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## Between the lines

Jacob Cherian, TNN Sep 10, 2006, 01.49am IST

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It looks such fun. Tom and Jerry scampering all over your TV screen, or Simba's antics. Ironically, the work that goes on to create all that fun is the most complex and time-consuming. A 3D half-an-hour show needs about 50 people to work on it for a month. And a 2-D half-hour show? Hold your breath — 200 people for 11 weeks.

"Whichever medium you use (2D/3D/clay), it is going to be highly labour intensive," says Vaibhav Kumaresh of Mumbai-based Vaibhav Studios. Suranjana Kumaresh and his wife run a six-member core team that operate mostly on short ad films. When need be, they hire up to 40 extra hands to get a project, with specific requirements like cameras and lights, done. The next big step for them, Mr Kumaresh says, is to get into serials. But he adds, "We would definitely need a bigger permanent team for that."

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Video games also come under the animation industry as they involve a lot of computer-generated images that are based on drawn story boards and character sketches. Some Indian studios, like Crest and DQ, make in-game videos for console games. Others specialise in building the virtual environment and characters for a game. Pixeltek, run by Vitek Goyel is one such studio. His 10-man firm specialises in 3D animation and caters to larger firms that outsource in-game artwork. To grow and sustain themselves, the 23-year old CEO says they might have to hook up with a larger company.

"Our ultimate aim is to build our own game," says Mr Goyel. He reckons Pixeltek is not more than four years away from its first game. The interaction that in-game animation allows, requires some heavy programming, which he says, is still rare in India.

Besides this, he points out that the game building will require a team of at least 50 personnel.

A mammoth in the outsourced animation sector is DQ Entertainment, based in Hyderabad. Besides having 600 people dedicated to console gaming, the company claims to have a total of 3,000 people on the payroll. Of these, 500 are a contracted workforce distributed between China and the Philippines.

Quoting Nasscom estimates, Tapaas Chakravarti, CEO of Hyderabad-based DQ Entertainment, says, "Over the next five years the animation industry will require over 30,000 more people." He goes on to say that at the rate that India is currently producing animators, this number will not be met. AK Madhavan, CEO, Crest Animation Studios, agrees that the number of animators needed in the coming years will be huge, but he is sure it will not be in tens of thousands.

The pace of productivity of the Indian animator is still slow, according to P Jayakumar, CEO, Toonz Animation, in Thiruvananthapuram. This is a huge factor for the need of such a large workforce. He says that a half-an-hour episode of animation is measured at 2,000 footage. "A Philipino animator has a productivity of 40 footage per week, while the Indian animator has 20 footage per week." He adds that for this to change, the Indian animator has to be exposed to international standards of productivity.

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