources,  
Convergys

### Training institutes

- HERO Mindmine ([www.heromindmine.com](http://www.heromindmine.com))
- Synaac (<http://www.synacc.com/>)
- Evolv (<http://www.evolv.in/>)
- Ma Foi Academy (<http://www.mafoirandstad.com/>)
- NEXT (<http://www.nextindia.net/>)
- Collections Training Institute (<http://www.creditandcollections.org/>)
- Spectramind ([www.spectramind.com](http://www.spectramind.com))

the difference between empathy and sympathy, and when it is appropriate to tell the customer "I'm sorry" and when it is preferable to say "I apologise". According to Dennis who has been training for the past six years, the focus is now on speaking flawless English as opposed to emulating the American or British accent anymore.

"Customers usually figure that our people are from India, so we don't try to make them sound like they are not from here. So, now there are two focuses. One, diction, grammar and clarity of speech so the customer understands. Two, comprehension. And this is a bigger challenge -. Can the agent understand the UK accent, for instance? I struggle sometimes to understand someone from Northern England or Newcastle!," says Tim.

According to Dennis, name changes are not a must here unless it is tongue

twister. For instance, Sita will remain Sita, but somasundareshwar might metamorphose into Sam. However, some clients insist on name changes. "It was a prerequisite from the client side to change our names," says Ankit Sharma (name changed), who worked as a Voice Agent at a BPO located in Delhi.

### How long does it last?

Typically, once hired new recruits undergo rigorous training for between three to six weeks, though this period varies across BPOs. The focus is on verbal and written communication skills and process training. Known as Foundation Training or the Pre Process Training, this is a 21- day training programme focused on developing the seven essential skills needed to perform ones job effectively ie Oral Communication, Written Communication, Document usage, Numeracy, Reading Comprehension, Problem Solving and computer usage. The aim is to hone the employee's interpersonal skills for effective communication - be it oral or written.

After completing it, they will be sent to any delivery centre for an "engagement". For instance, someone may be sent for an "engagement" in the communications service sector. The ambience and working environment at the delivery centre replicates that of the client in the UK or US. At the delivery centre, the individual undergoes three to six weeks of process training, which usually involves clearing client certification programmes.

Infosys BPO also kicked off Project Genesis in 2005 to offer free BPO training to college students. They have tied up with colleges in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Orissa to train their faculty in a Global Skills Enhancement (GSE) programme for a period of 12 days. GSE certified lecturers in turn train their students at the college campus and Infosys BPO organises job fairs at their respective locations, to hire students for entry-level positions.

According to Infosys BPO, they have so far implemented the project in 966 colleges, trained 2633 lecturers, 68841 students, and offered jobs to 4270 students. And training is free of cost, for both students and teachers. ■



**NIIT**

Produced by NIIT Limited, Corporate Communications and Marketing Services Organisation  
85, Sector 32 Institutional, Gurgaon 122 001 (India)  
Ph: +91 (124) 4293000 Fax: +91 (124) 4293333 Website: [www.niit.com](http://www.niit.com)