

'We need to internationalize content'

Animation is the next best thing after outsourcing, Pentamedia Graphics' chairman and CEO tells **Shobha Warriar**

Pentamedia Graphics Limited, the \$200-million entertainment solutions provider, is home to some of the finest animation films made in India. Pentamedia, which started operations in 1992, dreams of becoming a global player in the animation sector. The company's first international production was a pilot for the series *Excalibur* in conjunction with Gribouille of France.

Sinbad — Beyond the Veil, the first 3D animation film from the Pentamedia stable, was followed by *Mists*. Then came *Pandavas — The Five Warriors*, which won it the



The Business Interview
V Chandrasekharan

first international award at the Vancouver Film Festival in 2001.

While *Alibaba and 40 Thieves* made it to the list of Oscar nominations in 2002, the fourth animation film *Son of Aladdin* was released in the US in 2003.

Pentamedia's *The Legend of Buddha*, which is its first 2D film with 3D background, is one of the 11 animation films in the running for this year's Oscars.

Dr **V Chandrasekharan**, chairman and chief executive officer of Pentamedia, spoke to *India Abroad* about the Indian animation industry and the country's potential in this field.

How big is the animation industry. What is Pentamedia looking at?

If you look at theaters, home videos, television and cable television, the animation industry is worth about \$40 billion.

We expect it to reach \$70 billion in three years.

India, unfortunately, is not a major player in this sector. It makes up for less than one percent of the world market.

We have been knocking at it for three to four years.

There are 2D and 3D films, and since we are not trained in 2D animation, our skills are not up to international standards.

As far as 3D films are concerned, we can be very competitive.

This category requires artistic and software skills. Indians are very good at handling computers.

Thirty to 40 percent students in engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu are female.

They are very good at choosing colors, for characters and background.

They are very good at operating computers. At Pentamedia, we have a considerable number of female staff.

You said India is not a big player in the animation sector. When do you see India making it big in the international scene?

We have a number of animation companies in India. There is also an animation society here.

At Pentamedia, we have made five films. We have offered our infrastructure to others.

Earlier, to make an animation film in nine to 12 months, you needed 150 to 200 people and an investment of about \$17 million to \$23 million. Today, it is only \$ 6 million to \$7 million.

Compared to the US and other countries, where it will take \$40 million to \$50 million, we can make an animation film within \$4 million to \$5 million. That is our advantage. All we need to do is internationalize our strength.

What are India's shortfalls compared to the US, Korea or Japan?

We have a long way to travel.

Unlike software, where you mostly need logic and common sense, animation requires you to be creative.

Creativity is not something you can teach.

As far as 2D films are concerned, consistency and speed are the watchwords.

We have done most of our animation work in Manila and Singapore. We brought a number of people from there to work here on the projects.

The problem is, we are good at drawing Indian faces, Indian characters and Indian movements. When I wanted to internationalize it, I found that we are lacking in that aspect.

It may take two to three years for our artists to achieve that competency.

If they work on more global projects, they will learn faster.

In 3D drawing, we have an edge over others.

There are over 3,000 live animation films the world over. Hardly 10 are from India.

Except in the US and Europe, parents do not take children to watch animation films in theaters.

What are your plans for Pentamedia?

We have the infrastructure to make four animation films a year.

In Europe, they take 18 to 24 months to make a film.

But the problem is, the market does not believe we can make so many films in a year.

The market has to grow and understand our strength. The perception, however, is slowly changing. The television market is growing very fast.

The *Legend of Buddha* is the second film that will go to the Oscars.

Alibaba and 40 Thieves was our first entry. At that time we could not do much public relations.

Which is a big market for animation films — India or US?

There is no animation industry without the US market.

If an animation film makes \$1 in the US, it makes one and a half dollars in the rest of the world.

So, you can see how big the US market is.

Animation films have a very long life especially on DVDs and VCDs. If you have seen and liked an animation film as a child, you would love to buy and show it to your child.

As far as work is concerned, there are people in Korea, China who add color to the 2D drawings. If you work for half an hour, you earn lot of money.

In a year, 50,000 to 60,000 hours of animation is seen all over the world in various formats.

This is a very big industry. India can make good use of it.

How big is it?

It is a \$40-billion industry.

Since television programs for children are booming, even 10 percent of the 50,000 hours' work is very big.

Has such work come to India?

Some projects are coming to India.

We should hire skilled deaf and dumb people. It will be a good profession for them as you do not have to give too many instructions. It is a tedious process like data entry but well paying and huge.

We should first make ourselves known to the world.

In software, India's skills are well known all over the world.

The same is still not true in the animation sector. We will have to show more products and participate in exhibitions in the US.

Even the National Association of Software and Services Company is projecting animation as a very big industry.

In four to five years, how much of the animation industry market can India corner?

We aim at five percent.

I am certain we can grab two to three percent. While software does not need marketing, the opposite is true for the animation industry. It requires immense marketing effort.

We have to make our presence felt.

We have so much treasure. We can take [it out] to the world.

Our film on the Pandavas won the Vancouver Film Festival award and the Indian government award.

We are trying to work on the Ramayana and the stories of Hanuman. But we have to internationalize content. We can't make animation films for the Indian audience alone.

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