*Prometric Test Centre, Gurgaon: going online*

# The new paradigm

**Technology-based test delivery solutions are increasingly finding acceptance in India**

Kartik Selraj is gearing up for October. It will be the 22-year-old's first attempt at CAT (Common Admission Test) – an attempt he is hoping he will crack in the first go to gain admission at a premier B-school in India. "I am hoping to qualify for IIM, Ahmedabad… in terms of preparation I am sort of confident…but a little apprehensive about the online test thing because I am not too well-versed with computers," says Selraj.

Though CAT wasn't the first competitive exam to go online (BITS, Pilani in early 2000 took the lead), its stature certainly catapulted the trend in a big way. Though marred by a few glitches in 2009, the year CAT first went online, the journey has been smooth since. CAT, CMAT, GMAT, LSAT, ENAT, CLAT, GRE, TOEFL, BITSAT… are just a few that use the online mode of conducting tests. According to a recent notification, the Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering (GATE) 2013 has shifted 15 streams out of 21 to the online mode. The popularity of these online tests can be gauged from the fact that the number of students opting for the computer-based All India Engineering Entrance Exam (AIEEE) jumped from a mere 4,900 last year to about 1.96 lakh this year!

Enayet Kabir, associate director, education, Technopak, points out how the trend of online tests is slowly but surely catching on – fixed to mobile learning centres, from desktop to hand-held devices and from just education to diverse fields including driving tests, IT certifications, corporate trainings, personality assessment, skills training, etc. "Right now, a small fraction of the opportunity has been tapped. According to our estimates, the current market size of online testing is nearly ₹5,000 crore. We envisage a growth of 20 per cent year-on-year and expect the market size to grow to about $500 million by 2020. With a young population and improving gross enrolment ratio in K-12 and higher education, online testing is poised for a robust growth in the years to come." Rough estimates suggest that there is scope for over 250 million examinations going online in total.

Announcing the dates for LSAT this year, Sandeep Dua, vice-president, Pearson VUE India, sounded optimistic: "We are excited by the response received for LSAT – India, with several law colleges expressing an interest in the test. Currently, over 40 Bar Council of India approved law colleges across the country have agreed to accept LSAT – India 2012 scores. We expect this number to grow significantly as we continue receiving college sign-up forms."

Other key players in the market include MeritTrac, Eduquity, LSAC, NIIT Litmus and Prometric. Many of these are seeking to take contracts from state governments and groups of educational institutes to conduct exams online on contract. For instance, in the past 12 years, MeritTrac has conducted over 20 million examinations. Eight million out of these were done online. "Interestingly, almost 50 per cent of the examinations conducted last year were online examinations. This emphasises a clear trend that we believe will be evident in the coming years. Recently, we conducted an online examination in India where

over 941,000 examinations were conducted in 151 cities using 250+ test centres in a span of 22 days," says S. Murlidhar, CEO, MeritTrac.

Its technology-based solutions such as AuthenTrac (a patent pending in-classroom biometric candidate authentication solution) and TracMARKS (an on-screen marking solution) seem to be finding many takers in India. Among the 30 clients that MeritTrac handles are NIMHANS and IIIT, Bangalore. "We have helped NIMHANS make the transition to an online entrance examination mode. IIIT Bangalore too has leveraged MeritTrac's solutions for its admissions. There is also a medical university in Rajasthan and another one in Karnataka that we are supporting," says Murlidhar.

### Widening spectrum

Apart from educational institutions, government departments and corporate houses are also using such solutions. MeritTrac has supported government departments in Jharkhand, Gujarat, Rajasthan to conduct its recruitment examinations online. It also helped Indian Institute of Banking and Finance transform its examinations for banking correspondents. "We have been offering pre-recruitment assessment services (campus, off-campus and lateral recruitment) to five of the top 10 IT/ITeS companies. There is a couple of leading private sector banks as well," he adds.

Prometric, which conducts the CAT in India, took 2009 as a stepping stone in terms of learning. "The year 2009 is history. Since then, we have delivered the CAT to over 2 lakh candidates each year with a high degree of quality," says Soumitra Roy, managing director, Prometric India.

Prometric India also conducts the GRE and TOEFL for ETS, and many other industry certification programmes for global clients such as Microsoft, IBM, Project Management Institute, Saudi Commission for Health Specialties and NBME (National Board of Medical Examiners) for the US Medical Licensing Exam. The market for computer-based testing, feels Roy, is already big in India. Each year, Prometric alone delivers approximately



*Murlidhar: trend catching on*   *Roy: high quality*   *Kabir: poised for growth*

6,50,000 exams in India through its network of close to 450 testing centres in India. Last year it also set up two fully owned and managed test centres that can support over 200 seats each in Gurgaon and Hyderabad.

Over the past year, Prometric has been investing in the expansion of our test development capabilities. The eco-system of test centres in the case of computer-based testing is indeed important. MeritTrac has its set of 'Pariksha Centres' (online test centres), which are hand-picked from the available testing infrastructure in the country after stringent audits. It has 350 online test centres in over 200 cities with 1,000-plus certified test administrators with local language capabilities.

Perhaps the biggest benefit of online testing is the flexibility that it offers candidates to appear for tests in terms of date, time and location. While computer-based exams help in arresting leakage associated with printing and distribution of exam papers, delay in result processing, examination frauds like copying and impersonation, errors in evaluations, etc, there are a fair number of challenges as well.

Murlidhar and Roy, fairly representative of the industry, also draw attention towards the challenges that their fraternity has to face. "The lack of availability of infrastructure is the biggest challenge... good computer seats, network connectivity in remote places, etc. We are leveraging mobile-based technologies to

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remove dependence on computers, networks and other technologies at the test centres. Soon, any test centre – including the traditional pen and paper test centre – could also conduct online examinations…Pilots to this respect are underway and I believe this is the next generation of transformation for online examination.," says Murlidhar.

"Protection of test centre file servers is of critical importance since the exam content, candidate information and results data are securely stored. We have ensured that our servers go through multiple levels of protection. With the proliferation of the Internet and other technology, we need to implement additional security measures to minimise the threat of fraudulent activities like proxy testing and brain-dumps," adds Roy. Digital video recording, biometric checks and security audits come to the rescue in managing these threats.

Prometric's proprietary item banking tool like Intelitest too has security features like managing the exposure rates of each item, or even analysing a candidate's performance to identify any suspicious behaviour. Advanced-form assembly methods are also employed to reduce the likelihood of candidates memorising enough items to have any impact on their overall performance.

Clearly, with a portfolio of solutions like such, many more tests in future will be converging on the online platform.

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