

Educational Tourism – New Dimension of the Indian IT market

Outsourcing

DELHI – It started slowly in the wake of the dotcom crisis shortly after the millennium. The Indian IT company Koenig Solutions experienced that the money for IT investments by the Western companies, including the IT employees' certification for network administration, software etc., was no longer as generous, as it was before the bubble burst. But when Koenig Solutions at the same time, without effort, had a British participant for one of their certification courses, which was normally targeted at qualifying Indian IT workers, the foundation for Koenig Solutions' focus for the years to come was laid - IT certifications and shorter courses at lower prices and that too of much better quality, than the course participants would be able to find in their respective native countries. Or, as the owner and Managing Director of Koenig Solutions, Rohit Aggarwal, prefers calling it – 'Educational Tourism' or 'Course Tourism'.

Availability of IT specialists

The price of an IT course in India is lower than a similar course in Silicon Valley, London, Amsterdam or Hvidovre is self-evident, but how can an Indian company do better than its Western competitors, Rohit Aggarwal explains, "Because we're established in central Delhi, where many IT specialists live, but at the same time there are not as many IT jobs as in Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad, we have the opportunity of attracting some of the best teachers, who might have settled here with family and are therefore not ready to move for a job, and also want to avoid one and a half hour of transportation both ways to the IT companies placed outside of Delhi."

Three Tracks Option

The course participants can choose between three different levels of speed in the classes – a "regular track", a "fast-track" and a "super-fast track", where the first track is for who are completely new to the discipline they're being taught, the "fast track" is for those who are competent beforehand, and the "super fast track" is for those, who know it all, but missing the certificate, that has become so important in recruiting new employees in times of the financial crises, where companies increasingly have been able to pick and choose among candidates. The tailor-made IT courses also include the possibility of private lessons for those who might need it, just like Koenig Solutions also offers start up courses (Career Enabler™) for those who wish to enter the IT business, without any skills except the absolute basics like knowing of computers, internet and word processing programs etc. Here, the Indian company offers three-months courses in network administration, Java etc.

At the Blue Ocean

Competition

DELHI – Just like the other bigger or smaller Indian IT companies, Koenig Solutions originally focused on IT services like consultancy and software development, while the course and teaching part has arrived later, and at first only targeted towards the big, domestic Indian market. “But today there are so many competitors in India as well as in other countries, who offer IT services at lower prices than in the West that we are navigating at the Red Sea. Because of that, we have moved to the blue sea, where we have greater opportunities of moving in a way that fits us,” says Managing Director Rohit Aggarwal, and reveals his great enthusiasm for the thoughts and theories, two professors at the French business academy Insead, W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne, presented in their book “Blue Ocean Strategy”.

For several years, Rohit Aggarwal tried to continue with both consultancy and development of software parallel with the growing course activities, but since the number of course participants from abroad steadily increased, the Koenig management decided in 2005 to stop the traditional Indian IT services. He respectfully ascribes a great part of the success to his closest associate, Sandeep Dhawan, who came to Koenig approximately 10 years ago with his experiences from three different providers of IT courses.

Except from the actual certification courses in different technologies from IT providers like Cisco, Microsoft, Oracle and Red Hat etc., and the start-up courses for beginners in the IT world, the ambitions of Rohit Aggarwal are high. “In the long term, we would like to utilize our good staff of teachers to offer courses of long duration, for example it will be possible to take a bachelor’s degree here,” says Aggarwal. In the same way, he and Sandeep have started working slowly with plans about establishing courses on the home ground of the Western competitors, not at least because Aggarwal is convinced that his company, because of the wide range of courses, has more to offer to the participants, than the competitors. “Of course, we will not be able to offer courses in US or Great Britain at the same prices as in India, but we will still be able to do cheaper than the others, because we will make use of our own staff, who will not receive the wages, other course providers have to pay,” he says. In order to reach that far, it will be necessary for Aggarwal to obtain more capital, than he is capable of. Therefore he has plans for quoting the company on the stock exchange and obtain capital to the growth of the company. “We expect a quotation on the stock exchange within two years, and expect to reach 1000 course participants per month within the next five years, where we have 150 today,” he says.

Training Locations a la carte

DELHI – The Managing Director of the Indian provider of IT courses Koenig Solutions, Rohit Aggarwal, may very well point out the great value of being able to manage at the blue sea with a lot of qualified IT teachers by virtue of the relative lack of IT companies in the Indian capital, but he doesn’t mind complying with the wish of the foreign course participants about establishing training centers away from the 14-15 million inhabitant big, noisy and dusty capital. By request from several visiting course participants from the Western world, Koenig Solutions some years ago established a training center in the small town of Shimla in the

southern edge of the Himalayan mountain range, as the British under the colony empire established a summer capital, in order to escape the stifling heat in the plateau, where Delhi is located. "But it is so cold in the wintertime," Aggarwal refers several participants describing the location, and soon Koenig Solutions obliged a wish from some participants for another training center in the former Portuguese colony of Goa, which has become a Mecca for Western tourists because of its beaches, especially during wintertime, in our part of the world. Lately, yet another course center has been established in Dehradun, in order to have a location in a more peaceful area than Delhi, but still within a manageable distance to the capital. No matter which of the course centers the visiting participants decide for, Koenig Solutions sell their courses in a package solution which, besides the course and the examinations, also includes flight to and from India, pick-up service at the airport, accommodation at Koenig's own budget-class hotel, food, daily transport between hotel and course center plus various tourist excursions on Sundays. The price for a package-solution including for example a two-week Microsoft certification course is 2250 Euro, while the price for a similar course in Europe or the US, according to Aggarwal, costs about 5000 Euros, which is almost double the price – and that is without transportation and accommodation. If you wish a course and accommodation outside of the hectic capital, the price increases by 1 to 5 percent, depending on locality.

Hard Work

DELHI – Talking to some course participants reveals that it is no way a holiday, when the participants leave their homes in Holland, Great Britain, Norway or Nigeria to take an IT course in the capital of India. Several of the course participants Børsen met tell that during the two, three or five weeks their respective course takes, they almost don't do anything beside following the course and get on with the subjects on the weekly off days.

A great number of participants are independent IT consultants, who have invested in their future in the IT line of business, in order to increase their possibilities. But there are also course participants like the three colleagues Lucas Warunek, Bocar Mbaye and Andrew Upton, who have convinced their boss in the British IT company Kodit Database that it is important that they qualify, so the company is able to manage competition in the future. The Norwegian Harold Loken has seen the possibilities of qualifying to greater assignments in a situation, where he is "in between jobs", as he tells. He sees it as an advantage, that he has been able to pick a networking course that runs for 50-60 days, so he's got time to concentrate on his efforts, since the other courses he knows of, runs for only 10-12 days. Dutch Clyde has primarily gone to India to get a certificate of his skills, which he to a great extent already possesses. He is convinced that back home with the certificate in hand, he will be able to get a better job and a better pay. "But to hold a certificate alone doesn't prove that you will be better at doing your job. It only shows, that you have gained knowledge within the area you're certified," he says. Loretta from Nigeria, who has worked with the IT department at the University of Yola, is following a five-week course in one of Microsoft's technologies, which she finds will better her skills, and therefore got the time and the necessary money granted. Besides she tells that around 40 percent of the IT employees in Nigeria are female. British Michael Partner has been so unsatisfied with his first course of web design that he himself financed another course trip to India. But where many of the other course participants have travelled to India to attain the much coveted certificate on their knowledge, Michael has primarily come to qualify as an independent web designer.

Read in Danish: <http://www.koenig-solutions.com/training/borsen.pdf>