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Online education has grown beyond mere assimilation of digital assets: Shantanu Rooj, Schoolguru CEO

Schoolguru is a technology-led academic services firm. It partners universities to provide online courses for their students.

By: Heena Khandelwal (<http://www.financialexpress.com/author/heena/>) | New Delhi | October 19, 2015 11:38 AM

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Shantanu Rooj, CEO & co-founder, Schoolguru believes that the online audio-visual medium has the potential to bring in on-demand high quality education taught by the top educators from across the world at the doorsteps of the student.

Schoolguru is a technology-led academic services firm. It partners universities to provide online courses for their students. "We believe the online audio-visual medium has the potential to bring in on-demand high quality education taught by the top educators from across the world at the doorsteps of the student," says Shantanu Rooj, CEO & co-founder, Schoolguru. The company, which this month raised Rs 20 crore in funding from high net-worth investors, says its unique partnership model ensures zero capital expenditure by the universities. He shares with Heena Khandelwal that online education has the potential to improve upon the face-to-face learning that happens inside a classroom. Excerpts:

What made Schoolguru go for outside funding?

Schoolguru is a start-up and needs to invest in areas such as strengthening the technology platform, enhancing the mobile platform and enriching content. Moreover, as Schoolguru is growing at a brisk pace and needs to make certain investments in the short term and also cover the growing operational expenses till such time the organisation reaches break-even, we decided to go for external fund raising.

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How was Schoolguru set up?

After I exited my previous venture Broadlyne, I met the vice-chancellor of the Karnataka State Open University, which had invested in massive infrastructure for its online MBA and was struggling to get all the components ready before the launch. The VC asked me if I could help the university manage the online MBA in 30 days. I accepted the offer and Schoolguru was born.

How much does a student have to pay to subscribe to your courses?

The courses belong to the university and it is the university that decides on the fees. Schoolguru gets a fee from the university for every student serviced through its platform.

While the online medium has the potential to take education to the masses, but is it practically possible in India? The biggest challenge remains connectivity...

I am sure our mobile app (<http://www.financialexpress.com/tag/mobile-app/>) is ready for the job. Upon admission, the student is provided with a microSD card which has the learning app. The minimum level of audio-visual content is encoded into the app for offline viewing. Hence, connectivity, though it is desirable, is not a necessary condition for a student to get enrolled in an online programme.

Does the online-learning model generate enough revenue on its own?

Online education has enough potential to generate large revenues for deserving organisations as the cost of servicing a student is very low. However, like any other education enterprise, the business needs investments to be made in the right directions. If implemented well, the model can generate enough margins in the medium to long term.

What kind of tie-ups you have with the universities?

We work as technology platform service provider to government universities. Since these are PPP programmes, the agreements are exclusive and long term. Schoolguru undertakes the entire capital expenditure required to create, run and manage the platform.

Do you also develop your own content?

Yes, the courses are developed at Schoolguru studios spread across the country. We work with about 1,500 professors and academicians from across the world and ensure customised, syllabus-based content development for these universities. We have the capability to teach in nine regional languages apart from English.

How do you choose which all courses have to be made available digitally?

We currently handle about 140 programmes in nine languages. The courses belong to various streams such as humanities, commerce, pure sciences, management, IT, law, performing arts and vocational programmes. Normally, the choice of programmes is made by the university in consultation with us.

It is argued that online education is nothing but simply delivering information over the internet, and transmitting facts is not education...

Learning is an organic process, not mechanical. Good teachers know that education is not only about communicating and transmitting memorised facts. The role of a teacher is to arouse the curiosity in the mind of the learner and

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provide her the environment where learning can happen. Online education is not mere assimilation of digital assets.

It has the potential to improve upon the face-to-face education that happens inside a classroom. The online platform has tools that can not only ensure that the best of the faculty teach the students but also provide timely feedback and analytics. I must add that our online platform has the ability to personalise the education experience for the students.

You are also involved in admissions, counselling, fees, student support and examination management. Why?

It is not only important to improve the academics but also the administration of the entire life-cycle of the student. We set up a dedicated call centre at partner universities to take care of incoming queries of students. Our ERP platform helps automate processes inside the university.

How do you view Skill India, Digital India (<http://www.financialexpress.com/tag/digital-india/>) initiatives?

We are bullish about these initiatives and believe that, if implemented well, they can be revolutionary for the country. We are ready to support the higher education industry in implementing these initiatives.

First Published on October 19, 2015 12:05 am

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