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11:15 AM 14 MAR	LIVE	SENSEX	NIFTY 50	GOLD (MCX) (Rs/10g.)	USD/INR
MARKET STATS	▼	24,862 ▲ 144.51	7,552 ▲ 42.60	29,423.00 ▼ -77.00	66.96 ▼ -0.10

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CREATE PORTFOLIO

How Mumbai-based startup SchoolGuru is educating lakhs across India

By Vinay Dwivedi, ET Bureau | Mar 14, 2016, 08.00 AM IST



(From left) Shantanu Rooj, Anil Bhat and Ravi Rangan, Co-founders, SchoolGuru

After carefully studying the Indian education ecosystem, particularly the distance learning higher education segment, Shantanu Rooj, 42, a serial entrepreneur, found that there was massive scope for improvement. "Poor quality of learning material and a near total absence of student guidance and support has reduced distance learning programmes as the last recourse for the not-so-bright students," says Rooj.

Looking to bring about a change, Rooj teamed up with Ravi Rangan, 44, an experienced IT professional and an entrepreneur, and Anil Bhat, 45, who has 20 years of corporate experience, to start their own venture, SchoolGuru in August 2012. SchoolGuru is an academic support services organisation providing tech-based services to Indian universities.

The startup is recasting distance learning programmes to improve their quality. For instance, it packages online courses with skill development courses to improve students' employability. "It is a big challenge to create content in multiple languages for over 250 programmes with different academic requirements," says Rooj. SchoolGuru, which offers content in nine languages, has created a social network of sorts for students and teachers. "We have brought teachers and classmates to their drawing rooms. They can interact with each other and engage just as in an actual classroom," says Rooj.

Today, Mumbai-headquartered SchoolGuru has partnerships with 12 universities and serves around 1.5 lakh students spread across eight states. The first batch of MBA students passed out of Karnataka State Open University in 2015.

The founders, who invested Rs 1.4 crore to start the business, received a funding of Rs 20 crore in August 2015 from a clutch of investors. The money has been spent on developing content and technology. "Our company works as a university's back-end cloud-based platform that leverages the university's established brand and student base," explains Rooj.

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It is this business model of partnering with universities and leveraging its resources that has helped boost SchoolGuru's growth, even as other edutech companies have struggled. "Front-end service providers for online education for universities, due to the high marketing costs, have had to pivot their model to our model," says Rooj. The startup has a revenue sharing arrangement with the universities where they get a share for the fee paid by students enrolled in distance learning courses. The revenue share varies from 25% to 60%, depending on the services offered by SchoolGuru to the university, which then offers it to its students.

The startup's offerings include: student enrolment services, academic support services, assessment services and student support services. In 2014-15, Schoolguru, which has an employee strength of 110, saw a revenue of Rs 3.8 crore. Since then it has more than doubled its clients (from five to 12) and has also gone global with operations in Africa. The startup is on track to closing 2015-16 with more than `6 crore in revenue and expects to breakeven by 2016-17. "The government is yet to come out with guidelines for online courses. Because of this, we have not been able to scale to our full potential. Hopefully, there'll be some clarity soon. It will really boost our operations," says Rooj.

The startup, which, among others, won the 'Education Excellence Award' by the Indian Merchants Chamber in 2015, has set an ambitious target of covering 30 universities in India and the same number internationally in the next five years. This will bring some 50 lakh students on its platform.

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