

EDU TECH

FOR LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

1st
Anniversary
Issue

10 COMMANDMENTS

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Get Ready For The Smart Set



“LET’S NOT KID AROUND. TODAY, EVEN IN A REMOTE POCKET OF INDIA, STUDENTS ARE AWARE OF WHAT THE INTERNET IS CAPABLE OF—OR WHAT TECHNOLOGY CAN DO FOR THEM”

When was the last time that you spoke to that spunky 18 year-old fresher: asked her how she defined technology? Do so. She will tell you how technology’s not the future—it is her present. She starts her day by checking her smartphone for SMSes and calls. Afterward, it’s time to browse the net, update her social network status, read the latest news online and check e-mails. Her library is called the web. Discussions are over web-enabled portals. She does keep a diary, only now, it’s called her “blog”. And, if you try to explain to her that you could “do without technology” in institutions, she would think that you need rest.

Let’s not kid around. Today, even in a remote pocket of India, students are aware of what the internet is capable of—or what technology can do for them. It is aspirational. They understand that tech-savviness is where the world is headed.

When *EDU* started to work on the *Spotlight* issue (India’s plan to achieve the targeted gross enrolment ratio of 30 percent by 2020), we were in the dark as far as the roadmap to the target was concerned. Till we met Sam Pitroda. He said: “India wants to grow at an unprecedented rate. And, to support this ambition, institutions will have to focus on technology. Because, that alone will enable it to expand even with limited resource.” In a single stroke, he had answered all our doubts. And given us a story idea.

It was then that we decided to bring to you the technology “must haves” for an institution. Some academics may argue that in the “real” India there are problems—students, faculty and staff are not familiar with technology. But, it’s technology that holds the key to solving these problems. Video conferencing, telepresence and online learning tools are some of the ways in which the “real” India can be brought forward.

In this anniversary issue, *EDU* lists the top 10 technologies that we believe will help an institution move ahead and, hopefully, manage to keep up with that spunky 18-year-old. And finally, as *EDU* completes a year of publishing, we thank you for your invaluable inputs, e-mails, letters and contributions, we couldn’t have done it without you. Please, keep the letters coming!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pramath Raj Sinha". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

Dr Pramath Raj Sinha
pramath@edu-leaders.com

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ONLINE LEARNING &
VIRTUAL CLASSROOM

LEARNING BEYOND CLASSROOM

Online learning and virtual classrooms unleash the ability of an institute to reach out to more students in interactive and collaborative form **BY ANKUSH BAKSHI**

TODAY the internet gives students and teachers several sources of learning: search engines, wikipedia and social media platforms. Their biggest takers are students, who resort to these in a big way.

Is it possible to ignore the power of the online medium in delivering courseware and lectures today? It is not.

With improving connectivity across the country, delivery of video content is also not as prohibitive as it used to be some years ago. Interactive content, live classroom sessions and collaboration across geographies, is now happening.

Online learning provides a technological advantage for students as well as the institutes. The former are no longer restricted to conventional learning meth-

odologies. Those who can't keep pace with classroom lectures can choose to opt for a model that suits their learning styles and convenience. This platform also gives from different backgrounds the chance to communicate.

Institutions also benefit as there is an increase in student interest. Online learning enables students to pursue or continue education beyond the classroom through the internet. Students can access course content, assignments, video lectures or notes from either their homes or designated learning places.

For example, the National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) allows students to learn from IIT and IISc faculty—even if they aren't a student of these institutions—for free.

The aim of NPTEL is to let a large number audience, unable to attend scholarly

institutions, have access to quality content, created on an AICTE format. NPTEL has web courses and video content that can be accessed easily. It also has a channel on YouTube.

Another example of online learning is the 'Online Virtual Campus'

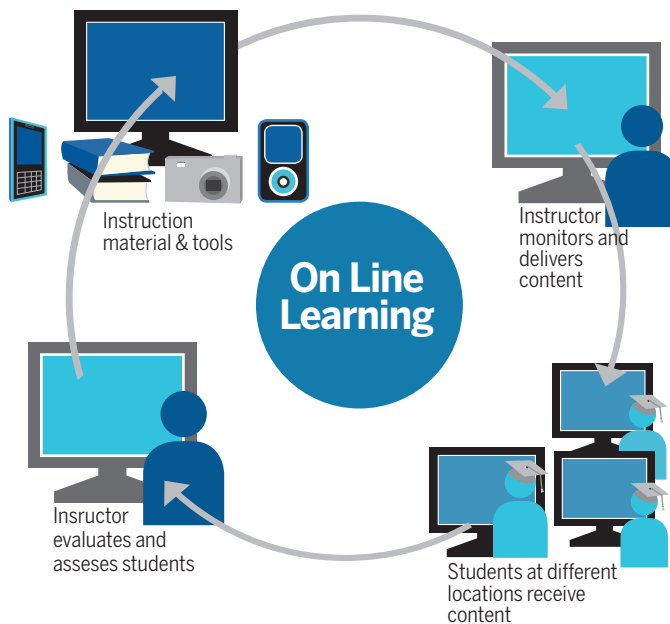
20.5%
institutes said
they plan to
install video-conferencing in 6 months

run by Punjab Technical University in collaboration with Lovely International Trust. The campus offers BBA, MBA, MCA, MSc (IT) and some other courses.

Virtual classrooms are a special form of online learning. They give the students an opportunity to be a part of live learning sessions. It's just like attending a class, except that the students log in from different cities at the same time to attend lectures. Special software enable professors to conduct sessions, just as they do in a physical classroom. Students can raise hands, and if the session is webcam-enabled, teachers can keep a visual check on them, as well. The sessions can be recorded and uploaded to be viewed later by students who might have missed attending it.

Being a part of the virtual classrooms students can not only learn, but also have a live interaction with all those participating in the virtual class.

University18 has been using such an environment for students who can attend the lectures live from anywhere in the world. Raunak Singh Ahluwalia, Director, University18, says: "Learning Management Systems or Virtual Learning Environments, are software systems that organise such information and content in an educational setting, providing tools and controls to the institution, to enable publishing of academic content such as e-learning modules, e-books, or video lectures, to be able to control access to this content, to evaluate and assess students accessing this content, as well as interact with them either using live virtual classroom sessions or forums and discussion boards."



He says, "The use of online learning systems and virtual classrooms has grown exceptionally in the past five years. The popularity and easy availability of the internet has allowed educational institutes across the country to take up the online learning and virtual classroom technology."

The use is not restricted merely to the IITs and IIMs, other colleges and institutes are also catching up. Private higher education institutions are readily spending time and money to crack an advantage over others. Ahluwalia says, "Increased collaboration, between private organisations and public institutions, has led to the development of innovative collaboration models and increased capabilities in the field of online learning".

Helping Hand

The main reason for the growth of online learning in Indian higher education has been government support. The government of India has funded various research and Information and

Communication Technologies (ICT) projects. Ahluwalia says, "Budgetary allocations towards projects like NPTEL and the National Mission on Education through ICT, as well as spending by organisations like the Indira Gandhi National Open University, have provided for most of the groundbreaking work done in this field. All this is contributing towards making India an upcoming world leader in the online learning space."

ISRO has also provided support in making the technology convenient to use by providing satellite connectivity through Edusat, which is its educational satellite network. Edusat provides connectivity for institutions, the NPTEL initiative and Indira Gandhi National Open University. Many private players also provide connectivity for many of the online programmes available today.

Adopting Technology

So how should an institute go about adopting online learning? The prime requirement is that the institute should be interested as well as be willing to adopt the technology. Institutions should work on a well thought out strategy, so that online learning is used as a primary practice and not as a supplementary project alone. Faculty from diverse



"These systems organise information and content in an educational setting"

Raunak Singh Ahluwalia,
Director, University18

E-LEARNING

e-learning is essentially the computer and network-enabled transfer of skills and knowledge
e-learning applications and processes include
web-based learning
computer-based learning
virtual classroom
opportunities and digital collaboration (Wikipedia)

ADVANTAGES

- ▶ It lets myriad forms of interactions among students
- ▶ It lets institutions to communicate with their students better

departments can help as the Subject Matter Experts (SME) in developing the online content.

Ahluwalia says, “Enabling an institution for the new age is a critical task and deserves all the time and attention we can put into it. Unfortunately, such initiatives often fail to take off due to a lack of management focus, clarity in vision and missing change management.”

In terms of infrastructure an institute needs the requisite hardware, software and data connectivity.

The amount of investment required depends primarily upon the number of people who will be using the services.

An account with any web-hosting provider might hold good for an audience of 50 to 100 but a dedicated server is required for a larger audience. The investment gets bigger when an institute looks for more features such as live classes or live streaming.

Ahluwalia says, “Online learning gives students access to some of the best brains in the field, something that was till recently the privilege available only to a handful ones fortunate enough to get into IITs and IIMs.” That is the real power of online learning. While the divide between the top institutes and their lesser counterparts cannot be bridged easily, online learning shows us a path to reduce the gap. ■■■