



ILLUSTRATION: ZARIF FAIAZ

THE EDTECH DILEMMA

Understanding the pivot towards “offline” models

A hybrid model, offering both online and offline learning experiences, seems to be the answer. Online platforms provide interactive content and self-paced learning, while offline methods such as workshops, peer group discussions, and practical sessions foster hands-on learning and critical thinking.

MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

Just two years ago, online learning was set to revolutionise education in Bangladesh, with companies like Shikho and 10 Minute School leading the charge. These platforms promised to democratise access to quality education. However, there is now a noticeable shift towards incorporating offline centres alongside online models. Why are these pioneers of online learning embracing offline methodologies?

The edtech market in Bangladesh is projected to reach several billion dollars by 2030, driven by increased internet and smartphone penetration, government initiatives, and changing perceptions about online learning. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the use of edtech accelerated significantly, highlighting the importance of digital learning. However, challenges remained. A 2023 study shows that only 18.7% of children participate in remote learning due to device and internet access issues. Additionally, the offline education market, including coaching centres and private tutoring, remains significant, worth an estimated BDT 25,000 crore.

A hybrid model, offering both online and offline learning experiences, seems to be the answer. Online platforms provide interactive content and self-paced learning, while offline methods such as workshops, peer group discussions, and practical sessions foster hands-on learning and critical thinking. A notable success story from India is PhysicsWallah, which achieved unicorn status within two years of its launch. They began with a purely online platform but quickly recognised the potential of a hybrid model. By integrating offline centres, they have managed to cater to a wider audience, providing personalised guidance and practical

experiences alongside their digital content. Their success has prompted other edtech companies, including India's Byju's and Brazil's Descomplica, to adopt similar hybrid strategies.

The majority of users in Bangladesh are still accustomed to the offline experience. Students from classes 1-8 often lack the self-discipline to study online independently, and their parents prefer in-person, supervised learning. Concerns about young children using smartphones and the affordability of decent smartphones further emphasise the preference for offline education. Additionally, exams remain a significant part of the education system, and giving tests offline is a practice that online experiences do not fully replicate. Consequently, online education is often viewed as a secondary option.

“The hybrid model will serve as a bridge to connect the unconnected, gradually transitioning offline users to fully online learning. It will also help create locally trained teachers to support their communities,” explained Mirza Salman Hossain Beg, an entrepreneur with experience in edtech.

Traditional coaching centres in Bangladesh have long been a staple of supplementary education. However, they often suffer from overcrowded classrooms, lack of personalised attention, and outdated teaching methods. The hybrid approach leverages technology to deliver personalised learning while maintaining the benefits of face-to-face interaction. Building on this idea, Shikho has recently started incorporating offline experience centres to complement its online courses. These centres offer students physical exam hall experiences and personalised guidance, crucial for subjects requiring hands-on practice. By making the platform accessible in a tangible setting, they aim to demonstrate the effectiveness of online learning.

“Our decision to establish offline exam centres was driven by the unique educational needs and opportunities in Bangladesh. These centres complement our digital offerings, allowing students to engage with online resources while benefiting from the discipline of a physical exam environment,” shared Shahir Chowdhury, founder of Shikho. These centres primarily serve as places where students can sit for exams and acclimate to the physical exam environment. They also offer combo courses that provide access to both offline exams and online class materials, such as live classes by top mentors, timed MCQ and CQ exams, and animated videos that explain topics further.

Similarly, 10 Minute School has initiated offline learning centres, enhancing peer-to-peer learning and community building. “Our core vision is to find synergy between what our learners want, what they need, and what we can provide. Recognising that certain learning experiences can only be offered offline, we see the strategic move to offline offerings as a complement to our existing value proposition, ensuring a more effective learning outcome for our students,” explained Abdullah Abyad Raied, co-founder and CTO of the company.

“Technology enables both online and offline learning. In Southeast Asia and MENA, hybrid models are now the norm. Going forward, we will see continued synergy between these approaches,” Abdullah concluded.

The shift towards a hybrid model in edtech is not merely a trend but a strategic move towards inclusive and quality education. By combining the strengths of both online and offline methods, edtech companies are paving the way for a more robust educational system. This approach addresses immediate challenges while aligning with global educational advancements, ensuring that Bangladeshi students are well-prepared for the future.

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

“Talent is cheaper than table salt. What separates the talented individual from the successful one is a lot of hard work.”

STEPHEN KING

Capitalising on market trends

The secret sauce to success

SHAMS RASHID TONMOY

Just two weeks ago, Nvidia dethroned tech titan Microsoft to become the world's most valuable company, reaching a staggering market capitalisation of \$3.335 trillion. At the time of writing, Nvidia currently sits comfortably in third place at \$3.038 trillion, only behind Microsoft and Apple. Despite that, the company's meteoric rise proves a compelling example of the power of capitalising on current market trends. Let's take a look at how capitalising on market trends can be the secret sauce to your startup's success.

Finding a common thread

Let's extend the example beyond Nvidia. Just last week, Amazon joined the exclusive \$2 trillion market value club, solidifying itself as the fifth US company to reach this massive landmark. The common thread? The recent boom in artificial intelligence (AI). Because of how prominent the use of generative AI has become, consumers are driving the demand for AI-powered products. Likewise, investors are pouring money into companies positioned to benefit from this technological revolution.

This is a prime example of how companies can achieve tremendous success by strategically aligning themselves with current market trends. Nvidia, a company



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synonymous with high-performance graphics cards for gamers, provides a particularly compelling case study. Recognising the potential of AI, Nvidia adapted its powerful GPUs for use in data centres, specifically those running cutting-edge AI models similar to OpenAI's ChatGPT and Microsoft's Gemini. The result? The level of success you see now.

Dive deep - and stay informed!

So, what can you do to make sure your

startup achieves success as well? As Nvidia and Amazon have shown us, banking on current demands is the way to go. Before steering your company's ship in a new direction, it's crucial to become educated about the current industry landscape. Immerse yourself in what the general public thinks about your industry and the type of product/service you offer. A good way to stay updated with current needs and demands is to read up on social media discussions and

look for themes and consumer behaviour shifts.

For example, the growing interest in sustainable living is a trend that Tesla leveraged with its electric vehicles. As per a 2022 research paper on Tesla's sustainability factor, the company had taken note of the green economy movement - which became a trend a few years ago - and since then has become a popular name in the world of EVs. Even though Tesla stocks have had their recent ups and downs, the brand is still known for electric cars that many international users have switched to owing to the clean fuel hype.

Be open to diversifying

To stay ahead of your competitors, you should keep your company open to continuously innovate, and, when needed, diversify your product or service offerings. Do this by identifying complementary areas where you can leverage existing capabilities to meet new market demands. A strong example of this is, once again, Amazon, which started as an online bookstore and has now become a multinational tech and e-commerce juggernaut.

This level of success was possible because Amazon recognised the potential of e-commerce, and quickly expanded its product categories to meet a variety of needs. Of particular note here is Amazon

Web Services (AWS), which allowed the company to brand from e-commerce to cloud computing, thus branching out to numerous new nodes of revenues - specifically data commercialisation, which further boosted the e-commerce's business value through user-based data and insights.

Embrace technological advancements

While market trends are important, neglecting research and development (R&D) can hinder long-term success. In the age of generative AI, where tech giants are constantly unveiling new models, companies need to embrace all available tools to expand sales and market reach. Once again, Nvidia serves as a prime example. The company not only capitalised on the surge in demand for graphics processing units (GPUs) but also actively invested in AI technology, generating significant industry buzz in the process.

In a similar vein, consider data analytics. It will offer valuable insights into customer behaviour and operational efficiency, ultimately streamlining your business. Remember, technology's purpose is to simplify processes. Companies that fail to leverage the latest advancements risk falling behind competitors. As such, use companies like Nvidia, Amazon, Tesla, etc. as examples of how to capitalise on demands and stay ahead of current market trends.