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'Design' set to join the outsourcing bandwagon

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THERE'S a new sector looking to join the outsourcing club. This time it is the design world, which believes that the time has come to scout for work across the shores and sees substantial potential in setting up BPO like, but integrated, operations for it.

Though design companies comprising 2-3 individuals have been up and growing within the country the past few years, and some such as Elephant Design and Bounce Design have managed to shore up considerable profits, it is only a handful of designers, each well known in their field, whose talent is being outsourced from India by overseas clients. For instance, take Mr Dilip Chabria in automotive, Mr Charles Correa in architecture, Mr Shombit Sengupta in brand design and Mr Dev Bannerjee in advertising - who have made their mark on the global design platform as well.

"Till now it is individuals who are designing for clients abroad, but we would like to institutionalise design outsourcing, develop it into an integrated service offered out of the country. And, the USP would be to combine two to three distinct verticals such as communication design, architectural design, product design and design consultancy, to give the client a distinct cost advantage," says Mr Sanjay Sarma, Director and Chief Executive Officer, Design WorldWide (DWW), a design solutions company that is looking at setting up front-end as well as back-end linkages to start the first specialised design offshore outfit.

Design WorldWide is being backed by private equity investments from Major & Minor Exims Pvt Ltd, a holding company with interests in global steel trading, exports, Web solutions and software development.

"Right now we are in the first phase, where an investment of \$1 million has been made to set up in the domestic market. In the second phase, an investment outlay of approximately \$10 million is proposed to help expand presence in the US, Europe, Asia-Pacific and West Asia. The expansion will be primarily through acquisitions or joint ventures. We will be looking at design companies in these regions and once they have been bought over or strategic partnerships have been struck, we will bring work into India routing it through the overseas company, explains Mr Dhruvo J. Borkotoky, DWW's Director and Chief Creative Officer.

According to Mr Sarma this would also take care of the 'cultural' aspect of design, as it is business that requires distinct culture-sensitive inputs. For back-end linkages DWW sees itself forging relationships with design institutions such as National Institute of Design, J.J. School of Arts and Delhi School of Architecture.

Whether DWW's venture succeeds and is followed by others in the market still remains to be seen, but design companies have been slowly and steadily forging alliances with counterparts overseas. Elephant Design has an alliance with a few companies in South-East Asia where sharing of design

resources is done on a regular basis.

However, Dr Darlie Koshy, Director of the National School of Design, is sceptical about outsourcing design from the country.

"India as yet does not have enough of a design culture and the first step of an adequate alliance between academic design faculties and industry has not taken off so far.

Besides, design has a well-guarded IPR, and that would come in the way. It depends on how long is the time horizon," he says.

But DWW has the confidence of a fledgling pioneer.

"We will have the first-mover advantage and already have clients interested in the project," they say, promising to make design the next happening sector in the outsourcing business.

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