

SPARK

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An AnimationXpress.com Special



THE INDIAN MAGIC BEGINS



- COSMOS MAYA: CAPTAIN CACTUS
- TOONZ MEDIA'S EXPANSION



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CONTENTS



5. Cosmos Maya's global push with Captain Cactus

8. Graphiti Multimedia's tribal art series seeks East European and MENA partners



9. India's L&M industry: understanding the La-La Land



12. Toonz Media fires on all cylinders in 2017



14. Rajshri Kids loves kidding around



16. Virtual India, now a reality



Editor's Note

Content is not king.

Content is not citizens and subjects.

Content is the kingdom.

And anyone who has access to it, has the keys not only to the king, its citizens, but also the kingdom. The kingdom of today's entertainment and distraction seeking, smartphone and device-toting, data-guzzling are the consumers.

At least that's the new paradigm. Whether one looks at how streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon and Apple's iTunes are going about conquering world's far and distant lands with stories from a culture that are capturing the attention of those from another. Whether it is a *Narcos* or *The Crown*. Or a 3 per cent - a show made in Brazil in Portuguese which is enamouring and keeping viewers glued in places as far as the US. Both Netflix and Amazon have kept aside humungous and very heavy money chests to splurge on content they hope will delight viewers worldwide. What they are spending on content as private companies alone equals the size of India's entertainment industry or probably 70 per cent of it. And that may make us look at our very shallow pockets in dismay. However, we should not despair.

For all those studio execs in more developed markets who are wondering where they will get their next growth spurt from, India is the La La Land. But it is more than that: it has real potential as well. Both in terms of outward and inward flows of content. Some Indian creators and studios have realised this. Cosmos-Maya is investing with Olivier Jean Marie of *Oggy and the Cockroaches* fame; Toonz Media is developing original digital and other TV and gaming IPs and even Green Gold is working on projects which could attract global audiences.

In the meanwhile, virtual reality is beginning to make its mark in the country. Mind you, it's only a beginning. Finally, licensing and merchandising (L&M) has swelled into a billion dollar business. Though some challenges remain, the mood is buoyant.

This issue of animationxpress.com's 'Spark' takes a quick look at some of these hot topics. Hopefully, they will give you insights into the new global India.

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Cosmos-Maya's global push with Captain Cactus

Prerna Kothari

Last year, when Indian animation studio Cosmos-Maya announced that it was launching an international animation series targeting kids the world over, a lot of noses went up in the air.

"Not another Indian animation studio taking a stab at this genre," was one comment AnimationXpress.com got.

But Cosmo-Maya is out to prove the naysayers wrong. Not only has the arguably India's largest producer of original Indian animated content (with five of its shows being currently on air: *Shiva*, *Eena Meena Deeka*, *Vir – The Robot Boy*, *Kisna*, *The Adventures of Motu Patlu*) got going on 'Captain Cactus' which is being produced with French animation genius Olivier Jean Marei of 'Oggy and the Cockroaches' fame - it is on track to roll out another two co-productions with other international partners.

The first one is 'Atchoo!', which is being done in collaboration with Studio Campedelli (co-production with RAI TV), Italy and is already into production and will be on air this summer in India. The second one is a German co-production which will be announced after *Captain Cactus'* details are revealed.

"Cosmos-Maya has a dedicated three-pronged content creation strategy; India centric shows like *Motu Patlu*, crossover shows of Indian origin like *Eena Meena Deeka* and global co-production," says Cosmos-Maya, CEO, Anish Mehta. "This is the strategy with which we approach all international markets."

While the two new productions will take some time to see the light of day, the focus at this year's MIPTV is on *Captain Cactus* which is all about the crazy, weird and wonderfully absurd adventures of... Captain Cactus – a young and likeable walking-talking cactus whose sole mission in life is to take care of his surroundings and protect its inhabitants.

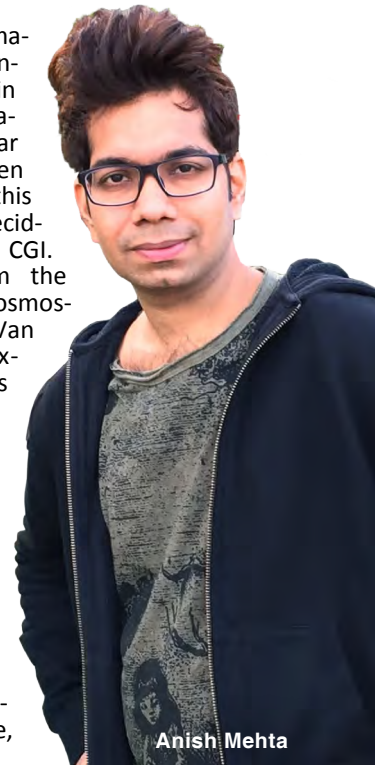
But all is not sunny, he is constantly disturbed by Zig and Zag, two trouble-making mosquitoes bent on destruction and creating havoc.

Mehta explains how the partnership for his studio came about. Says he: "During one of our strategy meetings we came across Olivier Jean Marie and his partners Jan Van Rijsselberge and Charles Vaucelle. We spotted certain obvious synergy that led to a logical symbiotic business association and that is how *Captain Cactus* was born."

Being a co-production, there is joint ownership of the IP between Jean Marie's team and Cosmos-Maya. The idea was to produce about 52 half hours in the first season and the series format is 7 minutes, so it finally will end up being 156x7' in total.

As far as the animation style is concerned, though in the past Jean Marie's most popular shows have been produced in 2D, this time the trio decided to go for 3D CGI. What gave them the confidence was Cosmos-Maya's and Van Rijsselberge's experience in this animation form.

Estimates are that *Captain Cactus* has a budget outlay between eight to 12 million euros with pre-and post-production taking place in France under the supervision of Jean Marie, Van Rijsselberge



Anish Mehta



its audiences laugh as they watch its protagonist.

As a business model, the teams would like to create a franchise out of a brand like *Captain Cactus*. However, though the initial response for the series has been rather positive, the team says it will watch how things unravel before taking any decision.

"With *Captain Cactus*, we are working on some of Europe's most renowned and talented artists. We are catering to a true global audience and thus in that respect the show is different from each of our earlier shows; and the same is evident in all aspects, be it the scale, level of detailing, production timelines or budgets and most importantly also the mounting that we have provided at Cosmos-Maya's end."

Captain Cactus has been travelling across many markets. Not revealing much about where's the show headed, Mehta mentions, "We have two major partnerships in the offing, and will soon be making an announcement."

and Vaucelle. Production however is being churned out at Cosmos-Maya's studio in Mumbai.

"Olivier is a pure genius and he is at his best when he is thinking of slapstick chase comedies. Taking that wild imagination and keeping in mind some of the 3D capabilities that Cosmos-Maya is known for; we developed the universe of the series. The squash and stretch in a 3D animation style is one of the biggest highlights of the series," exerts Mehta.

What makes *Captain Cactus* unique is the fact that the show is a "chase comedy with a purpose", explains Mehta. Unlike the predator-prey angle which has been the key theme of chase comedies; the protagonist out here, Captain Cactus is a good Samaritan who takes on the bad guys in order to protect someone. He is a do-gooder character. Whereas visually, squash and stretch which is a hallmark of 2D animation, will now be seen in 3D.

Being a fun show, the studio intends to make

What's the secret sauce that's helping Cosmos-Maya succeed where other Indian studios have stumbled?

"A successful co-production happens when all partners benefit from it. India is no longer about just the cost advantage. We are also about domestic consumption coupled with timely and organised deliveries and world over content makers and platforms are recognising that. As long as we manage to find the right project that doesn't bring one geography at the cost of another, the partnerships will be successful," discloses Mehta. "India has the uniqueness of being a developed and developing market at the same time and the demand is very high. Most of the notable global players are aware of this market dynamic and so are the Indian players. That puts us in a unique situation and thus partnerships like this will continue to happen."

Indian animation industry observers have their fingers crossed that this could be the first of many trendsetters to come.

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Graphiti Multimedia's tribal art series seeks East European and MENA partners



Prerna Kothari

In the age of pop and modern art, traditional forms of expression are quite likely to be forgotten and buried. Keeping traditional forms of rural and tribal art alive in Indian kids view frame is what has been driving Mumbai-based Graphiti Multimedia's animation IP initiative '*Krish, Trish and Baltiboy*' since 2008.

Consisting initially of two 60 minute movies, it has now extended that to seven with the eight being under production. The first two movies were created for Children's Film Society of India (CFSI), which were later acquired by Turner International India. Owing to the positive response garnered by the first two movies when aired on Cartoon Network and POGO, Turner decided to greenlight a few more movies and now, recently, the seventh movie was released and the eighth one is under production.

The series is about three minstrels: Krish - a monkey, Trish - a cat and Baltiboy - a donkey who take the audience on an exotic journey to the land of Indian folk tales and folk music. These endearing characters take one to different regions of India like Rajasthan, Kerala, Punjab, Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh. Exploring these regions, popular stories come alive like the beautiful leather puppets of Karnataka, the unique Madhubani style of paintings from Bihar and the artistic poet Chitra style of Bengal.

"We wanted to bring the art and culture of

our country to the children," says Graphiti Multimedia, co-founder, Munjal Shroff. "Expose them to the rich heritage we possess in an interesting manner. Sometimes, there are trivia about the art, caricature of the characters and many such things."

Eight years of extensive research went into developing the film with about 40 different regions and cultures explored. The eighth movie will showcase the North-Eastern art form - Thangka which is basically a Tibetan Buddhist painting observed on cotton, or silk appliqué, usually depicting a Buddhist deity, scene, or mandala.

The characters are in 3D animation whereas the story art is in 2D. Though the short film is region specific, the format of it is in high demand. The 60 minute movie is broken into three parts, each exploring different art styles and states.

Shroff adds, "European and Middle-Eastern broadcasters are keen on purchasing the format. The movie features three animals narrating the tales of a particular region in an artistic and musical manner. It can be easily adapted to promote the region's art and culture."

Graphiti Multimedia has also partnered with Disney India for the show '*YOM*' which is going to be an action-adventure comedy series, that narrates the adventures of a boy named Yom who has a unique super-hero ability of adopting animal inspired yoga asanas into his fighting technique.

India's L&M industry: understanding the La-La Land

Anshita Bhatt

Though licensing and merchandising (L&M) began in India nearly three decades ago when Disney stepped into India with a master franchisee, the sector has only gained momentum in the past decade or so. With original domestic shows on the rise and gaining popularity, the need to enter regional (both domestic and in the neighbouring countries) markets for expansion, co-productions, global franchises moving in to tap Asians, increasing awareness of IP rights, symbiotic business deals and increasing consumer demand from a young Indian population with bulging wallets, L&M has gained tremendous significance.

Licensing is globally valued at an estimated \$251.7 billion and in India, it is roughly around \$1 billion (Licensing Global Survey 2016) in retail, of which film and TV entertainment form a major share.

“Entertainment licensing is 40 to 50 per cent of the overall licensing business in India. 70 per cent of these are brands focused on the kids’ segment and the other 30 per cent is the young adults’ market,” says brand management and licensing representation company Dream Theatre’s founder and CEO, Jiggy George.

Amongst the leaders in the L&M business in India are Disney India, Turner India, Viacom18, Green Gold Animation (the creator of the *Chhota Bheem* and *Mighty Raju* franchises), and of course Dream Theatre which represents iconic characters such as Doremon, Pokémon, and Shinchian.

While companies such as the Mouse House, Turner India, Nick and the Japanese brands have been putting their characters on everything from books to pencils to stationary boxes to clothes for some years, the big domestic breakout came with the massive nationwide popularity of the locally created *Chhota Bheem* and the rollout of its specialty stores around four years ago. Some fine-tuning of its retail strategy for its merchandise has taken place since, but observers say that its success – and other local characters such as *Motu Patlu* – has indeed helped propel the industry forward.

“While there will always be iconic global franchises, Indian characters like *Motu Patlu* and *Shiva* are doing very well. The former cater to a very metro-focused crowd. But as you go to a mass market to the mini-metros and beyond, Indian franchises are extremely popular,” explains Viacom18, business head (consumer products and integrated network solutions), Saugato Bhowmik.

He should know. Viacom18 (which airs the *Motu Patlu* series) started its L&M business in 2006-07 with about eight categories, 500 SKUs and six licensees. Today, it has a presence in over 50 categories with over 10,000 SKUs across 40,000 retail touch points and over 80 plus licensees.

Disney India – the pioneer – on the other hand has its consumer products business pivoted around four brands: Disney, Pixar,



Marvel and Lucasfilm. It reportedly offers product ranges that cut across ages - from infants to toddlers to tweens and teens to youth to adults. Industry sources say that its products are available across 300,000 retail touch points with over 2,000 modern trade outlets in India and over 150 licensees.

As far as global franchises and characters go, it is properties like Doremon, Pokémon, Shichan, Mickey Mouse, Dora which are all the rage.

"Pokémon which is doing phenomenally well on Disney XD and VOOT (an online streaming service launched by Viacom18) has been one of the most popular licensing properties since its relaunch in 2014 with products across more than 15 categories and large FMCG promotions," claims George.

In the preschool category however, *Peppa Pig* has received great response on Planet Superheroes, a retail merchandise company with both online and offline stores.

It is not just the little ones who are tugging at their mothers' sarees urging them to buy a little Chhota Bheem, even adults are going gaga over character branded gear. Mainly courtesy the huge popularity of massive global franchises such as *Star Wars*, *The Avengers*, *Despicable Me*, *Batman*, *The Secret Life of Pets*, *Frozen*, *The Lord of the Rings*, which were released in different regional languages in India. Additionally, India's youth have become brand conscious - courtesy their global travels, and social media buzz - and have been buying more online on e-commerce sites.

Even TV series like *The Flash*, *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, *Game of Thrones*, *Breaking Bad*, *Sherlock Holmes* have garnered a huge fanbase in India. "Our *Game Of Thrones* and *Breaking Bad* lines are doing really well as they have a huge fan following in India," says online merchandise store Redwolf's managing partner, Vivek Malhotra.

Planet Superheroes, MD and CEO, Jaineel Aga adds that the Joker from DC Comics is the most popular on his e-commerce site.

Then there is the fact that even brands have



understood how they can leverage the appeal of these characters to give a little push to their sales efforts and also offer a connect to their fans. "Different brands have leveraged licensing for specific objectives to great success," explains George, whose company handles L&M for brands like *The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*, *Angry Birds*, *Smiley* and many others.

For instance, Bata Shoes started licensing with *Angry Birds* to increase its appeal among the young and upwardly mobile who were moving on from the Canadian brand, now synonymous with footwear in India

The FMCG push has helped the L&M industry's cause, courtesy the wide distribution these brands get. "When we are partnering with them (FMCG product distributors) on our franchises or movie promotions, we allow them to create excitement and value around their brand in partnership with us. They give us visibility and we give them strong value propositions for their customers," says Disney India, VP (consumer products and interactive media), Abhishek Maheshwari.

The major metros - like Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Chennai and Bengaluru - are most active in buying merchandise as licensees have stronger distribution networks and key retailers in these prime areas. In India, the offline market (stand alone stores, speciality stores and large format stores) still dominate and e-commerce contributes five to six per cent but this has been growing in recent times. This is mainly thanks to the spread of smartphones and lower bandwidth costs. Consumers in smaller cities that are not catered to by large retail chains have started buying online.

Agrees Maheshwari: "E-commerce plays a



crucial role in making our products available to consumers across India. The online channels help us showcase the length and breadth of products and are able to drive impulse buying through suggestions of related products. We closely work with some of the leading e-commerce players to create dedicated character branded stores.”

Ecommerce is a necessity today, elucidates George, as fans reside everywhere. Says he: “In some categories, like rainwear, innerwear, footwear and school bags, regional players are stronger than national brands and are also more connected to the needs and demands of the regional market.”

Bhowmik believes that Indian regional markets are going to be the main engine of growth in the next five to eight years for L&M.

So how can major brands tap the regional markets? Pat comes his answer: “By tailor making the packaging and putting content in regional languages.”

And that’s something which Green Gold Animation, chief strategy officer, Srinivas Chilakalapudi has been working on. “Our sales are highest in the western region, followed closely by the north and the south. Our brands are also very strong in the east. We have been selling comic books and DVDs in regional languages.”

The L&M business in India does not come without its challenges. The biggest one according to Maheshwari is piracy. “It is an issue at ground level that the entire industry and for that matter any company with IP faces. Protection of IPR should be of paramount im-

portance to any creative company and is vital for the L&M industry,” he points out.

Other concern areas include: Getting the right licence, right distribution channels and right branding is extremely critical, because it is a risky affair. On top of that, certain licensees do not honour minimum guarantees that the licensor expects while some do quite well. Then there is the fact that each of the characters and merchandise has to have immediate recall and pull.

“Pull demand is only created when there is digital dissemination of content happening continuously around the year. Either it has to be shown on TV or there is a lot of promotion happening of the franchise or new movies coming up,” highlights Aga.

Agents who are the first point of contact for providing licences in India are also a relatively inexperienced bunch. “There is a constant churn happening and licensing agents are not worried about that. This mindset puts barriers in the growth of the industry,” says Aga. “For the Indian L&M ecosystem to prosper, a win-win outlook has to be adopted. One needs to have an attitude of “I win if you win” as opposed to the prevalent attitude of being just a broker for short term deal closure focus. Doing licensing in the proper way involves focus - from understanding and adhering to brand guidelines, ensuring proper quality control metrics and having a transparent reporting format for all royalties and payments, data driven research. It is a mistake to assume that one can succeed in the licensing space purely on capital. It most importantly needs patience for this to play out to fruition in the long run.”

“The India brand and character licensing story has just begun and the potential is enormous. We expect this industry to continue its growth journey as the retail market evolves and the consumers become more discerning and seek greater value,” exults Maheshwari.

And therein lies the rub: companies, brands and franchises see a lot of potential in the Indian economy in the coming years. Which there is. But only if the challenges are overcome and issues resolved, will the colossal growth follow.

Toonz Media fires on all cylinders in 2017



Anshita Bhatt

With numerous TV shows, digital content and a gaming studio and an academy lined-up on the starting line, the Thiruvananthapuram-based Toonz Media Group is buzzing with activity this year.

The studio, which is already into content creation (animation and live action), production, distribution and rights exploitation, digital content, licensing and merchandising and animation training, has for the first time put together a gaming studio and an academy. 30 March, 2017 was the date when it announced the launch of Toonz Games, a new global division that will develop world class games on a variety of platforms including Android, iOS, Windows and others.

Toonz Games will use the latest technologies available, along with the support of AR and VR, to create stunning and thrilling gaming experiences. Operating from the state-of-the-art studio at Technopark in Kerala, the global division will consult with the veteran team of creators with over two decades of experience in animation and content for kids and families using the existing talent pool of gaming artists, animators and programmers.

And leading the initiative is two-decade gaming and animation veteran Sunil A.P.

“Toonz always believes in entertaining the world in the newest and most innovative ways. I believe Toonz Games holds immeasurable potential to take entertainment in general, and gaming in particular, to a totally new level. Toonz promises to create entertainment with a soul,” comments Toonz Media CEO P. Jayakumar.

The studio will start with games for two IPs - *Smighties* and *Pakdam Pakdai*. ‘Mighty Smighties’ is a fun-friendly game created by US-based company Herotainment. Toonz Studios - the flagship division of Toonz Media Group - had signed a strategic partnership with New York-based transmedia company, Herotainment to expand *Smighties* into a digital series. The animated digital series is currently in production and will launch in either June or July this year. *Pakdam Pakdai*, also internationally known as *Rat-A-Tat* and *Dogs vs. Rats*, is one of the highest rated shows being aired on Nick India.

So will the other games be around their already established IPs or will Toonz Games come up with new ones?

“We can, and we will,” says Jayakumar, stating that this is a very early stage. “We will take a decision very quickly. The idea is to focus on our IPs.”

The target audience for the games will be kids. However, the plan is to create game versions of iconic global IPs, conceive original ideas exclusively for games and also explore new possibilities to give customers a unique experience.

Its video content show roster is also overflowing with new productions. Toonz is at the last stage of producing the *Fruit Ninja* show, based on the *Fruit Ninja* game, developed by Australia’s Halfbrick. The game on the other hand is to be “launched soon” by YouTube, in association with the IP owner Halfbrick. Toonz has partnered with another Ozzie creator for an animation show called *Cutie Pops Girls* which is under early development. These offerings will be first streamed digitally and followed up with broadcast versions.

Uma and Devan Namaste!, a co-production between Toonz Media Group and New York-based Sharmaji Productions – is to be launched at MIPCOM this October. The show, the first of its kind, revolves around the life of the siblings Uma and Devan as they balance growing up in the US while staying true to their Indian culture and heritage.



Uma and Devan Namaste!: The US-Desi kids

Pre-production for *Beijing Safari* - a sequel of *Delhi Safari* - has already been done in the Toonz facility based in New Zealand. Talks of production are still on with India’s Krayon Pictures and China’s Heshan Media. The film will be released initially in China and then worldwide, dubbed in various languages.

So how does the team at Toonz manage to work on multiple projects at a time? “We have a top project management team wherein the key creative and management aspects are taken care of by us but in the meantime, we work with various other partner studios across the globe to produce content,” reveals Jayakumar.

As he is known to often say: “Collaboration and cooption are the ways to go.”



Rajshri Kids loves kidding around



Krishanu Ghosal

With the smartphone penetration and data services on an all-time high in the country, Indian kids between the age of four to 12 – like elsewhere globally – are always seen tinkering with a tablet or a mobile in search of their favourite content.

As demand persists, a lot of studios catering to the needs have sprung up. One of them, Rajshri Kids, was the first kids YouTube channel back in 2008, set-up with the vision of Rajshri Entertainment, founder, Rajjat Barjatya.

The studio's content comprises of a variety of storytelling visuals in different arts and styles. These include moral stories, edutainment, bed time stories and the very latest *Dr. Binoc*.

The kids seem to like the content that the channel creates and hence the number of subscribers has grown at a decent rate. Rajshri Entertainment, general manager of content alliances, Inderpal Singh Jaggi reveals, "The channel has grown substantially and we have a good reach across the heartlands of India. The views of the channel have grown from 700,000 plus views per month in February 2016 to around four million views per month in February 2017 with the growth percentage being 441 per cent in one year. The average monthly subscribers have also increased substantially in the last couple of

months with the growth percentage being 605 per cent. The total subscribers of the channel are 180,277 now."

The channel follows a revenue model which is a mix of AVOD and SVOD revenues. Rajshri Kids monetises its content on an AVOD basis on YouTube and also licences content to a lot of SVOD platforms, TV channels, DTH operators, mobile operators etc. The studio is also dubbing its content in various Indian and international languages to reach out to a much larger kids' audience.

"The OTT space has exploded with more and more platforms coming on board. The advertisers are more open to experiment with content on digital. There has also been a data revolution which is driving more and more video consumption. The future of the M&E industry will revolve around digital," says Singh.

The studio is also quite familiar with the MIP market as Singh asserts, "MIP offers us a great platform to showcase our content to a completely new set of buyers. It is markets like MIP where we have done deals with leading TV channels and OTT platforms who want to license our content and make it available in their local language. We are focusing a lot on creating new and original IPs. In the next one year we will be coming to MIP with more, newer and fresher content."

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Virtual India, now a reality



A still from 'Cost of Coal' by Memesys Culture Lab

Krishanu Ghosal

In a matter of just an hour, 16 year old Manoj Kale clumsily walked on a plank loosely placed between two high cliffs. The seven-year old kid besides him jumped off the cliff, unharmed, and landed in a dungeon with a gun, shooting at his enemies frantically. Kale took the steering wheel of a sports-car, totally absorbed in an adrenaline-pumping racing experience.

Others who were watching him in a small transparent kiosk in a mall in Mumbai, observed him waving his hands about, jumping around, with an excited look on his face. But for Kale it was an absolute immersive experience.

Welcome to the realm of Virtual Reality in India. Like most other nations, whether the US or those in South East Asia, VR has started to become a bit of a reality in India. Being one of the fastest growing economies of the world and a country synonymous with all things IT, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's India has been swift in adopting VR. At least in some specific sectors. Even though gaming is one of the major sectors where VR is being implemented, globally, it is definitely not restricted to it. Having come

into the limelight in the past three years, it has managed to grab the attention of not only the entire media and entertainment (M&E) folks but also that of those involved in architecture/real estate, manufacturing, retail, education, healthcare and the automotive industry as well.

And this is something that technology suppliers are also in agreement with. About 80 per cent of all VR content produced is created through Unity. And this is what Unity Technologies, regional director South APAC, Quentin Staes-Polet, has to say: "With the arrival of new graphic chips and devices over the last 18 months, accessibility of VR for all industries has become possible. We have seen a strong acceleration of the sector with many new user cases emerging. Mostly around training, simulations and maintenance. Basically ROI driven simulations that reduce costs of business processes and improve their outcome such as large machinery and facilities training, complex and remote maintenance of equipments, data visualisation and many more."

Heavy smartphone penetration propelled by the launch of 4G by numerous telcos, most



Quentin Staes-Polet: VR sector is accelerating

notably Reliance Jio and India's software development prowess are some of the factors which will further position the country as one of the leaders in the yet-untapped industry, says Staes-Polet. This would be in perfect tandem with the government's 'Digital India' drive.

"The only segment that India lags behind in the VR ecosystem is distribution. Owing to limited broadband penetration, data-heavy VR content has found it difficult to find large audiences. There has also been hesitancy from my VCs / investors and brands to invest in VR in India which has given the west a temporary advantage," explains Memesys Culture Lab, co-founder, Zain Memon. Memesys Culture Lab is based out of Mumbai in India and has launched the first edition of its 'impact-driven non-fiction VR platform, 'ElseVR' which aims to create an impact around pertinent but often ignored topics using high-end VR experiences.

The VR industry is projected to provide a sharp boost to the already thriving animation and VFX industry in India. According to the KPMG India: M&E industry report of 2017, the groundwork for it has already begun. In 2016, the team of 'Baahubali 2,' a VFX-heavy feature, launched a 360 degree immersive experience to showcase the gigantic sets of the movie.

Even though the production of VR related content is on the rise, the adoption has to step up in tandem.

"Currently the VR adoption in India is at a minuscule level. India with its huge smartphone base will be the key market for VR once this VR phenomenon explodes," says Saurav Bhaik, co-founder and CEO of Tagbin, an India-based VR production company which has associated with a large number of clientele including Huawei, Kingfisher, Hero, Honda, Cadbury, India Today, Mercedes, Livguard, Nestle among others.

Interestingly, he suggests that only visuals cannot create a complete immersive experience; elements like touch, smell, hearing are to be taken seriously to achieve absolute realism. The company has created a cricket simulator in the past and is currently working on a 'Next - Gen driving simulator'.

According to the KPMG report, around 70 VR/AR related start-ups have sprung up in India with an intent to tap into the steadily-growing market. However, it necessarily doesn't prove that the consumption of VR in India has grown. Just like the mobile market which is at its zenith in India currently, it will take time for the consumers of the country to adopt VR practices. The same thought is resonated in the words of The Awesome Game Studio, CEO, Rajat Ojha.

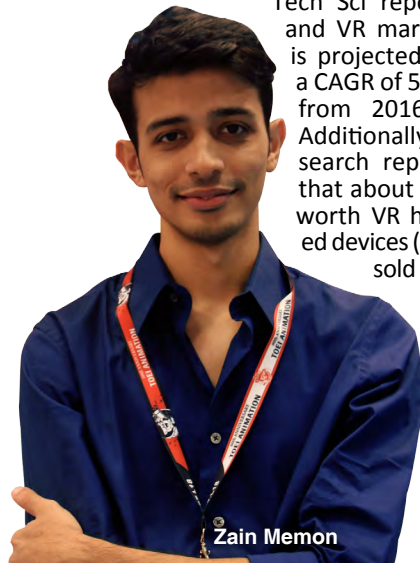
"This is the moment for India. There are a lot of game studios and VR just happened so if India focuses on quality content and not the rat race (like India did in mobile as actual momentum happened only after the mobile revolution) then it can be a leading force. Right now I haven't seen very promising content from India but probabilities of seeing very good content is really high. However, I have seen some amazing VR videos from India. Enterprise VR and games are much underutilised," he adds.

However, it has not always been a smooth start for everyone coming into the industry. India is known for its 'jugaad.' The term loosely means putting together means of implementation by the most bizarre and unconventional means. Bottom-line is: they make it work, somehow.

A hint of this can be found in the statement of Zain Memon, as he shares, “To shoot for VR, you need a camera pointing at every possible direction. For my first VR experiment, I took a Rubik’s Cube and I put action cams on all sides of the Rubik’s cube, took that into compositing software, and got my first VR video. Even though it was very low end, it was something. From there we have evolved into custom made rigs where cameras anywhere from a Go Pro to a Red Dragon shooting at 6K pointing at every direction, and we can capture enough FOV to take it into a stitching software and stitch a beautiful 360 image, which also means that there can be no cameraman standing behind the camera and shooting it and still getting the job done.”

One of India’s first VR documentaries was created by Memsys Culture Lab. Titled ‘Cost of Coal’ it was based on Korba, Chhattisgarh where about one fourth of India’s coal is mined and how it has ravaged the surrounding elements. It was later acquired by the United Nations for its VR platform, UNVR.

India doesn’t have ‘VR-demand’ yet, so it has to be created. There’s a lot of skepticism right now in India so the convincing game should be strong. One can probably have short term VR experiences like cinema chain PVR has recently done with its VR lounge and there are few more in the pipeline. According to a Tech Sci report, the AR and VR market in India is projected to register a CAGR of 55.3 per cent from 2016 to 2021. Additionally, a 6Wresearch report notified that about \$3.4 million worth VR head mounted devices (HMDs) were sold in India in



Zain Memon

the first quarter of 2016 itself.

It’s very clear outside India, VR games, VR expe-

riences, VR based entertainment centres (like VOID), educational VR are all around and are demanded. Social VR is another buzz word outside and one can see by the amount of money raised by these companies. Sundance festival and SXSW show the sheer number of VR content that is already out there and some of the most amazing VR movies are being showcased.

The Awesome Game Studio started back in 2013, providing content to several LBEs/ theme parks and existing amusement parks. The studio is currently working on two VR games, one of which is a classic arcade game for which it has taken a licence and another one is its own IP. Apart from this, the studio is also behind one of the first VR movies in India which was co-produced with Sikhya Entertainment.

Maya Digital, an animation studio is going to convert the ‘Gobindgarh Fort’ in Punjab into ‘Mayanagri,’ a virtual reality theme park. The project will comprise of a 3D live show, projection mapping and other modes of entertainment as well.

Challenges however abound. The cost of HMDs is still too pricey for the Indian consumer, whereas more affordable VR devices like the Google Cardboard VR fail to provide a true immersive experience. Apart from that, although India is experiencing a smartphone revolution, the majority of those handsets do not support VR.

However, recent conventions across India speak a different story. From the Nasscom Game Developers Conference and The India Gaming Show to Comic Con and Taiwan Excellence Cup, each one of them has been dominated by the showcase of Virtual Reality and the time for the technology has never been better in the country.

All pointers indicate that there is a lot of promise in the relatively untapped Indian VR industry. As Rajat Ojha exults, “Monetisation is the biggest problem but there are tons of solutions. In fact, we did better in few years of VR than all the years of mobile.”

Amen to that!

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