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E-learning- Learn it the e-way

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Dusky Blackboards, finger shaped chinks, zig zag wooden benches, hand written notes- the perfect picture of an epitome of learning. But have you ever wondered on how it would have been better if learning was much more casual with you sitting at home, relaxing on a couch and reading the ready set of notes.

E-learning is the new trend on the path of learning in this 21st century. The grim picture of learning is getting replaced with that of virtual classrooms, e-tutorials and online exams. With the direct communication developing between the experts and students, the education has opened up its wings for better education. Gone are the days when students have to slog for lectures and make notes, e-learning makes it "study in your way" possible. Flexible, cost effective and on-demand availability makes e-learning- the future path of learning for all.

The e-way

The world has embraced the e-learning in a big way. According to statistics, one of the top 10 positions among global 1000 companies of the future will be that of an online learning designer. Interestingly, many companies are booming up here in India as well for providing e-classes. The metros were the first targets, but now with the rise of the demand most of the cities have also become prominent centers of e-learning.

"E-learning in India has grown very rapidly in the last 5 years. On one hand, shelf life of information has reduced drastically and our workforce has to keep acquiring new knowledge to remain competitive. On the other, Indian companies are now operating on global grounds. Because of these two influencing factors the need to train employees has become a necessity. Most of the medium and large organizations in India use e-learning in some or the other form," says Karthik K S, CEO, 24x7 learning, one of the leading e-learning companies in India.

According to him, e-learning has seen completion rates of more than 85% in India on an average against the global average of around 30%-35%. The figure clearly shows wide acceptance of e-learning amongst learners in India.

With the competition increasing on a mushrooming speed in the market, one needs to acquire the maximum skills to catch up with it. Even the creation of a knowledge repository is a must for everyone. The acquisition of better skills is needed to sharpen and widen the knowledge base. With new challenges sprouting out, e-learning is the key for all of them.

"Collaborative learning is the need of the hour. With the number of educational institutes increasing, the quality of education is a matter of question. A repository of information which can be accessible to all is needed. With the broadband speed increasing and lot of players coming into the market; e-learning has a bright future ahead. Cost effective and less time consuming, the youth, which forms the majority of the population, surely prefer this as the medium of learning," says Arun Balachandran, CEO, Smart Guruji, which has come up with the new affordable offers for the convenience of students. For example: they are offering the product, IT finishing school, which costs Rs 12000 in the market at just Rs 1500.

Why e-learning

The major advantage of e-learning is that it is self-paced. The learner can make his own timetable and study. With the traveling and maintenance cost cutting down, people find this as cost effective. Even in case of referring the notes, the e-learning platform helps the individual to

store the information in a better way. Not just students even the working professionals are interested in learning the e-way as it offers.

Flexible and accessibility makes it more convenient for the learners. There is constant updation of content making the individual well versed with the market standards. Like no other training form, e-learning promises to provide a single experience that accommodates the three distinct learning styles of auditory learners, visual learners, and kinesthetic learners.

"With the people recognizing its power, lots of schools and organizations have introduced new programs making a firm step towards the growth of e-learning in India. Even public sector banks like State bank of India, Punjab National bank, etc, have started implementing e-learning in the last one year. The banks and government organizations implementing e-learning coming out of the conservative mindset is a welcoming step," says Manjul Sahay, COO, Transversal e Networks (TeN), which is focusing on online exams, which is emerging in a big way now with many schools coming up with this concept.

Government initiatives

Over the past few years, even the government has come forward and launched the National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (ICT). An amount of Rs 4612 crore is being incurred during the 11th Five Year Plan for the scheme. UGC-INFONET was set up towards the end of 2004, after constant efforts. Joining the crusade of e-learning, it provides electronic access to scholarly literature available over the Internet in all areas of learning to the university sector in India.

Many other major plans have come forward like the set up for production of video-based teaching material by the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), the Bangalore based Indian Institutes of Sciences (IISc) and Technical Teacher Training Institutes (TTTI.) Gyan Darshan, which was launched on January 26, 2000, as an exclusive higher education TV channel to provide quality distance education by IGNOU, can be considered as an effective effort in India.

At the institutional level many institutes have entered into online distance education and the much talked about NIIT Varsity offers training to 500,000 students annually across 33 countries. Institutes like the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta (IIM-C) have entered into a strategic alliance with NIIT, to offer executive development programs through virtual classrooms.

"Though people in rural areas still consider computer as something alien but in the last four-five years, the trend has changed. The PC sales have increased and usage of computer in schools are on a rise. The country has adapted the new trends of technology. Even institutes like NIIT along with Govt schools are organising new projects promoting e-learning. With students getting accustomed with computers at school level itself and people becoming computer-savvy, e-learning is surely on a rise," says Manish Mohan, Head of India Development Center, Element K, who are primarily into corporate training especially workplace learning.

The visibility quotient between the learner and the teacher in understanding things and reconfirming on them then and there itself makes e-learning the most preferred. E-learning also offers individualized instruction, which print media cannot provide. Though e-learning offers boundless scope in the field of learning, it has its own limitations as well.

The upfront investment is larger due to development costs. Budgets and cash flows need to be negotiated depending on the progress. With technology being sought as the sole partner, the issues related to it always pose as a problem. One of the main hindrances in the path of e-learning is the social acceptance. When classrooms are still considered as the epitome of learning, the virtual set up will surely take time to be accepted. But in this 21st century, all these drawbacks get sidelined when its advantages are seen.

Future

Unique in its learning style, preferences and needs, e-learning is on the rising path. With

academicians, students, parents, institutions and even government organizations accepting it, the future of e-learning is very bright in India.

With the rising acceptance of e-learning, a new BIS (Bureau of Indian Standards) e-learning committee has also come into existence. "With the mindset of people changing, e-learning has a great future ahead. Many more companies are implementing them. Keeping such a rise in mind, BIS e-learning committee decides and analyzes on the standards of e-learning in the country. The standard of learning and managing the software is looked on and discussed. The best tactics is reviewed and the information is spread across all the companies. The committee having members like C-DAC and even Microsoft aims at taking e-learning to higher levels of growth," adds Manjul Sahay, C O O, TeN, who is a member of the committee.

With such a mushrooming growth, e-learning is the way ahead for the learners. Cost-effective, flexible and on-demand availability; it is sure to rise to higher levels of growth in future. With everyone accepting its worth, the students can now learn it "the way they want" through the platform of e-learning.

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