

Nurturing the small guy

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THE big ones in the family don't need much help to strike out on their own. But the medium and small members sure could do with a helping hand.

Meeting such a need is a young, non-profit organisation in Bangalore. This organisation, the Interactive Technology, Software and Media Association (ITSMA), is helping small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the IT sector gain market access in the European Union.

The Bangalore-based organisation is playing the role of a catalyst in the growth of many a small and medium IT company. It liaises and networks with companies and agencies involved specifically in the development of multimedia content and its distribution. It helps small and medium enterprises to develop business partnerships and expand their operations. The two-year-old organisation that has been working behind the scene, as it were, is, of late, catching the attention of IT SMEs.

"We already have 26 firms enrolled as members," says Surbhi Sharma, secretary-general, ITSMA, and "Many more are set to join us." The organisation's members include Blue Star Infotech and Magnasoft Consulting. The ITSMA helps companies to accelerate the process of connecting to markets. It offers advisory services, helps promote excellence in multimedia through showcasing, and forming special interest group, offers international business promotion, and also helps identify new business opportunities. Besides helping Indian firms to explore market opportunity, it helps European companies to identify vendors and outsourcing partners. It envisages a dynamic future for Indian IT SMEs and is keen to help them overcome hurdles such as

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the lack of international recognition and accessibility, and dearth of cohesive standards.

It has tie-ups with the Eu-

ropean Multimedia Forum (EMF) and GAIA. The EMF promotes competitiveness of the converging digital media indus-

tries in the global market while GAIA promotes its associated companies in technical, commercial and economic terms. GAIA is the Association Cluster of Telecommunications of the Basque Country supported by the Basque Government.

Fund backing for R&D

Apart from technical collaboration, SMEs can look forward to some financial assistance for their R&D efforts through ITSMA. It recently launched two new initiatives — Accelerator and Patent — in tie-ups with the European Commission. The Patent initiative spurs R&D in Indian IT SMEs by opening new partnerships and avenues to their work while Accelerator aims to obtain funding for certain R&D programmes from various existing organisations, says Surbhi. Many Indian firms are unaware of how to access funds for their R&D initiatives. "We are trying to get more funds for Indian firms from the EC through the Accelerator programme," she says.

"After a recent seminar in Bangalore, we have seen a real rush from SMEs to avail of various facilities," she says.

The organisation plans to concentrate for now on the South, especially on Bangalore, Chennai and Hyderabad. In future, it plans to expand its presence to other cities, including Delhi. Being a non-profit organisation, the ITSMA charges its members a certain fee, depending on their turnover. It also generates revenues by providing consultancy services and undertaking R&D initiatives. "We have partnered with other multimedia associations worldwide, on issues such as IPR, to boost the competitiveness of the industry.

The association is also looking forward to working with larger industry associations such as Nasscom," says Surbhi. ○



Ramesh Sharma