TECHFOCUS

Outsourcing
Opening of the floodgates

EDWARD APURBA SINGHA

OUTSOURCING has become part of the business lexicon as big companies around the globe have opted for delegating some of their operations to external firms in a bid to gain a competitive edge in cut-throat global market.

Delegation of production and services has resulted into businesses operating in a distributed environment -- now a commonplace term as the spread of the internet has turned the planet into a global village where everybody is virtually connected to each other. This development has driven the corporate world to adopt information technology (IT) as an integral part of their operations because it paves the way for them to outsource their businesses.
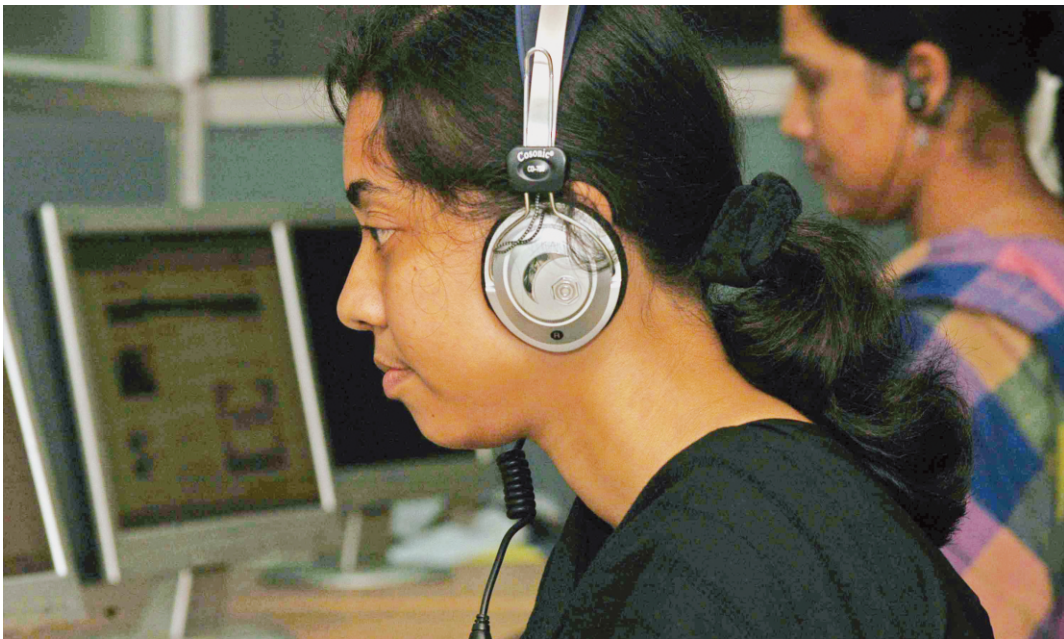
Outsourcing is a business strategy. Companies now transfer their non-core operations to external service providers in order to achieve optimum result within a specific timeframe. Outsourcing, however, is not above controversy. But then it is considered as a solution to increasing efficiency, cutting down operation costs and generating more revenue.

India is now the ideal destination for firms to outsource their services. Many US-based companies purchase services from India, spawning call centres there. In addition, many Indian software companies provide their foreign clients with cutting edge software solutions. All these have generated huge employment for IT-educated people in the next-door country.

Apart from India, many eastern European countries develop animations for Hollywood movies. Dependence on technology and a shortage of IT-skilled people in some developed countries have driven big corporations to the developing world where labour is also cheap. All these have made outsourcing an immense opportunity for the IT industry in developing countries.

Bangladesh is still at the nascent stage in this sector. But we have the potential to tap this lucrative business. Outsourcing here first began in 1988. Since then the country has overcome many obstacles but it is yet to do better in the global market.

At this moment nearly fifty companies in Bangladesh are providing outsourcing service for more than thirty countries

Figures below show use of different software programs in percentage points:

Programming Language	Basic/VB	C/C++/VC	C #	Java	.Net	HTML	ASP	PHP	Java Bean	JSP	CGI Perl	Cold Fusion
	50%	28%	16%	24%	22%	34%	21%	18%	18%	16%	5%	4%
Database	MS SQL	Access/ Foxpro	Oracle	PHP								
	40%	39%	27%	18%								
Operating System	Windows	Linux/ Unix										
	58%	17%										
Other skills	XML	UML	Lotus Notes									
	21%	17%	4%									

including USA, some EU countries, Switzerland, Canada, Japan, Australia, South Africa, the Middle East, Thailand and Malaysia.

Outsourcing services provided by Bangladeshi companies are offshore software development (business application, web services, games, cell phone application, embedded software, VLSI etc), animation (2D & 3D-cartoon, web publication, advertisement, 3D modelling), IT enabled services (GIS, CAD/CAE, architectural visualisation, network maintenance, desktop publication, document conversion), BPO (call centre, e-accounting, HR/payroll), software testing and verification service etc.

"We need a long-term vision as well as a strategic planning in order to move ourselves in the right direction", T.I.M. Nurul Kabir, a well-known IT personality and CEO of Spinnovation, told StarTech. "Bangladesh has tremendous potential in IT. The government should come forward to highlight this in the international arena", he added.

Spinnovation is a technology, consulting, outsourcing solution and services company which is affiliated with global leaders like Microsoft, Landsteinar Strengur hf, Avantus, Sagem Defence Securities, Borland etc. The company concentrates on areas such as telecommunications, manufacturing, retail store, health care, financial institution, distribution, estate etc.

Services available from Spinnovation are application development in .Net and Java, software QA and testing, ERP, CRM, SCM consulting, project management consulting, application lifecycle management etc. Recently Spinnovation, as partner of Microsoft and Landsteinar Strengur hf, has delivered the Point of Sale (POS) solution to all customer interaction centres of GrameenPhone, widely known as GrameenPhone Centre (GPC).

AKM Ahmedul Islam, COO, Bangladesh Japan Information Technology (BJIT) Ltd, expressed his concern about bandwidth price. He told StarTech that "highly expensive bandwidth is one of the major setbacks for outsourcing services in Bangladesh. We require one mega bandwidth for each PC when testing software. Existing bandwidth price is a great hurdle for us."

BJIT is the first joint venture ICT company having offices in Dhaka and Tokyo. It operates in four business areas -- software development, software testing, CAD/CAE and technology consulting. The company has already proved itself a success. It is currently working for renowned companies like Nokia, IBM Japan, NTT Data, Access Co Ltd and Metso Paper.

In 2002 BJIT teamed up with Taito, a famous Japanese game company, to develop four games for Nokia. These games were developed on Symbian platform for Nokia N-Gage device.

Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS) has taken some pragmatic initiatives such as 'IT-upgrade' and 'BITMAP' to create awareness and develop expertise in local IT companies to compete in the international market.
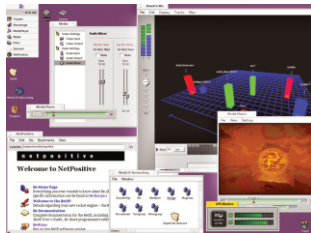
IT-upgrade is a project funded by the Asia Investment Programme of European Union and implemented by BASIS with technical assistance from Germany's Bremen University and Paris Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The project focuses on providing training for BASIS companies in software development and transferring European know-how to them so that they become eligible to sell their products and services in the European markets.

Recently, BASIS has unveiled BITMAP (The Bangladesh Information Technology Management Programme), an initiative to build the capacity of local IT industry. This project is also funded by the EU's Asia Investment Programme. Partners of the programme are Federation of Small and Medium Enterprises (DFSME), Denmark, Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, UK and T&E, Finland.

Outsourcing brings a ray of hope to exhibit our innovations and prove our competency. We should utilise this unique scope for the sustainable development of IT industry. An alliance between academia and industry could play an important role in turning our youngsters into resources.

TECHNEWS
Oracle gives a peek into 11g

SOFTWARE heavyweight Oracle recently unveiled its latest database software, "Database 11g", with a set of new features, which may well cement the giant's continuing dominance in the niche market.

Oracle says this new database will give its clients more liberty to handle their enterprise information, increase efficiency level and strengthen capacity so that they could gain competitive advantage over their rivals.

As the company has a solid footprint in Bangladesh, it held a press conference on its new release at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel on September 12. The aim of the conference was to give some insight into Oracle Database 11g.

In his multimedia presentation, Amer Khan, senior sales manager of technology business, Oracle South Asia Growth Economy (west), explained the features of Database 11g in detail. He also highlighted four aspects of it-- performance, scalability, availability and securities, areas that the company considers key to giving new dimension in modern business.

Database 11g opens new horizons for organisations that frequently require cutting edge IT solutions to speed up their

Amer Khan, senior sales manager of technology business, Oracle South Asia Growth Economy (west), speaks at the event.

operation. This database has introduced Oracle Real Application Testing that will enable the customers to test and incorporate changes in existing IT infrastructure in a cost-effective way.

Data Guard feature of Database 11g actively supports customers to protect data from system failure and site-wide disaster. Oracle Data Guard uniquely enables simultaneous read and recovery of a single standby database by making it available for reporting, backup, testing and 'rolling' upgrades to production databases.

Oracle Database 11g has significant new data partitioning and compression capabilities for more cost-effective Information Lifecycle Management and storage management. It automates many manual data partitioning operations and extends existing range, hash and list partitioning to include interval, reference and virtual column partitioning. In addition, Oracle Database 11g also provides a complete set of composite partitioning options.

Another unique capability of Database 11g is to manage all data from traditional business information to XML and 3D spatial information that makes it the ideal choice for power transaction processing, data warehousing and content management applications.

Edward Apurba Singha

TECHNEWS
Canon unveils new inkjet printer

STARTECH DESK

RENOWNED printer manufacturer Canon Inc recently introduced a cost-effective, high-performance bubble jet printer, PIXMA iP1880, in the local market.

Smart outlook and lightweight, the new product incorporates photo printing capability and is considered as a breakthrough in the small range printer market, says a press release.

Abdullah H Kafi, managing director of J.A.N. Associates, an authorised distributor of Canon products in Bangladesh, said, "This new printer will have significant impact on customers and in some cases it will replace expensive high-quality printers".

This printer utilises FINE (Full-photolithography Inkjet Nozzle

Abdullah H. Kafi, managing director, J.A.N. Associates talks about the new Canon printers

Engineering) technology to ensure quality print. Ink droplets as small as 2 pico-litres and resolution as high as 4800 dpi (dots per inch) guarantee exceptional image detail and accuracy.

Canon PIXMA iP1880 comes bundled with Easy-Layout Print and Easy-Photo Print software. The new product mainly targets home users and small businesses.

PHOTOTECH

ROLLY

A model displays Japanese electronics giant Sony's robotic music player "Rolly", equipped with 1GB built-in flash memory and mounted stereo speakers on an egg-shaped body, measuring 6.5cm in diameter and 10.4cm in length, to play MP3, ATRAC and AAC coding digital music contents in Tokyo on September 10. Sony will put it on the market from September 29.

PHOTO: AFP

Tech Jargon VII

READERS, through this space, I've been trying for the past few weeks to help those who were curious about technological jargon, but did not have time to go through big fat books to enhance their knowledge. Hope I've been successful in doing so. With this expectation, I'm winding up my series this week and giving up my space to other deserving enthusiasts and their articles...Oh the pain of goodbyes!
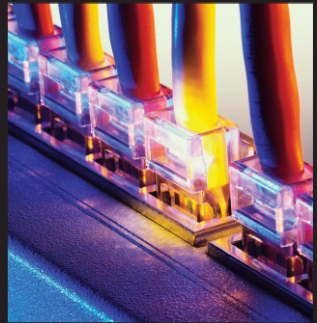
Well then, let's begin my final batch of words...

Protocol: A person well versed in English can easily tell what this means. A protocol, as the Oxford English Dictionary says, is a system of fixed rules. When applied to computers and the internet, it is a set of rules that computers use to communicate with each other over the internet. That brings us to the word IP, which basically stands for Internet Protocol. This protocol is used by your computer to understand the information that comes from the internet.

Router: Split this word and you end up with the word 'route'...which is precisely what the router does. It is a device that basically guides signals in a network to its relevant path or 'route'. This becomes especially necessary when a single computer is connected to a number of computers, such that the signals need somebody to guide them to the required path, as in a LAN...remember Tech Jargon I?

Java: Just hearing the name makes you want to reach for a hot cup, isn't it? Well, if you know what Java means in the computer world, you may change your mind! Java is a programming language that is often used to produce special effects on web pages. The language helps programmers and web developers to create small programs called applets...mind you, I didn't say 'apples'...and these applets help produce your special effect while you browse the internet.

ADSL: Short for Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line, ADSL is a method for connecting a computer to the internet over an ordinary phone line, which produces a much faster connection. Interestingly, it is called asymmetric because it is faster from internet to PC than the other way round.

DNS: DNS stands for Domain Name Service / System. It is an internet service that converts a web address provided by you (e.g. www.yahoo.com) into the numeric address that computers use and understand to track the relevant server (once again, look back through the previous issues if you want to know what a server is). The numeric address is called the "IP address". The IP address is a unique number assigned to any computer that is connected to the internet, including yours, and is often of the form 255.255.255.255, where each of the four blocks of numbers can be any value from 0 to 255.

You might have at some point during your internet browsing come across an annoying "Can't resolve DNS" message. This usually means that this conversion has failed and therefore, your required website cannot be found.

Nahid Akhter