

digitalstudio

BROADCASTING AND PRODUCTION IN INDIA

BETWEEN THE LINES

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A WAY WITH WORDS

As creation gives way to localisation, dubbing and subtitling companies are primed for a massive boom in the next two years. *Chesta Shah Sengupta* profiles one company that is set to cash in on its first mover advantage

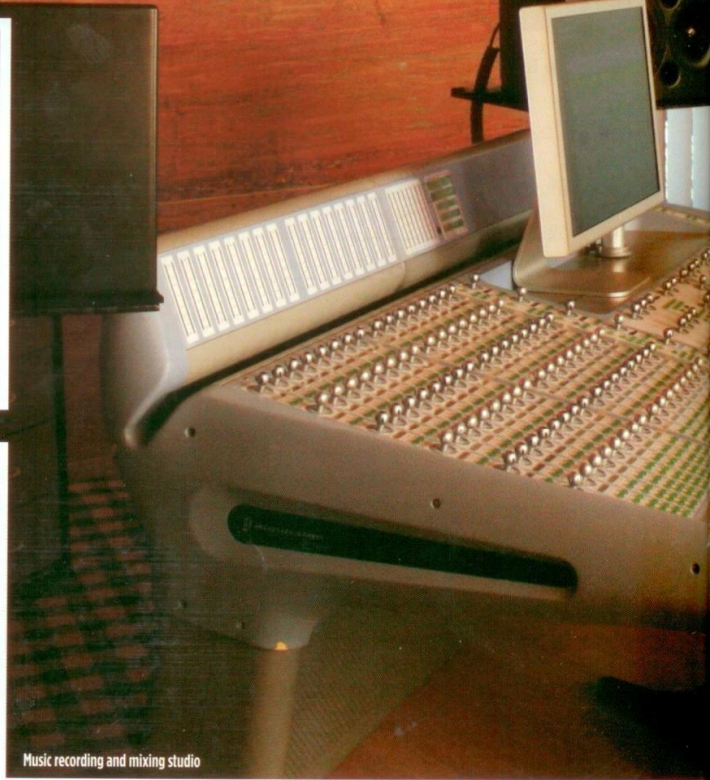
VU



Foley & effects recording studio



Foley & effects recording studio



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FACILITY PROFILE



Film dubbing studio



Music recording studio



It started with one PC, two people and a few big ideas. It has become one of the most successful enterprises in Indian media. And it shows no signs of slowing down, due, primarily, to the surge in localisation of content that is sweeping across India.

Words, the subtitling venture set up by the husband-and-wife team of Jagruti and Arjun J. Sharma in 1999, now commands a 95% market share in the subtitling market for Indian Regional Languages to English and international languages to English and Indian Regional Languages content in India.

And the dream has continued to grow too.

"The opportunities thrown up by convergence coupled with increasing requirement of the M&E industry to leverage content across geographies and distribution devices have been the primary driver of Words growth strategy," says Arjun J. Sharma, MD and chairman. "Imagine circa 2020, the world's media is available digitally to be distributed through digital cinema theatres, digital home television, digital home video, internet, mobile and all those yet-to-be-launched convergent devices. How will media overcome its biggest limitation? The language of its narrative? How will true and total convergence happen until the entire world's population get to view this content in their own language?"

The company now known as Words Infocom Private Limited (WIL) operates in three main verticals: postproduction – audio and video; content localisation including dubbing, subtitling, and translations, and Digital Asset Management. With a total annual turnover of Rs26 crore and six facilities with more than 200 team members and 600 freelancers, WIL has a lofty vision to be the world leader of 'total convergence', to deliver content to people in a language they understand and in a format they can easily access.

According to an industry report the global subtitling industry is worth US\$1 billion.

Language dubbing including mastering/authoring and mixing both inward and outward content in India is estimated at Rs100 crore. WIL has a daily capacity to subtitle 60 titles in various language pairs and dub nine films per day in multiple language pairs.



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 Jagruti A.Sharma,
 director,
 WIL

"While the world speaks thousands of languages, a story can be narrated; a dream can be woven only in one language - an art in itself. And the task to present it in another language, while keeping its soul unharmed, is more difficult an art - so that the spirit is not lost in translation," says Jagruti A.Sharma, director.

"WIL is the melting pot, where not only are the dreams woven and stories narrated but they are translated too. WIL is the alchemist."

Content localisation and subtitling is still an unorganised sector. It is fragmented among many players. But the potential this industry holds as a significant source of extra revenue is huge, says Sanjeev Das, director, WIL. According to Das localisation is a big market. "Your 20 minutes of programme can be translated into revenues from every country so that the content can reach a person in his language. If you are doing a documentary on somebody from Africa and the person sitting there cannot understand the language then what's the point?"

So to break the barrier of language, localisation is very important. This allows content to be available across various demographics."

Reaching out to the international community is particularly booming, and after the success of *Slumdog Millionaire*, should be something all major players consider with their Indian features.

"There is no downtrend for content localisation," points out Suresh Vamajoor, director, WIL. "It is booming. Suddenly there is an increase and we are inundated with enquiries from both local and overseas clients who want to localise their content in Indian and foreign languages. The trend now is that Indian movies are being dubbed in international languages. Indian television content too is getting ready to be seen in French, Russian, Bhasa, Malay, you name it. This is primarily driven by the growing necessity of the content owners to leverage their content globally."

Major movies are being dubbed in Tamil, Telugu and Malayam. *Spiderman*, for example was dubbed in Bhojpuri. The market is growing for sure. "The business models that most follow are typically agency types who take the work from some producer and give the work to some director and take a commission for it. If I have say 1,000 hours of Russian dub, the easiest way is to outsource it. Find a studio in Russia and get the work done there," says Das.

But that's not WIL's business model. "We create the entire value chain preferring to do everything in house. Only if a resource is not



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available then we look into the market," says Radhika Chinai, CEO Languages, WIL.

The challenge is finding the right person for the job: creative guys who appreciate content. Dubbing or subtitling is not just about translating - it's about getting the essence out of it.

"You need the right combination of the writer, dubbing director and voice artist. Even if the writer puts it down in different forms it's up to the dubbing producer/director how he executes it, which artists he decides and up to the artist how he delivers the dialogue in the right manner. You cannot call Jagdeep to dub for Amitabh Bachchan in some different language. The dubbing producer/director has to be up to that mark. That's where the expertise comes in," says Devbrat Das, director, WIL.

Walt Disney, a major advocate of the localisation trend, is one of WIL's key users.

For international companies such as these trust is an important factor in the relationship. "I don't understand the Hindi language but it is a matter of trust, otherwise you can't

EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIERS

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I don't understand the Hindi language but it is a matter of trust, otherwise you can't work. At Disney we are very very strong in our animation work and cartoons. Our brand is very important. Anyone doing work for Disney has to understand and respect that. If they keep doing a good job we keep coming back to them

Tossaporn Roongwitaya (Tui), sr. technical manger, Asia Pacific, Disney Character Voices International



work," says Tossaporn Roongwitaya (Tui), senior technical manger, Asia pacific, Disney Character Voices International. "At Disney we are very very strong in our animation work and cartoons. Our brand is very important. Anyone doing work for Disney has to understand and respect that. If they keep doing a good job we keep coming back to them."

Ashwin Saksena, a dubbing producer and owner of En Sync, the dubbing company, has been working with Walt Disney for 15 years. "Usually we used to get English and foreign content in, now it's working the other way



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Sanjeet Das, CEO- Audio, WIL

around which is great. For Disney we need to work in studios that are approved by those who have the highest standards of technical specification," says Saksena.

Working with these high profile clients requires the most diligent and comprehensive of quality standards. "We are totally backed by PRO tools Digi design. The questionnaire you get from Warner brothers is exhaustive at 24 pages, for example. From technical specifications to where you store your tapes - every little detail - it's all there including room temperature and security," says Sanjeet Das, CEO - Audio, WIL.

But much of the time the quality of the output comes down to the dubbing producer's subjective instinct. "A great sound room is difficult to define. It's very personal. It just needs to 'sound' right. The room where you can sound as natural as possible is a good sound room. You can always add subtraction is the problem. It should not echo in five different places. If you can pinpoint sound it's a great room," says Saksena.

Industry veterans predict that the next two years will be a challenge for original content production, and so leveraging existing content across geographies is set to become a huge market.

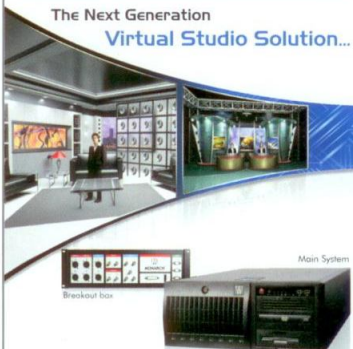
New productions will reduce and efforts in monetising existing libraries will be the focus. Content owners and distributors will give a boost to syndication activities. While low-cost digital cameras will result in increased digitisation, budgets will be smarter and increased emphasis will be provided to planning and workflow monitoring. These seem to be a few industry trends we are likely to see.

MONARCH **NEW** HD ready

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Areas of application

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