

ALL EYES ON THE PRIZE

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The desktop publishing company, which she started with her husband some 20 years ago, is now a leading end-to-end content solutions provider from India, with global delivery centres in Japan and USA.

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While most of the business outsourcing services companies were concentrated in metropolitan cities, Anuradha Sriram and her husband decided to set up their digital content services company, Integra Software Services, in Pondicherry. The company, which was founded in 1994, has come a long way since inception to become an end-to-end content solutions provider offering the whole gamut of services from developmental editing to digital products.

While it would have been much easier for the couple to start their business in a metro city, the Srirams chose their hometown for their IT start-up. Explaining the reason, Anuradha Sriram says, "We wanted to provide employment to the local youth so that they have a better quality of life in a tier-2 city and also stay with their family. Also, Pondicherry is a well-known educational hub in this region with more than 15 arts, science and polytechnic colleges and with a confluence of multi-ethnic people, it is ideally suited for this industry to flourish. This potential is still untapped and not exploited fully. The workforce in the city is not only dynamic and educated but also comes with a good work ethic. Along with this, the publishing BPO industry benefits immensely from the plethora of language skill available to serve many of its European customers." Thus, an outsourcing company came into existence, which was practising the offshore business model in the true sense.



Anuradha Sriram, Co-Founder & Joint MD, Integra Software Services

Integra has proved that the mix of right technology, quality manpower and able leadership can make a success out of an outsourcing services company in any part of the country. Today, the company has its global service delivery centers in India, Japan and US, besides added capabilities to provide onshore project management and editorial support out of UK, Spain and Italy.

Anuradha, who has more than two decades of industry experience, has played a significant role in founding Integra and placing Pondicherry in the global map of BPO companies. Her focus is on people development, especially mentoring and grooming young talents into effective and successful managers and leaders. And she is clearly more than just a champion of e-publishing services. Her efforts for the cause of women empowerment has motivated her to take up the role of Deputy Chairperson of the Southern Region of the Indian Women Network (IWN) which was launched by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) as an exclusive platform that enables women to become better professionals and achievers in their respective fields of expertise.

TDB: What major hurdles did you face in the initial years?

Anuradha Sriram (AS): Integra Software Services Private Ltd. was founded by my husband Sriram Subramanya and me. Both of us were passionate about starting a venture of our own, and thus Integra was born in 1994.

In the initial days, banks were reluctant to give a loan as they had doubts on our ability in continuing the business.

In fact, when I was in hospital to deliver my first child, the first term loan for Integra got sanctioned. It was a really joyous moment for me. At that time I felt as if I had delivered twins – one was my son and the other was Integra! Managing both was quite a challenge. Later, on seeing the fast repayment of the loan and considering our growth, banks were willing to give multiple term loans.

TDB: What inspired you to venture into a highly competitive segment like e-publishing and digital content outsourcing? What was the motivating factor for you to set up the company in Pondicherry?

AS: We forayed into this segment much before many of our competitors. In the 90s when IT was growing by leaps and bounds, we decided to be in the IT related industry. That is when we realised the desktop publishing industry was in its nascent stage and had a huge potential for growth. This was long before the publishing BPO industry came into existence. There was a huge potential at Pondicherry as well for design and pagination work, hence we decided to set up base at Pondicherry. We first started with the local market, and diversified later.

TDB: Apart from e-publishing and digital content management, what are the other business verticals of Integra?

AS: As the tagline in our logo suggests, we are in the content space. The first line in our Mission states, "We are a global organisation serving customers who have a need to publish knowledge, information or content." Currently, we are focussing on two major groups – publishers and corporate entities.

TDB: How do you ensure brand visibility and customer retention in the overseas market?

AS: We are clearly focused on the geographies that we operate in and the kind of customers we want to win. We are constantly evolving the list of prospects in these markets and communicating to them through focused messages, website presence and even participating in major events in those geographies to enhance visibility and establish our brand. Our quality teams ensure we sustain and meet the quality expectations of our customers, from across the world, constantly.

TDB: How do you deal with competition?

AS: We are uniquely positioned as an end-to-end service provider for publishers which means we meet many of their service demands. This optimises cost for them and helps them focus on their core business. For over two decades, the world's best brands across publishing trust Integra for their content solution needs. This trust was not built in a day. We are working closely as a consultative partner across both print and digital requirements of many of our customers. In addition to these, about 4% of our annual revenue is spent on R&D initiatives – especially for automation, process improvements, work flow management system, and quality control tools – to ensure that we are always ahead of the competition.

TDB: You have started serving the Japanese market. How is the Japanese e-publishing and KPO market different from other global markets? What are your plans for the future?

AS: It is a very unique market. However, language is a major barrier as English speaking resources are few and far between even in large organisations. Companies in Japan are still somewhat wary of outsourcing work to other countries.

As far as our future plans are concerned, in addition to the 70,000 square feet world class facility in Pondicherry, Integra has invested in a 15,000 square feet office space in the Chennai Metro area (in the technology corridor) focused on next generation digital services delivery excellence. This facility houses employees in critical roles such as instructional designers, creative designers, media specialists, solution architects, platform/mobile learning specialists, SaaS and Cloud solution experts, programmers, engineers. This facility will also include the Integra's Content Innovation Lab (ICIL) which is being built with a strong focus on research, design and innovation in the content creation, delivery and analytics space.

TDB: What, according to you, are the major challenges that India-based services export companies currently face?

AS: Customers, across the globe are under heavy financial pressure. This translates to pricing pressure for vendors. Service providers of the future should be able to offer full spectrum capabilities and increasingly clone the publishing clients that they serve. And then there's a need to focus on automation and innovation in order to remain competitive.

TDB: Are you satisfied with what you have achieved in life?

AS: Without challenge and continuous development, you will become a zombie. Our lives are like prepaid cards and I would like to do many things before the card expires. Sriram and I also are very focused on CSR activities through our foundation and we do a lot of work with the local communities in areas of education, environment and women empowerment.

Pin it
Favourites...

BUSINESS QUOTE: "Success isn't about how much money you make, it's the difference you make in people's lives." – Michelle Obama
FAVOURITE BOOK: Bhagavad Gita
HOLIDAY DESTINATION: Miami
MOVIE: The Intern
CLOTHING BRAND(S): I am not a brand person.
CUISINE: I like to experiment & enjoy different cuisines.
BUSINESS LEADER: Steve Jobs
A GADGET YOU CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT: My iPad

