

It ain't a bubble, it's a boom

Every single working day, 200 people are employed in the BPO sector

Ameya Bhise

In about roughly 10 years, India has garnered an estimated 46 per cent of the global Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) market. "The Indian ITES-BPO exports grew from \$6.3 billion in FY 2005-06 to \$8.4 billion in FY 2006-07 and are expected to grow to \$10.5-11 billion in FY08," says VK Raman, head of the Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) BPO.

Not just exports, the Indian BPO sector is also absorbing people at a rapid pace. "The Indian BPO industry is growing at the rate of 40 per cent per annum in comparison to the IT industry which is growing at 20 per cent per annum," says Anirudh Ganguly, associate chief operating officer, Wipro BPO.

The magnitude of growth is put in perspective through numbers by Manuel D' Souza, executive vice-president of Intelenet Global Services. "Currently, the BPO industry is responsible for 600,000 jobs in the country and is expected to employ approximately one million by 2009," he says. "As many as 200 personnel are

hired every working day of the year. The sector provided direct employment to 553,000 in FY 07 up from 415,000 in FY 06."

Not only are a lot of people getting jobs, they are also making a career out of it. Of course, quite a few — some BPOs face an attrition rate as high as 90 per cent — drop out of the race altogether. "The BPO industry is versatile and allows individuals to progress from low skill levels to those that require specialisation. The career progression and opportunities the BPO industry offers are manifold," says Milind Godbole, chief delivery officer with Mphasis BPO.

Insiders chaff at the perception that a BPO career is usually 'short-term'. "This is probably the only industry that offers mass employment, does not require very high qualifications and has probably the highest growth rate," says Sanjay Kumar, CEO, vCustomer. "We have peo-

ple who have been working with us for eight years, since inception."

But Rochit Abbi, site Director and Vice-President at 3 Global Services, feels the longevity of a career is relative. "I am sure if we look around we will see people with over 10 years in the

same industry and in some cases with about 6-7 years in a single organisation. However people have different needs and desires and this can be motivation for some of us who have smaller stints," he says. But the span of a career has also increased ow-

ing to the intensive training and development that is imparted to individuals joining a BPO.

"The industry helps an individual in developing their marketing skills, problem solving skills, communication skills; it teaches him/her diplomacy, makes them a good listener and also exposes the individual to different cultures," says Sam

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Chopra, president of The Business Process Industry Association of India (BPIAI).

"Over the last six years, the BPO industry has transformed from pure play Customer Relationship Management (CRM) to end-to-end process outsourcing provider," says Godbole. "It is all about providing comprehensive solution to the client requirements with real time and non-real time activity for the client's customer. Finance and accounting, HR outsourcing, research and analytics, content management and media are emerging as specialised sectors."

With BPOs extending their horizons, the skill sets required by the employees have also changed and it's no longer exclusively about good communication skills. "The ability to communicate effectively with global customers is critical. But in high-end non-voice based work environment like us, there is a demand for professionals with domain-specific skill sets. Around 25 per cent of our professionals have strong domain component to their skill sets," says Raman.