

The Content Crunchers

Mash, mix, move, mutate—it's all in a day's work
by Teri Tan

India's content services industry continues to buzz, loudly. For many multinational publishers, an average cost saving of 30% and a pool of top-notch Indian vendors are just what they need to survive the eat-or-be-eaten competition. For vendors, the latest statistics on the outsourcing business are music to their ears: a predicted 35% annual growth until 2010 and a still largely untapped \$4 billion educational publishing market.

At Planman Technologies Image digitization is big, and one recent 225,000-image project says it all. "The images came from one of the world's largest archival houses, and the varied formats proved to be the greatest challenge. There were A4 and A3 prints, 6cm x 6cm and 35mm negatives, scrapbooks, transparencies and gaslight paper," says v-p of sales Amit Vohra. "We put together a highly specialized team of image editors and photographers to finish this project within six months." Planman has also digitized and converted about four million pages of newspapers, manuscripts, books and journals. "The deliverables were issue- and page-level PDFs, JPEG2000 and TIFF images, and XML files (in METS and ALTO). With such projects, the biggest hurdle was the non-English language and the consequent large file size of the pages." One of the largest newspaper digitization vendors around, Planman plans to scale up capacity from the present four million pages per annum to 7.5 million.

Digitization aside, a project from a leading k-12 publisher showcases the company's illustration and creative capabilities. "We were contracted to develop creative art for mathematics products targeting grades 9-12. About 14,000 art pieces were commissioned: 4,000 creative and the rest technical. We assigned a team of 10 illustrators to get through 100 to 150 creative art pieces and about 1,200 technical illustrations within four to five days," adds director Sourav Chatterjee. Another k-12 job required composition, design and creative art services for a series of grades 3-6 books. "In total, there were 1,500 art pieces in this 2,400-page project. We also had to key in text from old editions as well as restyle and compose the pages. Maintaining design fluidity was crucial, as the client's requirements-- design as well as editorial-- kept changing throughout the project. Eventually, we deployed a team of two designers and 14 illustrators along with 30 production staff and completed this project within 12 weeks."

Meanwhile, its state-of-the-art media studio is focused on 3D animation (feature films, TV series, short films, docudramas and home videos), games and multimedia products. Says Chatterjee, "We offer animation services for the medical, architectural, legal, and educational segments as well as virtual reality and game design for handheld devices, computers and game consoles. This segment is growing rapidly."

Meanwhile, multinational publishers, now experienced in offshoring to India, are shrinking their vendor pool and consolidating accounts with mostly those offering full-service capabilities. It's definitely a great time to be one of the bigger vendors. But buyers are out there, not necessarily from the top 10 publishing houses. Smaller publishers are often more comfortable dealing with like-sized vendors giving their projects highly personalized attention. So, for vendors big and small, there are always plenty of fishes of different sizes out there.