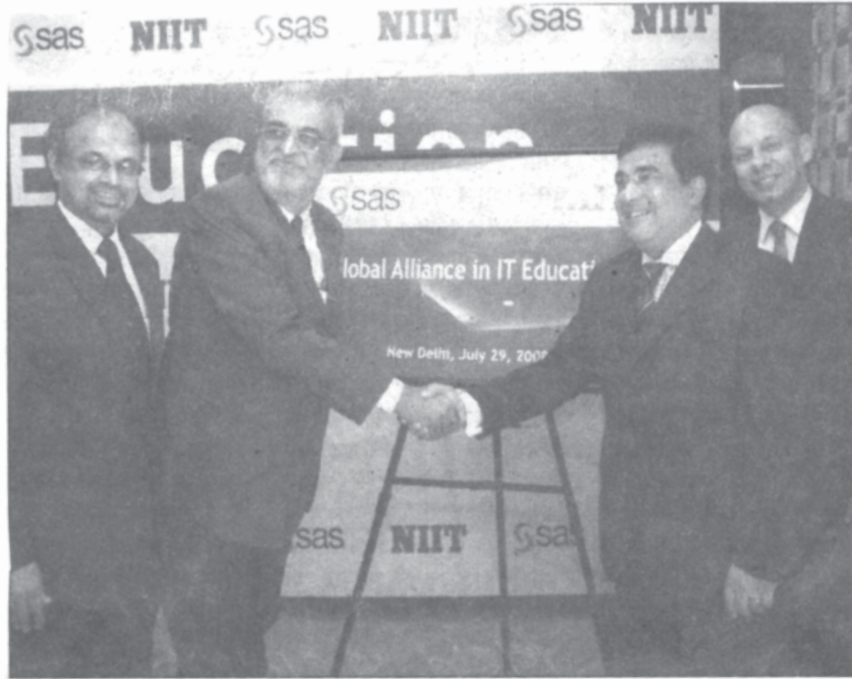
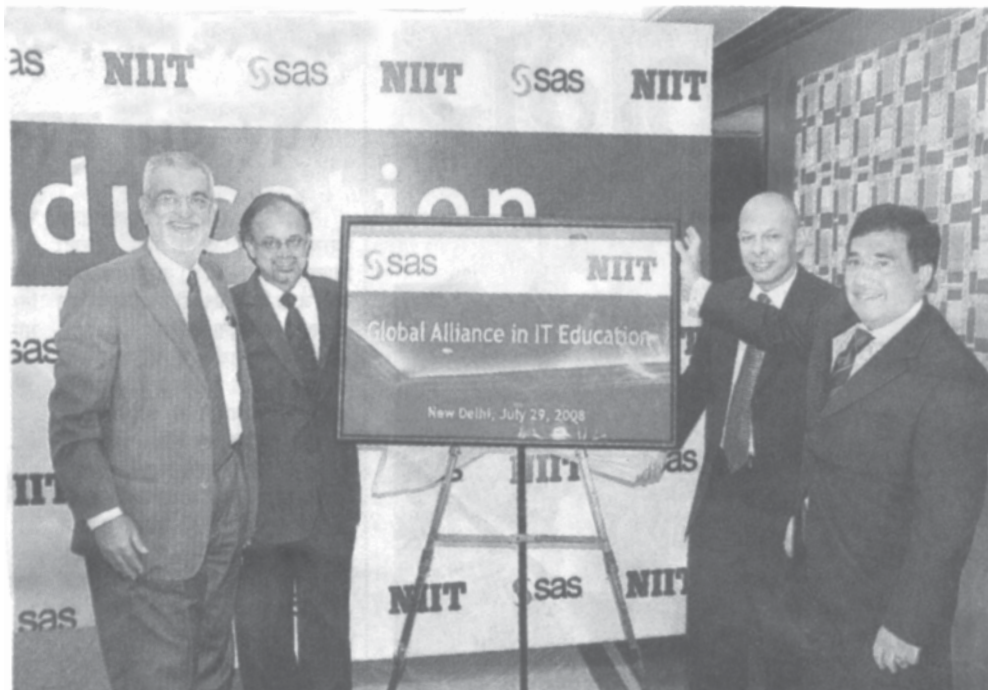


Viratt Vaibhav
New Delhi
July 30, 2008



नयी दिल्ली में मंगलवार को बिजनेस आईटी के वैश्विक गठबंधन की घोषणा के अवसर पर एनआई आईटी के सीईओ विजय ढडानी, एनआई आईटी के अध्यक्ष जी राघवन।

Panjab Kesari
New Delhi
July 30, 2008



नई दिल्ली में एन.आई.आई.टी. के सीईओ विजय के. थडानी सेस इंस्टीट्यूट के सीईओ सुदिप्ता के. सेन के साथ संयुक्त रूप से छात्रों के लिए आईटी का नया कार्यक्रम लांच करते हुए। (छाया : साहिल काठपाण)।

NIIT Tech Q1 net flat at Rs 35 cr; revenues rise 7%

Our Bureau

New Delhi, July 22

IT solutions company NIIT Technologies Ltd today posted a consolidated net profit of Rs 35.1 crore for the first quarter ended June 2008, the same as year-ago period, primarily on account of losses on hedging position.

"The company's hedge accounting policy based on Recognition & Measurement Principles' under AS30, for highly probable forecast transactions, has resulted in operating revenue being reduced by Rs 4.6 crore and Rs 6.3 crore of unrealised loss provided for in other income, with a net profit of Rs 35.1 crore," Mr Arvind Thakur, CEO and Joint Managing Director, NIIT Technologies said.

The company's current hedges are pegged at \$222 million covering 30 months.

NITL's Q1 consolidated revenue at Rs 245.8 crore, represented a growth of seven per



Mr Arvind Thakur (left), Chief Executive Officer, NIIT Technologies Ltd, and Mr Rajendra S. Pawar, Chairman, at a press conference in the Capital on Tuesday. — Ramesh Sharma

cent over the same period previous year. The operating profit for the quarter grew 7 per cent over the same period last year to touch Rs 45.6 crore. The operating profit margin in the just ended quar-

ter came in at 18.6 per cent, compared with 18.5 per cent a year earlier.

Europe, Middle East and Africa (EMEA) accounted for a lion's share of business (52 per cent of total revenues),

while the Americas contributed 30 per cent of overall revenues during the quarter. The rest of the world contributed 18 per cent of the revenues. Banking, Financial Services & Insurance vertical pitched in 42 per cent, Travel, Transportation & Logistics (TTL) contributed 28 per cent and Retail & Manufacturing contributed 13 per cent of the revenues.

"In spite of the challenging macro-economic environment, the company acquired six new customers and a healthy order intake of \$43 million. Going forward, the focus would be on improving cost structures and generating business through new non-linear services," said Mr Thakur added. Close to 23 per cent of NIIT Technologies' revenues were derived through non-linear services such as managed services and asset based services in the quarter, and the company expects this figure to rise to 25 per cent over the year.

The Hindu Business Line
New Delhi
July 4, 2008

The Indian Express
Lucknow
July 9, 2008

Room Solutions wins award

New Delhi, July 3

Room Solutions, subsidiary of NIIT Technologies that supplies IT solutions and services to the international insurance market, has bagged accomplishment award at the 2008 Acord Loma Insurance Systems Forum. It received the 'Acord innovative implementation award' in the accomplishment category for implementation of XML standards at Aspen Insurance utilising Acord standards. It also implemented the RLC Placement Message at the insurance company as part of its direct placement project, said a company release. — PTI

NIIT tops Black Book of Outsourcing

Chennai: NIIT Technologies Ltd, the global IT services provider, was ranked No 1 in the prestigious Black Book of Outsourcing 2008 Travel Industry user survey. The survey covers contracts held by 1200 of the top airlines, hotel chains, cargo companies and other travel corporations globally. — ENS

Business Standard
Hyderabad
July 8, 2008

NIIT Tech bags top rank in travel industry

New Delhi: NIIT Technologies has been ranked number one in the Black Book of Outsourcing 2008 Travel Industry user survey. NIIT Technologies gets 25 per cent of its revenues from the travel industry. According to the survey findings, NIIT Technologies won the Top Honors and excelled in both sections of ITO and BPO as well as together as a bundled ITO/BPO supplier. The survey which was conducted by the outsourcing management consulting firm, Brown-Wilson Group, evaluated outsourcing vendors across 18 key performance indicators of operational excellence.

BS Reporter

Deccan Herald
Bangalore
July 10, 2008

NIIT Tech bags Top Honour in outsourcing

New Delhi, DHNS: NIIT Technologies Ltd announced on Wednesday that it was ranked No. 1 in the prestigious Black Book of Outsourcing 2008 Travel Industry user survey. The survey covers contracts held by 1200 of the top airlines, hotel chains, cargo companies and other travel corporations globally. According to the survey findings, NIIT Technologies won the Top Honour and excelled in both sections of ITO and BPO as well as together as a bundled ITO/BPO supplier.

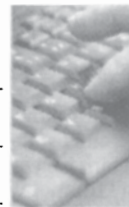
Daily News & Analysis
Jaipur
July 23, 2008

NIIT eyes buy in insurance, travel verticals

Posts Rs 35.1 crore net in April-June quarter

■ NIIT Technologies results

In Rs crore	Q1 ended June 30,		
	2007	2008	% chg
Revenues	229.40	245.80	7.1
Operating profit	42.50	45.60	7.3
Net profit	35.10	35.10	0.0
Operating margin (%)	18.50	18.60	-



Vivek Seal. New Delhi

IT services provider NIIT Technologies is scouting for companies in the travel and insurance verticals for an acquisition to accelerate its revenue growth.

CEO Arvind Thakur said that the acquisition could be in India or abroad. "It will give us an edge in the travel and insurance vertical," he told *DNA Money*.

Though the size of these acquisitions was not clear, Thakur said that NIIT has about Rs 188 crore of surplus cash on its balance sheet. Of this, Rs 80 crore-plus would go into its Greater Noida campus. The remaining Rs 100 crore may be used for the planned acquisition. The company may also consider a 'stock swap'. Thakur, however, did not give a time period for the deal.

Delhi-based NIIT has been on an acquisition spree for some time now. In February this year, the company acquired Germany's Softec for \$4.5 million. In May 2006, it picked up UK-based Room Solution Ltd for \$25 million.

Meanwhile, NIIT reported a net profit of Rs 35.1 crore on consolidated revenues of Rs 245.8 crore in the April-June quarter. Year-on-year, its quarterly revenue grew 7%, but net profit remained unchanged.

"We grew our topline by 7%, which is way higher than the earlier 1-2 % growth. In the rest of the three quarters, we expect our growth rate to remain at similar levels, if not higher," Thakur added.

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Printed and published by Maheshwer Peri on behalf of Outlook Publishing (India) Pvt Ltd.

Editor: N Mahalakshmi, Printed at International Print-O-Pack, C 4-C 11, Phase II, Noida and published from AB-10, S.J. Enclave, New Delhi 110 029

Published for the fortnight of June 28 - July 11, 2008



Despite the macro

Coping with volatility is never easy. Stocks have plunged about 30 per cent this year; many of them have hit 2008 lows. Gone are the days when investors rushed to buy equities at every decline; now, they're adopting a more cautious approach, even joining the selling as markets tumble. At least that's what it looks like given the steep fall in stock prices and dwindling volumes.

True, there are genuine concerns about whether the sizzling pace of economic growth will be maintained as inflation surges to record levels. With so much uncertainty swirling around the markets, investors face a tricky dilemma: should they wade into the markets at current levels or should they cut their losses?

To be sure, stocks are headed for stormy weather this year, but that certainly does not make stocks a complete no-no. Despite all the loud noises being made about inflation and economic growth, the truth is that Indian stocks have never been driven by macroeconomic fundamentals.

For proof, consider this: before 2003, GDP growth rarely exceeded 6 per cent; our forex reserves could hardly be described as adequate and our fiscal deficit was stubbornly high. Interest rates were high too, but India Inc, for the most part, seemed able to cope. With so much against it, our equity markets actually performed quite well. More than 80 per cent of the actively managed domestic mutual funds beat the benchmark until 2003, barring a couple of years which saw the tech boom and bust and two market scams.

While the spectacular performance of stocks in the past five years was a culmination of these factors, that does not, by implication, mean stocks cannot yield returns that could beat inflation if these factors did not exist. That holds a key message for investors: focus on stocks that continue to clock steady profit growth, never mind where the economy/currency/oil prices/interest rates are headed. Stick to stocks whose growth is not dictated by favourable economic conditions. Our cover story this time shortlists 25 stocks that can deliver decent returns despite tough market conditions.

Apart from these, we also have elaborate analyses on three other stocks we find attractive. The first is NIIT which is finally swinging into action by expanding its training business. Next is Sadbhav Engineering, whose order-book, track record and valuations make it a compelling investment case. The third is Bharat Forge. As the company struggles to combat a slowdown in its user industry - automobiles - the management is eyeing new areas of business such as capital goods to de-risk its operations.

No matter how the markets swing, it is always a good time to learn how to invest from the best in the business. Perhaps it's an even better time to visit such ideas in bad times such as these. So from this issue on, we will profile some of the world's best-known investors in a series called Profit Guru. We start with John Templeton, the renowned value investor who made his billions by being one of the first to invest in emerging markets.

N Mahalakshmi
Editor

mahalakshmi@outlookindia.com

The value of education

Foraying into new training areas and a growing demand for basic IT education in India will keep NIIT busy over the next few years

Mohammed Ekramul Haque

It is a name synonymous with technology education in India. Starting operations a little over two decades ago when the idea of computer education was just taking off in India, NIIT today is one of the best known names in the business.

With thousands of teaching centres across India, the New Delhi-headquartered company now also has operations overseas. More importantly, it has diversified into other, exciting areas of specialised training such as executive education. It is also eyeing projects to equip schools across the country – private and public – with the essentials for IT education (hardware and software).

All these initiatives are expected to bode well for NIIT in the coming years, say analysts.

Education is key

At a recent analysts meeting, chief executive officer Vijay Thadani announced that one of NIIT's goals would be to enter new areas of business by teaming up with top companies in that arena.

Its Imperia venture is a good example of that. Imperia provides executive training via its partners, among them are the Indian Institute of Management in Ahmedabad, Calcutta, Lucknow and Indore. The market for executive education is estimated to be worth Rs 35-40 crore. What sets the 20-odd Imperia programmes apart from other offerings is the premium NIIT can command for its courses. Programmes under the elite brand typically cost Rs 1.2-1.4 lakh – much higher than other courses offered by NIIT. Also, working in NIIT's favour is that there are few adversaries here – the only real competition is HughesNet. A new entrant in this segment, Imperia is

Vijay Thadani, CEO, expects individual learning business to drive earnings growth

OPPORTUNITIES GALORE

figures in \$ bn

20

Individuals

- 80% of 11 mn in colleges need training for employment
- Low penetration - only 5% of the population has 1 certifiable skill

29

Schools

- Urgent need to upgrade quality of education in public and pvt. schools
- Increasing part of educational spend being outsourced

59

Corporates

- Growing recognition of training
- Outsourcing growth at 18%

fast amassing converts. In banking, NIIT sewed a deal with ICICI Bank and created the NIIT Institute of Finance, Banking and Insurance (IFBI), which offers 6-month courses in banking and insurance. NIIT's partners in the IFBI Programme - apart from ICICI Bank - now include HDFC Bank, Kotak Bank, Yes Bank and ICICI Securities.

It's a strategy that has reaped good dividends. For one thing, associating with market leaders gives NIIT a visibility and acceptability that would have been tougher to achieve had it ventured into these markets on its own.

No wonder then, in fiscal 2008, NIIT has trained 10,000 students under the IFBI and Imperia programmes.

Thadani says there are plans for more such joint partnerships in the future.

Recently, NIIT tied up with Genpact, one of the countries biggest business process outsourcing (BPO) outfits to create and offer training programmes in business processes, language skills and business communication.

Back to school

The rather appalling state of primary and secondary education in the coun-

try has also thrown up interesting opportunities for NIIT. With education a priority on the government's reform agenda, some steps have been initiated in that direction. The Sarv Shiksha Abhiyan programme is one such project: it aims to equip 600 districts or 1 million government schools across India with the right tools and infrastructure for educating students. The planned expenditure is about Rs 50 lakh for every district (covering infrastructure and course materials). IT experts believe that about 30 per cent of the government's expenditure of Rs 300 crore (Rs 50 lakh X 600 districts) could be parceled out to private-sector education providers such as NIIT.

NIIT also has its eyes on the ICT@School programme - a project that focuses on IT training in schools. Given that we have about 60,000 such schools and an estimated spend of Rs 2 lakh for every school, this opens up another Rs1,200 crore market.

In addition, there is also the market for equipping private schools with all the required gear for training students in technology. NIIT services about 981 schools out of an estimated 10,000 private schools in the country. The potential for software and content is estimated to be about Rs 3-4 lakh per year per school - a huge opportunity just waiting to be tapped.

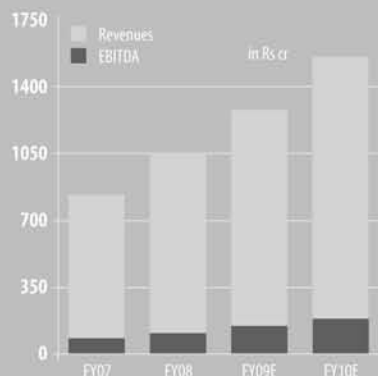
For sure, NIIT is positioning itself well to exploit this. "We have a dual focus, both on government schools and private schools," says Thadani.

The company recently bagged an order from the Andhra Pradesh government to provide IT learning solutions (hardware and software) to over 2,000 schools.

Analysts expect the education sector in India to stay abuzz with new ventures and public-private partnerships.

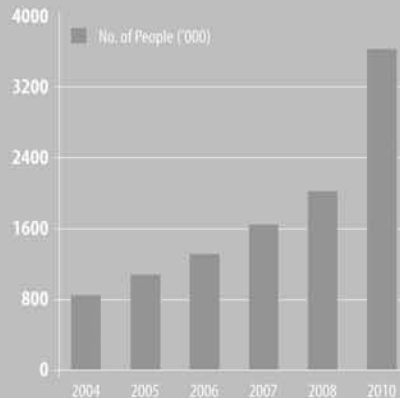
ON COURSE

NIIT's operating profit margins are expected to expand to around 12 per cent by fiscal 2010



NEED OF THE HOUR

Manpower requirement for the IT sector is expected to grow at 34 per cent CAGR over two years



Harit Shah, IT analyst with Angel Broking, forecasts the school learning division of NIIT will grow by 20-25 per cent in the next 2-3 years.

Graduating to the board room

It's not just schools that NIIT is heavily involved in; it also has a significant corporate training services division. This segment got a major boost after NIIT snapped up Element K, a US-based provider of learning solutions and the owner of the world's largest content library with more than 3,500+ courses offered in the US, Canada and India.

The total global training market is estimated to be worth \$100 billion+; within that, the estimated outsourcing market (Element K's forte) is worth \$5.1 billion. Here, the US is the biggest market, accounting for 62 per cent or \$3.2 billion.

Element K has very high-profile partners including Microsoft, Philips, Toyota and Ford Motor, giving it an edge over rivals in the business.

For NIIT, a huge chunk of revenues from the corporate learning solutions come from Element K. And that is expected to continue. "Element K should bring in about two-thirds of corporate learning revenues in the next three years," says Thadani.

That may not altogether be a good thing, say some analysts. A US economic slowdown will directly affect corporate training budgets and that could put Element K right in the line of fire. Despite this, Thadani remains upbeat on the overall prospects of this division. "Globally, while the corporate training industry is growing at 3-4 per cent, in India, it is rising by 30-40 per cent," he points out. He expects this division to bring in 35-40 per cent of total revenues.

Cash cow

Despite ambitious expansion plans and forays into new areas of business, NIIT has no immediate plans to raise debt. Funds are currently being raised from internal accruals. "We are not looking at raising any additional debt," says Thadani. "Even though our partners share part of the equity, what we are looking for is their domain expertise."

So how does NIIT fund all these new ventures? Simple: from its learning institutes in India, which come under the Individual Learning Solutions (ILS) business. This division contributes about 62 per cent to gross earnings of the company and is the biggest revenue earner of NIIT as well.

The company expects this division to maintain its leadership status in the years to come. "ILS should remain the largest contributor to earnings, bringing in more than 50 per cent of total earnings," says Thadani.

Still, a looming US recession clouds the immediate outlook for this division. Many analysts fret that a slowdown in the IT could bring down NIIT's earnings with it.

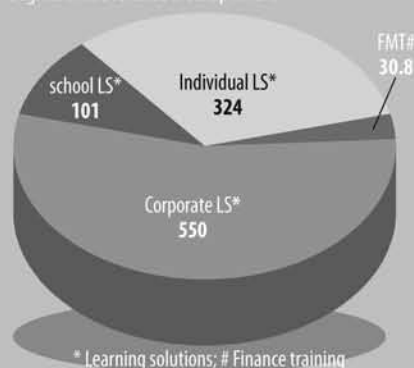
While that remains a real danger, Angel's Shah is hopeful about NIIT maintaining "a decent growth rate" even if there is a slow down in the next few quarters. NIIT's management is even more optimistic: Thadani vehemently dismisses all talk of a slow down and predicts that IT spending will "continue to grow at a decent pace".

While there is one camp that believes that India's glorious IT story is set to come to an end, Thadani insists that that isn't the case. "Certainly, the IT story in India is no longer a cost arbitrage story," he says. "India now offers both value and scale offering. Companies like Infosys and Wipro operate

IT'S ELEMENTARY

Element K buyout has bouyed revenues in the corporate learning segment in FY08

Segment wise revenue breakup in Rs cr



LOGGING IN

Individual learning registrations have increased by 30% (yoy) over the last three quarters

Period	Jun '06	Sep '06	Dec '06	Mar '07	Jun '07	Sep '07	Dec '07	Mar '08
Registrations	81776	96284	51850	80632	92357	126573	66335	104085
QoQ growth (%)	-	17.74	-46.15	55.51	14.54	37.05	-47.59	56.91

just like some of the best companies in the world. The industry's fundamentals continue to remain strong."

Chinese connection

NIIT doesn't just have operations in India, it also runs learning centres in a country that many Indian companies consider a business rival: China.

Starting off in 1997, the Indian company today has 171 centres across China and claims to be the country's second largest IT education provider.

Enrollments, he says, are growing about 35 per cent every year: "Coming from a small base, growth from China is expected to be faster than that of India. Today, China accounts for 15 per cent of ILS revenues. That figure should go up to 20 per cent in 2-3 years."

Obviously, Thadani is spreading his bets. "India is far ahead of China and should continue to remain that way, but in the long run both countries will do well," he adds.

Financials

For the year ended March 2008, NIIT's net revenues were up by 27 per cent at Rs 1,006.83 crore. Net profit rose by 32 per cent to Rs 75.6 crore on the back of an improved product mix that produced a higher margin band.

Revenues from the ILS division (including finance and management training) jumped by 40 per cent from a year ago to Rs 350 crore; operating margins also added 452 basis points at 18 per cent. The jump is attributed

partly to the higher IT training margins and higher volumes from the finance and management training business, which completed its first full year of operations and generated revenues of Rs 30.8 crore.

According to Angel's Shah, "Revenues from ILS IT should grow at 25-30 per cent in the next 2-3 years and ILS should continue contributing more than 50 per cent to operating profit. Operating profit margins should be 21-22 per cent in the same period."

The School Learning division also grew by 19 per cent following the company's renewed focus on this segment. Operating margins improved by 134 basis points to stand at 13 per cent. Says Shah: "SLS should see revenue growth of 20-25 per cent over the next 2-3 years while margins of this segment should be 13-14 per cent. On contribution to total revenues, SLS should account for 2-3 per cent more than current levels."

Revenues from the corporate learning division grew by 21 per cent in fiscal 2008. While volumes rose by 29 per cent, currency fluctuations hit operating margins, which slumped to 5 per cent. Shah believes that in the medium term, operating margins could stay tethered at 6-8 per cent, while he forecasts 8-10 annual growth in revenues from this segment.

At Rs 101, the stock trades at 20 times its estimated fiscal 2009 and 15 times its estimated fiscal 2010 earnings and is a good stock to buy on declines. ■

MID Day
New Delhi
July 30, 2008

Financial Chronicle
Hyderabad
July 30, 2008

It pays to be business intelligent



ALL EARS: NIIT CEO Vijay K Thadani (left) with SAS MD Sudipta Sen

MID DAY Correspondent would go up to 40,000 in next three years.”

SEEING the immense need for Business Intelligence Technologies (BIT) world wide, NIIT and SAS Institute have joined hands.

NIIT claims this is first of its kind specialised curriculum on Business Intelligence, which would be taught to students of graduate and under graduate-level.

Vijay K Thadani, CEO of NIIT said, “At present there is a requirement of 75,000 BI professional out of which only 50 per cent professionals are available. Out of this half of the professionals are not certified. We have planned to bring out 8000 professional in a year which

The course would be available initially in India through 150 centres of NIIT, which would be expanded to 300 centres by the next year. After India, NIIT could also take BI course to 34 other countries.

BI course will be taught along with the NIIT famous GNIIT course and the fees of the course would be Rs 1.15 lakh. Talking about the growth of business intelligence professional Sudipta K Sen CEO and Managing Director of SAS said, “There is a high demand of BI professionals in telecom, insurance, banking and retail sector.”



JOINT EFFORT: NIIT would offer curriculum, and SAS would provide contents, software and technologies

NIIT, SAS join hands

NIIT entered a strategic alliance with SAS Institute to offer business intelligence technologies training globally.

Business Standard
Hyderabad
July 31, 2008

NIIT inks pact with SAS

New Delhi: NIIT said it has tied up with business analytics software company, SAS Institute Inc for offering curriculum on business intelligence technologies. As part of the pact, NIIT will offer the curriculum under its information technology career programme, GNIIT, for engineers and graduates. “The programme will be offered initially across 150 NIIT centres and we plan to extend this to 300 centres in the next few years,” Chief Executive Officer Vijay Thadani, said. NIIT aims to train around 8,000 students in the first year of this programme. Both the companies plan to offer the programme in 34 countries. SAS has two wholly-owned subsidiaries in India.

NW18

The Statesman
New Delhi
July 8, 2008

Help at hand

The NIIT has launched a path-breaking initiative that aims at making maths simpler and more enjoyable for students.

Promila Roychoudhuri has details

MATHEMATICS is an important subject not only in schools and colleges but also for most competitive examinations. Many students have a hidden fear for the subject that they develop at an early age. With a view to addressing this problem the NIIT has launched a breakthrough initiative that aims at making maths easier, simpler and more enjoyable for students.

The acclaimed institute inaugurated the first ever NIIT eGuru Math Lab on 25 June, in collaboration with Ballygaunge Shiksha Sadan in Kolkata, which

marked the establishment of a first of its kind Math Lab in eastern India. H P Malpani, president, managing committee, Ballygaunge Shiksha Sadan, along with L Balasubramanian, president of School Learning Solutions, NIIT Ltd, and Debdas Banerjee, deputy general manager, NIIT, eastern India, graced the occasion as guests of honour.

Sketchpad. This innovative concept will make learning enjoyable and visually more appealing to enable students to learn better. In addition to helping students learn the tricks of the trade, the Math Lab will also enable teachers to demonstrate and explain abstract mathematical concepts by using concrete objects, model, charts, graphs, pictures, and, more importantly, the geometric Sketchpad software. The software will help teachers to draw accurate figures like triangles, rectangles and circles, thus making the process of drawing a little less time consuming.

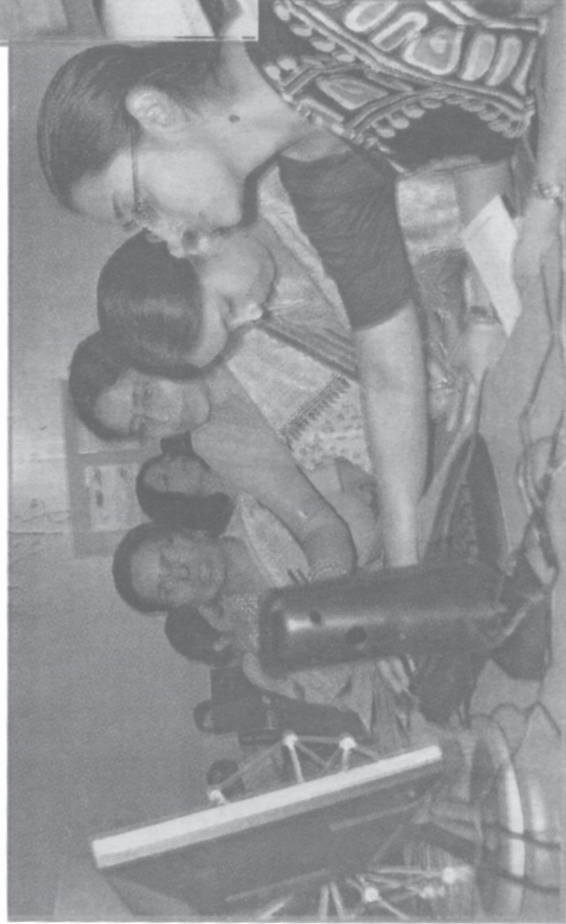
Said Sen, "Maths is generally looked upon as a vapid, boring and technical subject. They will now have the opportunity to understand, internalise, discover and verify basic mathematical and geometrical concepts. This laboratory will help build interest and encourage students to think and discuss problems more freely with teachers."

The entire package comprises the set up of the Lab with a capacity of 60 students. They will be provided computers, different models and objects that are being imported, as well as a three-year contract of support, maintenance and upgradation along with teachers' training. The whole package will cost around 1.2 million. "Teachers should have a good grounding in the new technology in order to make the venture a big success," said Balasubramanian.



Sunita Sen, principal of Ballygaunge Shiksha Sadan, together with G K Khaitan, the secretary of the school and Nirmal Khaitan, member of the managing committee of the school, were also present.

The NIIT eGuru Math Lab is expected to enable students to learn and explore mathematical concepts and verify mathematical facts and theorems with the help of software like geometrical



The Times of India
New Delhi
July 21, 2008

Technology shows the way

TODAY, TECHNOLOGY TOUCHES ALL ASPECTS OF OUR LIVES. WHY, THEN, SHOULD EDUCATION BE AN EXCEPTION? SAKSHI KHATTAR HIGHLIGHTS SOME INITIATIVES THAT ARE SOLVING PAST PROBLEMS WITH NEW TECHNOLOGIES

IF students, on one hand, are learning alphabets while watching a movie, on the other, they are playing educational games on the computer using multiple mouse devices. Technology has touched our lives in many ways, including the educational one. And with portable technology such as laptops and iPods, the teaching process has finally gone beyond classrooms and blackboards. Today, the world is witnessing a tremendous change in the education scenario, leading to a paradigm shift from teacher-based education to a learner-based one.

REACHING GRASSROOTS

"The audio-visual medium is a great way to reach/teach children as it helps in better understanding and comprehension as well as retention," says Sashwati Banerjee, executive director, Sesame Workshop India. The organisation is into developing interactive educational content using multimedia.

She adds: We have developed innovative low technology models such as the 'bioscope' to be used in Balaivadi and Aanganwadi settings. Our recent research and anecdotal evidence from our partners shows that this has been hugely successful for engaging children. It has also helped bring children back to school settings, particularly those from migrant backgrounds. We are currently developing digital prototypes to enable access and improve quality of early childhood education in rural areas that have little or no access."

In a similar initiative, laptops are being used to teach reading and writing within just 30 days with the help of multimedia. This literacy programme, called Tara Akshar Literacy Programme (TALP), has been launched by Development Alternatives under the Poorest Areas Civil Society (PACS) programme.

Says Kiran Sharma, programme manager, PACS: "In four weeks' time, we have trained women who had never picked up a pencil in their life. But today they can read and write." Informs Soma Biswas, manager (communications), Development Alternatives. She adds: "The second phase of TALP will be conducted in Ratlam, Dewas, Badwani and Sahapur districts from August 1, educating 5,000 women."

Likewise, a project by Microsoft employs multiple mouse devices on a single computer in a bid to cater to more students with lesser resources. Elaborating on other projects being carried out, Vidya Natampally, director (strategy), Microsoft Research India, adds: "In another initiative, we digitally record live classes by grassroots-level teachers and distribute them to rural and slum schools, on DVDs." The project, entitled Digital Study Hall, is being carried out in collaboration with computer scientists and education experts.

PITCHING IN

Numerous private players are also doing their bit to bring 'interactivity' to classrooms and make the learning experience a fun-filled one. Promethean, for instance focuses on providing 21st Century interactive classroom technology;



FUN-FILLED LEARNING: Students learning through a bioscope, an initiative of Sesame Workshop India. This wooden box, with five peep holes, allows five children to watch a movie simultaneously. The teacher moves the slides manually with a handle atop the box and children have to kneel down to watch the slides. Background music from the TV show is played as an accompaniment to the visuals among others.

teacher training, and comprehensive resource materials. Their Activboards and other advanced classroom technologies have been in use for over ten years, offering a comprehensive and effective classroom system.

"These Activboards, when used in conjunction with our online lesson sharing and collaboration tools, can connect hundreds of teachers and thousands of students. This way they can simultaneously co-operate in lessons and, through low cost video conferencing, ask questions and participate in live online lessons," informs Peter Ormerod, international business development manager, Promethean.

Promethean provides a variety of resources for teachers, such as free downloads from their education community website and commercially produced material from leading educational publishers. On localising their content, Ormerod states: "When working with local part-

ners, we ensure that the material is upgraded to suit the specific needs of local curriculum and language needs."

Similarly, Apple is providing a range of hardware and software to foster creativity, communication and collaboration with its integrated initiatives in the field of education. It offers a total solution that supports schools and educators in implementing a 21st Century learning environment. And it isn't just about providing computers, the organisation takes into account the requirements of the institute, sets up Apple Labs on campus and even conducts regular training workshops to keep faculty members updated on the latest in educational technology.

Many institutes are benefitting from Apple's solutions, including Entrepreneurship and Management Processes International, Delhi and Whistling Woods International, Mumbai,

content, in that language, thereby overcoming the limitations of a visually-impaired learner. Apple, too, is using their technology to help the visually impaired. Using iPods, which can record up to 24 hours of lectures, Apple is utilising the audio medium for learning. Available for as little as Rs 2,300, these iPods serve as an electronic classroom, allowing anywhere, anytime access to course material. Besides, iTunes provides access to educational content from hundreds of top colleges, universities, and educationally focussed organisations across the globe.

Also, the Microsoft Corporation has recently partnered with industry and advocacy group leaders worldwide to launch new software that will make it easier for anyone to create documents and content that will be accessible for the visually-impaired and print-disabled. Details of the same are available at www.daisy.org/tools/index.shtml

For the hearing impaired

The hearing-impaired have found a friend in NITT's Affirmative Action - the social outreach arm of The NITT Institute (TNI). In fact, TNI recently presented NITT certificates in graphic design and desktop publishing to its first batch of 18 hearing-impaired students. The students are now certified users of Corel Draw, Adobe Photoshop, Flash and Adobe Indesign.

Other impairments

Deepalaya, an NGO, recently launched the IOCL computer centre to help cater to children with special needs. Since then, 30 differently-abled children from Deepalaya's special unit as well as 17 other students are learning the rudiments of computers.

Informs Rama Balatchandran, senior officer (marketing), Deepalaya: "The centre has opened a world of opportunities for these students as they can finally learn computer skills. They have further developed a new sense of self-confidence and their attitude towards life has become increasingly positive. In fact, their approach to academics has also improved."

SOCIAL AWARENESS

Apart from specific initiatives aimed at increasing access to education, various social networking websites and blogs are also being used not just to share information but also to spread social awareness. One such initiative is Swachha's Monsoon Wooding Campaign, an annual campaign that takes stock of the fast-depleting greens in Delhi.

Elaborates Vimlendu Jha, executive-director, Swachha: "The campaign has distributed more than 1,000 saplings this year; has collected more than four kilos of nails and staples from trees so far; and has planted more than 300 saplings through their plantation drives. Moreover, three large plantation drives are proposed in the month of July this year. The campaign is anchored through a web-based model of mobilisation using collaborative platforms like Facebook and Blogspot."

THE DIFFERENTLY-ABLED

Technology has become a boon for the differently-abled as well. Today, it serves as an alternative medium to make people self-dependent.

For the visually-impaired

An apt example of IT in education serving the differently-abled is Screen Access for All (SAFA), which was conceptualised by the National Association for the Blind (NAB) and Media Lab Asia. SAFA enables visually challenged children to operate a computer using text to speech output for Windows environment in English, Hindi and a variety of Indian languages. It not only supports word documents but lets users use the internet as well. On switching on the computer, SAFA detects the language of the screen and starts narrating

The Economic Times
New Delhi
July 25, 2008

Mobile learning opens new chapter in education

EnableM, Tata Interactive, 24X7 Learning, Airtel, IMS and NIIT Bet Big On The New Medium Of Teaching

Shreya Biswas
NEW DELHI

IF YOU find classroom teaching boring or computer sessions a little too tiring then it's time to break the mould and switch over to learning on the go! Now, you can take lessons in maths, English and science and also do your training on your mobile and PDAs. And what more, you can also take your preparatory tests, such as CAT and IIT-JEE, on your handset. Some firms, such as EnableM, Tata Interactive, 24X7 Learning, Airtel, IMS and NIIT, are working overtime to make this possible.

While companies are offering small training modules for employees, coaching and content development institutes in the education space are tying up with mobile operators to offer such services.

EnableM, a mobile content distribution firm, for one, has tied up with Harper Collins, Britannica for content aggregation and dissemination. It also has institutional tie-ups with University of Florida, Haifa University, Israel, CDAC, Media Lab Asia to deliver content and basic course modules on maths, English, science. A new entrant in the mobile learning space, it launched a module — maths for mobile — four months back. The company is now planning to launch My Sports Pal in India. The programme aims at making maths interesting using sports. "Mlearning, though in a

nascent stage in India, has huge potential," says EnableM CEO Amit Zaveri. "Going forward, you will see more action happening in the space."

India is witnessing rapid growth in mobile and internet penetration. With 250 million mobile subscribers and about 42 million internet connections, the market is huge and growing. Analysts believe convergence of mobile, internet, and TV services on a single gadget will lead to increased awareness and popularity of this form of education in the next few years.

Airtel on the other hand, has plans to launch a small reference module on mobile for employees in the next two months. Employees can access information on leave, company policy et al from a central server by sending an SMS. Second step would be to launch customer service information on the handsets. If things work fine, the company may go ahead with it's plans of introducing it's course on mobile in the future. "We are exploring this medium as it looks like an exciting platform. To start with, we will look at delivering content for frontline employees in sales and customer service," says Krishnamurthy Shankar, director-HR, Airtel.

Such a medium has multiple benefits. One, it offers an interactive learning experience; two, accessibility of mobile devices in remote areas. The platform can be used anywhere, anytime, including schools, home or when in transit. It engages learners and is far cheaper than computers. Applect Learning Systems

director Ritesh Hemrajani says, it will also help us to reach the bottom end of the pyramid with some learning solution as these are the people who are still some time away from computers and the internet. He believes, it will serve as an effective education platform even in basic formats of entry level products. This has led Applect to prepare solutions on the same.

The firm is trying to come up with different applications — the static applications, which will be downloadable from the Applect site and third party neutral sites. Initially, it will be in the form of free question banks. Effort will be to get more and more people to download while subsequent advance versions may require cost to download. Secondly, a premium dynamic service which will take care of assessment led learning and will provide a customised feedback and learning content. "We are trying to tie-up with a couple of mobile operators for this and also to expand the area of value added services in the field of education," Hemrajani.

NIIT, on the other hand, has been doing it for the last one year through PDAs and the company claims a huge response. "Companies would take it up as it's an extremely cost effective medium of training," says Vipul Rastogi, senior VP and head enterprise solutions, NIIT. The IT education firm says it has created content for the world leader in direct selling of FMCG goods that was imparted using PDA as one of the medium to impart training. Another instance is of an 'Experience Programme' to build brand ambassadors for its category which encompasses over 200 products, including nutritional food supplements in liquid, powder, food bar, tablet, and capsule form. The program included a comprehensive health assessment and consultation, facility tours, and presentations on health concepts. It is also in talks with a beverage major for a big project in mobile learning.



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