The IMPORTANCE of
INDUSTRY BASED TRAINING IN ANIMATION

By **Ranjit Singh**

Be it setting up his own animation and sfx studio in 1995 or providing insights and project reports to help re structure organisations and animation training schools, independent animation producer and TASI India founding member/spokesman **Ranjit Singh**'s 15 yr old stint in the animation Industry is marked with many highlights.

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(At the recently held animation/graphics expo CgA World, Ranjit Singh presented a white paper Industry based Training in Animation', the series is an adaptation (by Ranjit himself) of the same.)

Animation Express presents the first in a 12 part series.. titled 'Introduction'. The views expressed throughout the series are the Author's. Animation Express may or may not subscribe to the same.

Reference: Skillset -The Animation Industry 1997-98 prepared by Myra Woolf, Alan Chrisnall and Sara Holly.

'INTRODUCTION'

The commercial side of Indian animation industry has been active now for more than a decade. As is common in all new age technologies, it has had its share of peaks and lows and is currently going through an important phase of introspection. There are a number of studios that have had to scale down operations, staff and expenditures in light of falling revenues. Unfortunately a large part of this slowdown is self-created. For many years now, the Indian entrepreneur has viewed this industry mainly as a cash cow. Failure to recognise the need and importance of qualified and efficient manpower, the never ending desire for greater profits, the callous attitude towards research and development and all this at the expense of human resources has put the industry in this precarious position.

Animation is labor intensive, requires long hours of dedicated work and being a form of creative expression is not something that can be mastered in a short while. It is a prestigious part of a much larger industry (the Entertainment Industry) and has an international appeal. But it is still confined to the small-scale sector with relatively few animation companies worldwide employing over 300 artists. Majority of this industry comprises of small independently held studios and companies with fewer than 20 artists. The absence of a unifying body that can act as a guide, mentor and support structure to hundreds of practicing animators also contributes to the fragmented structure of this industry. With the advent of newer technologies web and computer game developers have also made inroads into this sector.

However these companies do not find economies in affiliations to large animation houses since they do not depend on animation as their main source of revenue. Also present are small independent operators who have taken to computer animation and provide some form of low-cost alternatives to the frugal advertiser, corporate house and upcoming independent businessman.

In the near future companies do see changes that will involve better technology, established work norms and production processes and the general feeling is that computer animation and digital processing will become quite common. The direct implication of this development is that a large adaptable skilled workforce will be required to service this spurt in demand. Herein lies the dilemma. Small companies are not in a position to conduct significantly effective training programs and neither are they in a position to carry trainees for long periods of time. Large companies on the other hand are too busy chasing nightmarish deadlines to be able to do full justice to training programs as most of these are designed towards

specific skills of its workforce relevant to the jobs at hand. In such a situation the industry suffers because:

1. It is difficult to maintain current skill-sets

2. New skills cannot be easily developed to face the ever-changing demands of business.

In the present scenario companies find that the limited pool of experienced local talent is a hindrance to business development. If we are to compete in the changing global environment we need experts to lead our businesses.

The international scene is quite different from that in India. A large part of the animation workforce has some formal training in the field before it enters or rather, is accepted into the industry. This training may be in the form of a recognised degree or some other animation related qualification. This however does not mean that qualified people get into animation abroad and that India accepts rookies. A sizeable percentage of new entrants abroad are just as clue-less as their Indian counterparts and further a large number of companies do not follow a system of in-house training. Job profile and skill up-gradation is pretty much left to the employee and his personal outlook. In some cases where companies provide formal training for skill upgrades, the courses are restricted for its regular employees only. Freelance artists have to pretty much fend for themselves.

In India, animation training is quite a hands-on experience. Workplace supervision by seniors is the major contributor to skill development and up-gradation. Whatever formal education is being provided by a handful of private institutes is quite irrelevant to the requirements of the practicing industry. The National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad is just about the only place in India that can be called a formal institute. Even NID has recognised a need for change and up-gradation of the courses being offered to students in order to keep abreast of the latest global developments and this has made a positive impact on the quality of animators it is producing.

The following factors are enough to show that serious introspection is required both at the training and industry level as far as animation education is concerned:

1. Current lack of industry based institutes

2. Small companies do not have the resources to commit towards training employees

3. Skill up-gradation is necessary to service and compete in the changing global scenario

4. Shortage of skilled animators in the industry and projected high demand in the near future

5. Small companies and relatively stable workforce call for an industry based training course

6. The large gap between available courses and training needs as recognised by most animation companies in the country

7. Theoretical software based approach towards training by private institutes that are distanced from ground realities of the medium

8. Absence of courses in subjects such as life drawing, character study, storyboard development, scripting, art direction, visualisation, production planning, project controls etc.

9. Willingness of local and international industry to participate in such ventures

10. Urgent need to establish a competent body that can impart education relevant to the production demands of the industry

11. Required to give a necessary boost to the local animation industry

A serious effort will be required by industry, educational institutions and the Government if we are to place India firmly on the global animation map not just as a source of cheap labor but also as a hub of creative development. India has the manpower, talent, willingness to learn and desire to excel as has been amply demonstrated by the revolution in information technology. Countries such as Canada, China, Korea, Philippines and others in the South East Asian region have recognised the importance of this medium for their local economies and these Governments proactively support their animation industries. It is high time we create an atmosphere for the Government to look at us seriously.

The primary aim of this series is to try and understand the need, viability and profitability of true animation training given the existing and future Indian market conditions. There is no doubt that a huge market exists for industry-based courses. Qualifications that can help people get profitable jobs and create people who are useful to employers without additional financial burden will always be welcome. Jobs that contribute to the improvement of industry revenues and corporate bottom lines will eventually provide for creative freedom and artistic development within this industry.

End of Part 1

Part 2 of the series entitled 'Animation Overview' shall appear in the next issue of Animation Express.

The IMPORTANCE of INDUSTRY BASED TRAINING IN ANIMATION

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PART -II

Animation Express presents 'Animation Overview' the **second in a 12 part series**.. on The Importance of Industry based training in animation. The views expressed throughout the series are the Author's. Animation Express may or may not subscribe to the same.

'ANIMATION OVERVIEW'

Animation -the creation and use of still images in such a manner that when viewed in rapid succession they create an illusion of movement.

Traditional animation is a time consuming process since each second of footage requires the creation of 24-25 still images. Each of these images have to be drawn by hand, painted, composed and exposed one by one.

Actor	Environment	Frame
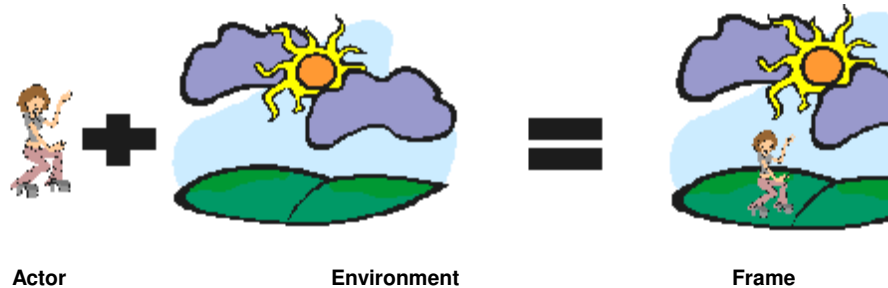
To better understand the complexities of this process it is necessary to first take a look at the structure of an animation film.

DRAWINGS - FRAMES - SHOTS - SEQUENCES - SCENES - STORY

As should be evident from here the process is fairly straightforward. However the fact that each frame of every second of film has to be drawn and processed by hand takes it into a different league by itself. Consider this -a 90-minute film will have approximately 1,29,600 frames -(24x60x90)

This however does not mean that there will be 1,29,600 individual drawings. The number of actors per frame determines the total number of drawings per frame. Each actor is a separate drawing. So in the above case we are assuming a 90-minute film with only one actor. By conservative estimates the average number of actors is between 2-3!

There are certain processes that have been simplified with the use of technology but at heart animation remains a labor intensive and time consuming exercise. Computer animation is very often wrongly cited as a shortcut to faster production. You must remember that the computer is a tool and not the solution by itself. It too has to be driven and driven well for the results to be effective.

Broadly speaking animation can be defined into three categories:

1. Traditional hand-drawn animation
2. Computer aided animation
3. Object animation

Traditional hand-drawn animation requires the drawing of frames to be completed by hand as individual sketches. These can then be processed and colored using computers and the final output rendered directly onto film.

Be it setting up his own animation and sfx studio in 1995 or providing insights and project reports to help re structure organisations and animation training schools, independent

Computer animation on the other hand makes use of hand drawn sketches only as reference frames. Computer artists use software to make digital models based on the drawings. These models are then animated using specialised animation software

that can either be proprietary or vendor based.
Object animation is a completely different field. In this case physical models are made and animated by hand. Clay, paper, sand, painting on glass, mechanical puppets etc. fall under this category.

Some examples of these three categories:

The Lion King, Aladdin, Mickey Mouse, Tom and Jerry -traditional hand-drawn animation.

Toy Story, Bugs Life, Shrek, Finding Nemo -computer aided/assisted animation.

Wallace and Gromit, Chicken Run, Nightmare before Christmas

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-object animation.

End of Part 2

Part 3 of the series entitled 'APPLICATIONS & MARKETS' shall appear in the next issue of Animation Express.

Read Part 1

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PART -III

Animation 'xpress presents 'Animation Overview' the **third in a 12 part series**.. on The Importance of Industry based training in animation. The views expressed throughout the series are the Author's. Animation 'xpress may or may not subscribe to the same.

Applications and Markets

To understand the importance of training we need to first take a look at various applications of animation. This will give us an idea of the scope of this medium.

To list some of the prominent areas:

1. Entertainment
a. Computer games
b. Film
c. Television
d. Interactive media
e. Internet

2. Advertising
a. Television
b. Direct marketing
c. Interactive media

3. Engineering
a. Computer aided design
b. Design and test bed experiments

4. Simulations -medicine, sports, manufacturing, space and deep sea exploration, archeology, defense, paleontology, legal study

5. Education
a. Internet
b. Computer based training programs
c. Corporate presentations thru Interactive media

The current market for animation is estimated to be in the range of US$ 30 billion. A large chunk of this market is in North America and Canada. Asian countries like China, Philippines, Korea, Taiwan and recently India are providing a small chunk of work to these markets. Often this work is not the end product but a part of it.

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NASSCOM estimated the Indian animation industry to be to the tune of US$ 500-600 million for the year 2001. In terms of local content development there have been some sporadic attempts made by India but these have either been of poor quality or straddled by financial constraints. A serious lack of large-scale expertise seems to affect most animation companies. An overpowering reliance on technology without a supporting base of qualified animators is one of the main reasons why we are lagging behind in local content development.

We must remember that high-end technology requires qualified high-end personnel. Coupled and compounded by an absence of animation culture due to the unavailability of proper training courses. This should in some measure explain why we are still struggling to find the genre of the independent Indian animator.

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End of Part 3

Part 4 of the series entitled 'MANPOWER' shall appear in the next issue of Animation Express.

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Read Part 2

The **IMPORTANCE** of
INDUSTRY BASED TRAINING IN ANIMATION

by Ranjit Singh

PART -IV   Read Bio

Animation 'xpress presents 'Manpower' the **fourth in a 12 part series**.. on The Importance of Industry based training in animation. The views expressed throughout the series are the Author's. Animation 'xpress may or may not subscribe to the same.

Manpower

Let us now take a brief look at the manpower profile. We will limit this to the entertainment and more specifically to the arena of episodic and long format animation work.

Four broad categories
1. Pre-Production

2. Production

3. Post Production

4. Administrative

Pre-Production

This consists of the creative team. Prominent members of this group include Creative directors, art directors, character and art designers, research executives, script writers, prop designers, color key artists, storyboard artists, pre-viz, sound breakdown engineers, technical directors, production directors, senior animators, chiefs of computer graphics, model animation and camera, music directors and studio managers. More people may be involved in this process depending on specific needs.

Production

This consists of the hands-on team. Members that are added to the pre-production team include Junior animators, assistant key animators, cleanup artists, breakdown artists, in-betweeners, line testing assistants, production controllers, graphic designers, render and transfer assistants, model animators, model makers, mould makers, senior and junior programmers, ink and paint artists, compositors, checkers, scanning assistants, visual effects directors, background artists, set creators, computer model makers, riggers, computer animators, computer imaging directors, light-men, assistant cameramen, trainees, helpers etc. Almost every one involved in the actual creation of the project is part of this team.

Post Production

Post-production consists of all activities that take place after the product comes through the production department. This includes music recording, editing, addition of extra special effects, conversion to various delivery formats and specifications. Certain key personnel are required for this category.

Creative directors, music directors and their assistants, off-line and on-line editors and their assistants, machine operators and scheduling executives to aid the studio managers and effects directors. Other people from the pre-production or production departments may be recruited if required.

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Administrative

This team consists of the suits that run the studio. From the chief executive to the managers, all administrative staff falls under this category. It would be interesting to note here that running an animation studio is quite a different experience from running a similar facility with a few hundred people. Creative arts require a knowledgeable head of operations and a flexible financial officer. Artists cannot be treated like mill workers if

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high standards have to be maintained.

A very personal hands-on approach is required of all senior executives who may be, more often than not, required to chip into the production process.

The easiest way to alienate a large workforce is to have a top-down management approach when the best-worked models are horizontal hierarchies. It is therefore imperative that the senior executives be people who are from the industry and understand its workings.

End of Part 4

Part 5 of the series entitled 'Emerging Trends' shall appear in the next issue of Animation Express.

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PART -V   Read Bio

Animation 'xpress presents 'Emerging Trends' the **fifth in a 12 part series**.. on The Importance of Industry based training in animation. The views expressed throughout the series are the Author's. Animation 'xpress may or may not subscribe to the same.

Emerging Trends

There are some interesting new markets for animation. Leading among these are episodic character animation, computer based training, education, film effects, web development, virtual reality and gaming.

Broadcasting is believed to be poised for tremendous growth with web development and technological advancements made in the field of streaming video, virtual reality applications and the gaming industry all augur well for the qualified animator. Multimedia productions, features, commercials and corporate presentations all require animation at some stage. Most companies today are looking at diversification as the preferred mode of operation. Convergence of technologies to produce a better bottom line is the key today. Falling prices and improved wares make it possible for cheaper and better visualisation of complex projects (whether this benefit is passed onto the client is a matter of personal choice).

3d character animation is the current favorite with animation companies. Traditional job work is also looked at as a major revenue generator but unfortunately this requires a large skilled workforce. Few studios in India are venturing into independent productions. The overall economic conditions are such that breaking in is proving to be difficult let alone breaking even. In such circumstances, joint ventures and co-productions seem to be the order of the day. It is possible for studios to collaborate with international and local partners and execute a project together and bite into the share of the larger players. However consistency and quality are the main stumbling blocks of such arrangements.

Computer based training products will emerge as a strong market for the future. India lags here, as basic computer literacy levels are quite poor. But these are bound to improve in the future. Companies that can position their products for such markets are bound to do good business. Most companies focus on the urban audience however a large untapped India is in the villages and it is there that a huge market exists.

Current animation and art training is mostly restricted to the urban areas. With the spread of literacy and computer education into rural areas this is another potential revenue earner. As I mentioned earlier 3d character animation is the current ride to success for long-term players wherein given the right tools, a small set of talented individuals can consistently deliver quality products.

Recent reports suggest that India has roughly between 2000-3000 animators as compared to China with over 8000 and the Philippines with an estimated 40,000+ skilled workers! Indian animators have excellent communication skills in English while China, Korea, Taiwan and the Philippines are weak in that area. What is surprising though is while the average production cost in the South East Asian countries is between US$90,000-100,000 India currently commands around US$50,000-60,000 while China is reported to be below the US$50,000 mark.

Though the accuracy of these figures may be debatable the general impression they cast is irrefutable.

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A point to note here is that while the Chinese Government offers incentives in their Special Economic Zones and the Philippine Government has designated animation as one of their top priority industries India still does not recognize the potential of this medium and does not provide any additional incentives to promote animation export.

Revenue figures in India may not be huge but they are worth looking at:

2 episodes a month = US$120,000 @ 45 = Rs. 54,00,000 = Rs. 6,48,00,000 in a year.

Typically these would be figures for one company engaged in episodic work only. It would be very difficult to draw a parallel with any other sector of the economy that can earn so much in such timeframes.

End of Part 5

Part 6 of the series entitled 'Training' shall appear in the next issue of Animation Express.

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The **IMPORTANCE** of
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PART -VI

Animation 'xpress presents **'Training'** the **sixth in a 12 part series**.. on The Importance of Industry based training in animation. The views expressed throughout the series are the Author's. Animation 'xpress may or may not subscribe to the same.

Training

Recently FICCI reported that **Korea has sixty colleges dedicated to the art and craft of animation**. And how many do we have in India?

The current status of animation training here is quite lopsided. While the tremendous presence of private players in the market offering animation courses cannot be denied the quality and structure of courses offered needs to be closely examined in view of changing industry requirements. We may have institutes but we certainly don't have institutions.

To understand needs there has to be participation in training from the industry. Not just by way of figureheads and prestigious names being used by companies to fill seats but by way of actual hands-on contribution on a regular basis from the industry. Very often people who have very little and in most case no knowledge of the internal workings of animation studios teach current courses.

Majority of courses offered concentrate on 3d computer animation with little or no emphasis on traditional animation techniques. Moreover courses are designed to impart training on specific software packages and do not cover basic theories of animation. In such cases we are faced with a situation wherein a student who completes these courses is left in the lurch. He is neither qualified as an animator nor does he have sufficient software experience for him to be useful to the industry from day one.

The renowned Walt Disney is reported to have said that it takes 16 years to make one animator and Indian players will have you believe that we can do it in 6 months flat!

A look at local industry will also explain why the training structure is so poorly designed. Large companies look at training as a short-term measure that is designed more to fill up vacancies to complete specific projects than as a means for future investment in the trade. Medium and small-scale companies do not have the resources to run sustained training programs. Whatever little knowledge is imparted to employees is mostly through senior to junior percolation. Companies do not view this as a major area of concern as most of them are fighting for their own survival.

External vendors best run training programs as these can cater to specialised needs of the entire spectrum of industry. However such players need to be constantly in touch with industry and its developments as only then can they provide raw material that is useful. Companies dislike the idea of spending money on employees especially when employees claim to be carrying qualifications from training institutes, and rightly so.

Trainees present another dilemma for companies as employers have to maintain a fine balance between providing suitable work and finding time to properly oversee progress. Companies perceive a lack of direct benefit in training people as the never-ending fear of employees leaving after gaining suitable experience seems to take hold. Couple this with the fact that expensive capital equipment has to be made available for the trainees in order that they learn under proper working conditions. In such a situation careful and constant supervision is required for a beneficial learning experience. Lack of supervision and guidance can lead to a very negative experience for the trainee.

Internationally it has been found that companies do see a very serious need for proper training institutes and the role they play in shaping the future of the industry.

In the late 90's the International animation industry felt that there was a specific need for training. This need was for both senior as well as junior artists. Those who were fresh entrants to the industry required proper training in its workings while existing people needed improvements and newer skill sets. Art direction, character design, storyboard, layout, 3d construction, action and kinetics, special effects, background art, digital ink and paint, dope sheets, camera operation, scanning, model making, texturing, performance animation, set design, computer hardware and software systems and animation direction were some of the prominent areas that required training courses. In cases where companies did run some form of internal course it did not lead to a formal qualification while external courses were sometimes funded by the

companies themselves.

It was found that the quality of courses being offered was either downright poor or not very good at all. The utility of trained animators cannot be overstated but there were hardly any institutes providing such qualified people to the industry. The industry felt that if remedial actions were not taken there would be a serious shortage of skills and technical knowledge that would eventually have an impact on creative abilities of the industry.

On the positive side it was found that emerging trends indicated that with falling prices better technology would be available to small and medium scale companies that will then be in a position to produce their own complex and large-scale productions. There will be an increase in 3d computer animation.
Educational and intellectual programs will replace special effects and pure entertainment cartoons for children. Growth in Internet and information technologies will see a higher demand for animation and employees will need to have multiple skills in order to survive in this new age.

The main concerns of the industry were:
1. Lack of basic animation techniques

2. Lack of script writers for animation

3. Shortage of skills

4. Lack of training and awareness in business skills

5. Lack of cross or multiple skills

6. Too much theory and not enough industry related practice in art schools and colleges

7. Inappropriate level and quality of courses

8. Absence of a single unifying body that supports animators and industry

**9. People were entering industry thinking jobs are plentiful without
sufficient skills**

10. Training and professional environments were disjointed

11. Need for long-term investment

12. Lower costs in production will eventually create more opportunities

13. Skilled work force necessary to avail of the emerging opportunities

Unfortunately for us we can see that these concerns are still very relevant our local industry. We can either take advantage of this research by working towards removing these ills from our own industry or dig our heads in the sand and pretend all is well.

Some hard facts therefore are:

Training needs long-term investment

Lower costs in production will create more opportunities

Skilled workforce needed for emerging opportunities

Only relevant training can provide qualified talent

From these concerns we can infer the following on the importance of industry-based training:

-To produce animators who are useful to the industry from day one

The main objective of training should be to produce a usable animator. Money and time spent in a training institute is best realised if it can be recovered in a short period of employment. This is possible only through disciplined training.

-Specialisation courses are difficult to run and best left to experts

Most companies do not have the time or resources to run courses that cater to special needs. At most a general overview is provided. This is not only inadequate but also forces the aspiring animator to progress at the pace of his employer. Specialised courses run by independent third parties are the only solution. The animator is free to specialise in subjects of his interest and institutes run only those courses that are in demand thereby efficiently utilizing their funds.

-To prepare animators for real world pressures

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glamour only to be disappointed by the long working hours and short deadlines. Training can condition an aspiring animator to face such operational hazards.

-To build a strong base for the future

Demand for animators is increasing every year. A pool of talent needs to be built if we aim to compete at international levels. Relevant training is the key. The Indian animation industry is facing immense challenges today. The main question is how will it face the ever growing shortage of trained animators and at the same time cater to the demands of the international market.

Most students of animation are first time entrants into this industry i.e. they have no prior knowledge of media, entertainment or any of its allied fields. An insignificant small percentage of people have some knowledge due to interaction with media people or through word of mouth. Even today large numbers of students take to animation because it seems to be the 'in-thing'. The average duration of courses available to aspirants is 4-6 months with most of the courses concentrating on training in animation software. A general survey will indicate that almost all students are unhappy with the quality of training they have received and most companies have to re-train employees in order that they become useful to the trade. This leads to wasteful expenditure in both time and money for the employer.

End of Part 6

Part 7 of the series entitled 'Recruitment' shall appear in the next issue of Animation Express.

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The IMPORTANCE of INDUSTRY BASED TRAINING IN ANIMATION

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PART -VII

Read Bio

Animation 'xpress presents **'Recruitments'** the **seventh in a 12 part series**.. on The Importance of Industry based training in animation. The views expressed throughout the series are the Author's. Animation 'xpress may or may not subscribe to the same.

Recruitments

Methods prevalent in the industry are dominated by word of mouth and friendly contacts. Few recruitment agencies specialise in animation placements since this is still a relatively new field. Training institutes still lack serious credibility among the industry and as a result formal ties with animation houses to take on the 'qualified animators' they produce are more or less non-existent.

At present it is pretty much dependent on the individual drive and stamina of the artist to seek out his chosen place of work. Poaching becomes very common especially when a studio lands a project that it finds too big to handle on its current strength. Often such recruitments are for short project-based durations. Smaller units that cannot afford high overheads now prefer free-lance animators and artists.

The main drawback to recruitment is the limited number of qualified animators. Most companies are of the opinion that it is not the lack of talent or skills rather the sheer lack of numbers that bothers them. Most people who have been in the industry for over 10 years have their own businesses to run. Artists with experience between 5 to 10 years are gainfully employed by the larger houses and this leaves a relatively young and inexperienced pool of talent for the remaining companies to choose from.

This divide is growing constantly as fresh inputs into the industry are dismally short on fundamental knowledge. Companies are facing and will face the problem of recruiting senior staff members. There is a shortfall in technically qualified people. Companies that depend on traditional animation as their main source of revenue are more likely to face a shortage of pre-production and production staff. Those that are aiming to enter the 3d character animation field will find animators with little or no traditional animation experience. Multimedia programming companies too will face a problem of technical qualifications in their new recruits. The industry being fragmented and pressed for resources cannot support a large pool of trainees while they gain valuable experience.

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Coupled with this is the fact that animation is a very specialised field. Not enough importance has been given towards industry relevant training in India and as a result today we find a shortage of skilled people that can be absorbed into the industry and those that become useful to a company from day one.

In a nutshell we are sitting on a disaster waiting to happen. One player can undo the years of hard work by a few companies to get India onto the animation world map by over committing and being unable to deliver due to manpower inadequacies. It is high time we wake up and look at ground realities and work for the future.

End of Part 7

Part 8 of the series entitled 'Essentials of an Animation training course' shall appear in the next issue of Animation Express.

Read Part 1

Read Part 2

Read Part 3

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The IMPORTANCE of INDUSTRY BASED TRAINING IN ANIMATION

by Ranjit Singh

PART -VIII

Animation 'xpress presents **'ESSENTIALS OF AN ANIMATION TRAINING COURSE '** the **eighth in a 12 part series**.. on The Importance of Industry based training in animation. The views expressed throughout the series are the Author's. Animation 'xpress may or may not subscribe to the same.

ESSENTIALS OF AN ANIMATION TRAINING COURSE

CONSTANTS
1. Involvement of animation companies from the industry
2. Involvement of senior and experienced people from industry
3. Should keep standards of industry always in focus
4. The courses should be practical and relevant to industry
5. Senior faculty be of only working members from industry

VARIABLES
1. Recruitment methods used by various institutes
2. Structure of courses taught at these institutes
3. The target audience
4. Duration of courses offered
5. Whether financial aid available to trainees
6. Management of the courses
7. Place of training
8. Other participants such as non-government bodies
9. Teaching methods used by the institutes
10. Infrastructure available at institutes

CONSTANTS

Involvement of animation companies from the industry
The success of an industry-based course is directly proportional to the level of involvement of the very industry it aims to cater. Industry involvement means immediate transfer of newer technologies and processes to fresh entrants. It is also a means of keeping recruits in touch with industry norms and practices. Look at the best management schools and colleges. All of them have serious participation from the industry.

Involvement of senior and experienced people from industry
Senior and experienced people bring with them a wealth of knowledge and a stable perspective into teaching. They are not driven by trends and fashions but rather by the desire to help groom fresh talent. Experience is a vital part of an animators' training. Senior people can utilise their experience and knowledge to guide recruits and bring with them loads of credibility. It should be noted here that this involvement should not be on paper alone. Many institutes today approach industry professionals purely for the credibility factor.

Should keep standards of industry always in focus
Training courses should always strive to maintain and improve upon prevalent standards of operation in the industry. An industry-based course is only as good as the students it produces. Poor teaching standards and course design will affect the caliber of fresh recruits and thereby be detrimental to the industry in the long run.

The courses should be practical and relevant to industry
Teaching students material that does not aid employment and/or is outdated, irrelevant to current industry requirements is of no use. If industry is to benefit, courses have to be designed in such a manner that new recruits are able to get employment and become useful to their employers from day one. Too much emphasis on theory without practical application and vice-versa are bound to produce trainees that will be misfits.

Teaching staff be of only working members from industry
If those that teach are actively working in industry on a daily basis the course is bound to be updated and relevant to industry needs. Few people outside the industry understand the pressures and demands of working in this medium. A practicing animator will bring in his own set of practical measures, solutions and problems for recruits to learn from, something a pure classroom teacher is ill equipped to do.

VARIABLES

Recruitment methods used by various institutes
Institutes should be free to decide how they want to recruit or lure students. In the final analysis, it is compliance with the constant factors that will determine the success or failure of a particular school. Some institutes prefer direct advertising while other might want to tap into their local contacts and referrals supplied by their faculty.

Care should be taken to provide training to all categories of students, from freshmen to practicing animators who might want to refresh and/or upgrade their skills.

Structure of courses taught
Varying course structures will bring about competition and open the education field to better resources. It would be quite impossible for one institute to provide skills in all relevant areas. Therefore it might be better if many different schools run industry-based courses and offer variety to students and professionals alike so that specialisation and excellence in both training and course materials is possible.

The target audience
Most courses available today do not take into account senior artists who might want to refresh their knowledge or improve their skill sets. Courses are not designed for the practicing animator on the pretext that he would learn all that he requires on the job.

Nothing could be further from the truth. There is very little time or space available for a practicing animator to attempt gaining newer skills while under constant production pressure. There is a large market for such courses that can be designed around production schedules.

Duration of courses offered
Current courses range from short 3-months to a year. Too much is crammed into the syllabi to be of any practical use to the animator. The idea is to design and offer specialised, 6-month courses that enable students to get thorough knowledge both in theory and practice.

Whether financial aid available to trainees
With courses in animation being urban-centric, most students find the costs exorbitant. There should be an attempt to organise financial aid in the form of educational loans by the institute to offer talented people from all walks of life a chance to realise their dreams.

Management of the courses
Qualified people should manage these courses. Businessmen and knowledge brokers will never be in a position to understand the complexities and constraints of running an educational institution. Some level of idealism is required to avoid the common pitfall -that the teaching of business becomes a business of teaching.

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Place of training
Art schools and colleges are best suited for such courses. In any case courses are best situated in an environment of learning. Teaching staff in such cases should be independent and there should absolute freedom to the institute to conduct the course as it deems fit. Animation can become part of courses in fine and commercial art as a field of specialisation. Animation courses can also be incorporated into the normal structure of higher education with regulations in place to ensure proper recruitments and validations.

Other participants such as Non-Government bodies
Lack of funds is a main source of trouble for any high-end specialisation course. Non-government organisations and public bodies can play an active role in financially supporting such ventures. It would be quite impossible for a single unit to take over the entire burden of such an exercise. However care should be taken that financial assistance does not lead to interference in administrative and more importantly course related issues. It is very difficult to keep focus with too many players involved in the financial aspects of a venture. Certain compromises on the intended direction are necessary to take the project forward.

Teaching methods used by the institutes
Different institutes may employ different teaching methods. So long as they are relevant to industry norms and practices and are technologically current they will be useful. Care should be taken that there is a right mixture of theory and practical time on the courses. As far as possible independent practice sessions should be encouraged.

Infrastructure available at institutes
Equipment that is used for animation is fairly expensive. However institutes cannot afford to train students on outdated technologies and systems. Constant upgrades and induction of fresh equipment on a regular basis is required in order to offer the most relevant training to students. Institutes that realise this fact are bound to lead in terms of the quality of

students they offer to the industry.

End of Part 8

Part 9 of the series entitled 'Current Indian Scenario' shall appear in the next issue of Animation Express.

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The IMPORTANCE of INDUSTRY BASED TRAINING IN ANIMATION

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PART -IX

Animation 'xpress presents **'CURRENT INDIAN SCENARIO '** the **ninth in a 12 part series**.. on The Importance of Industry based training in animation. The views expressed throughout the series are the Author's. Animation 'xpress may or may not subscribe to the same.

CURRENT INDIAN SCENARIO

Lack of coordination between industry and trainers

There is miniscule to negligible coordination between companies running training schemes and the animation industry. As a result courses fall dismally short of industry requirements. Repeated attempts by industry representatives for involvement with institutes have produced poor results. This is largely due to the reluctance of these institutes to reimburse trainers as per industry standards as well as wanting to use names purely to attract potential students. The tendency of industry representatives to suggest improvements that call for system overhauls are also not very welcome.

Poor design and implementation of courses

It has been found that people with very little experience of the industry and its norms design animation courses. This results in material that caters to bookish knowledge only. Importance is not given to the production environment and its demands. Students have to re-learn almost all of what they have been taught once they come into the industry. Moreover courses are conducted in a haphazard manner with little emphasis on a structured approach. In most cases, fundamental principles of animation do not even figure in the basic level courses.

On the other hand sometimes industry experts are called upon to help in the design of the courses but implementation and teaching is pretty much left to inexperienced staff.

Little credibility of courses among animation companies

Animation companies in India have very little faith in the caliber of students being produced by these institutes. In most cases the solution is to employ raw talent, as it is far easier to train a fresh mind than to retrain a confused one. Too much emphasis is paid on computer animation courses without a base of fundamental animation theory. Further, subjects such as cinema, direction, acting, staging, set design, use of camera, lenses, perspectives, film and video technology, sound design for animation etc. are not found in most courses. Animation companies have resigned themselves to the harsh reality that they will have to impart basic training to fresh employees in order to make them useful to the bottom lines.

Inadequate and poorly trained faculty

The objectives of most training institutes are business oriented therefore very little emphasis is paid towards recruiting industry professionals who charge relatively heavy fees for their time and knowledge. Very often the best students are offered faculty jobs by these institutes to train the next fresh batch.

This results in a step down phenomenon. With every trainer retaining only ~80% of what he is taught, with every passing batch the relevant knowledge of the faculty approaches dangerously low levels. This ultimately leads to a poorly delivered course which no doubt has a direct bearing on the quality of students being produced. It would be worthwhile to find out how many institutes send their faculty into the industry to gain first hand experience.

Overcrowding

A general survey of training courses will reveal a density of over 2 students per computer system. The size of each training batch varies between 15-20 students, taught by an average of 2 instructors. In such cases personalised training is impossible. Project work is undertaken in batches of 5 students per assignment. Not only does this prevent growth of individual creativity, it also does not allow a prospective employee to fairly judge the true ability of an applicant.

Overcrowding is also visible in the structure of most courses. Institutes try to outdo their competition by offering everything under the sun. It is impossible to teach animation theory in the duration that they cover a complete course.

Absence of standards

The government has still not recognised this field as a major factor in vocational training and with the absence of a single regulatory body it is no surprise that there is a complete absence of standards. This is one of the few vocations where a student can be gainfully employed based on the knowledge he gains during the course of his training. Taking advantage of this situation many sub-standard and downright poor animation 'institutes' are prevalent in the market.

What would help is an initiative from the industry that is supported by the Central/State Governments to institute a national level body comprising of people from the industry who may be called upon and given the responsibility to keep institutes and courses in check. This alone can ensure that we safeguard the interests of the industry and students as well.

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Concurrently incentives may be provided to the industry and existing training outfits to take manpower development seriously. An analogy may be drawn from the manner in which the Canadian Government is encouraging their industry. Heavy incentives are available for those productions that qualify through the stringent criteria of the Producer and Key Creative being Canadians and 75% of production and post-production costs have to be paid to Canadians.

The Indian Government may qualify educational institutes and animation companies for incentives if they are found to be actively contributing towards manpower development in a disciplined manner by setting and maintaining high standards.

Absence of courses for industry seniors

Training courses are designed only for aspiring animators and still fall dismally short of industry requirements. It is no surprise then that there is a complete absence of courses for senior animators working in the industry who would wish to upgrade their skills or acquire newer ones to further their careers.

End of Part 9

Part 10 of the series entitled 'CHOICES FOR INDIAN INDUSTRY' shall appear in the next issue of Animation 'xpress.

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The IMPORTANCE of INDUSTRY BASED TRAINING IN ANIMATION

by Ranjit Singh

PART -X   Read Bio

Animation 'xpress presents **'CHOICES FOR THE INDIAN INDUSTRY '** the **tenth in a 12 part series**.. on The Importance of Industry based training in animation. The views expressed throughout the series are the Author's. Animation 'xpress may or may not subscribe to the same.

CHOICES FOR THE INDIAN INDUSTRY

As mentioned before, training has been and is a low priority area for most animation companies. Internal supervision and on the job guidance are the most favored methods of employee training. However the pressing demand for trained animators makes the need for training even more severe. Some of the options that can be exercised by a company to train staff are:

1. Internal formal and informal courses for staff

2. Persuade institutes and teaching bodies to orient courses suited to industry needs

3. Participate in industry-based schemes by way of support and organisational help for members

Internal formal and informal courses for staff

High cost of infrastructure, capital equipment and time constraints make this form of training prohibitive for most companies. Moreover companies don't teach ancillary skills such as business management, production control, budgeting and supervision. The small size of most units in India also makes it unprofitable to invest in training schemes. Large companies have also found that sustaining long duration courses is not viable and why should they invest time and effort in training students in material that is not relevant to their production needs. Constant change in technology makes it difficult for companies to impart expert knowledge in such areas. Therefore courses are merely short term alternatives for the staff to become productive and useful for the immediate projects at hand.

Persuade institutes to orient courses suited to industry needs

Lead-time required to introduce new courses in universities, schools and colleges is in itself a deterrent. Moreover these bodies do not enjoy the kind of financial freedom to be able to spend heavily on capital equipment on a regular basis. There are also differences in the objectives of these organisations and in most cases the industry and they do not see things in the same light.

Colleges of art and design see the intellectual and individual creative development of students as their main objective while the industry would rather have them concentrate on production based subjects. It would be unrealistic to rely on the existing schools and colleges to fulfill the required shortages in trained manpower.

Industry standards require constant upgrades in equipment and skills both for the trainee as well as trainer. It would be unrealistic also to suppose that educational bodies in themselves would be in a position to take on this challenge.

Participate in industry-based schemes through support and organisational help for members

Industry-based schemes provide a host of advantages over other forms of training. Let us take a look at some of the prominent among them:

1. Regular mass of student trainees to bridge gap between demand and supply

2. Regular training programs can be easily arranged

3. Capital equipment is already present in companies only methods to make it available for training have to be devised

4. A range of different courses can be devised based on general needs of industry

5. Many companies can cooperate to reduce the burden of capital expenditure on any one unit

6. Ready availability of trained staff for training requirements

7. Operations can be devised as readily scalable to suit changing demand scenarios

However there are certain considerations that need to be addressed:

1. Outside finance will still be required as total outlay will be huge

2. Cooperation from Government bodies and institutions will be required to make it a creditable venture for the general public

3. Space is a major consideration in cities like Mumbai

4. The business element will have to be kept in mind for the venture to be financially viable

5. Inclusion of many players will require compromises and accommodations of differing points of view

6. Backup staff will be required to take over in case production demands require on site presence of senior staff

7. Industry requirements have to take precedence over individual company requirements that participate in such schemes

In-spite of these considerations it is certain that industry-based schemes are the only solution for this specialised field. Even though teaching skills of trainers may be inadequate, the knowledge they bring to such schemes will more than make up for these shortcomings by providing leading edge training and information to students.

Technology can come to the aid of those who are less fortunate in the art of communication. Teaching aids in the form of interactive multimedia presentations can be employed to make the classrooms more interesting and the training program cost effective and at the same time provide a ready platform for standardisation of course material.

HOW

The success of such courses depends to a large part on the proactive role of the entire industry including the existing training units. Some pointers that may help us introspect and work towards a viable solution:

1. Help existing animation training institutes with know-how and technical expertise

2. Increase awareness of animation as an effective medium of creative expression among Indian film makers

3. Minimise animation costs through effective use of technology

4. Setup exclusive animation entertainment clubs for children

5. Set standards in recruitment by formulating proper criteria

6. Organise regular induction programs at college level to motivate young students

7. Place strong emphasis on training and skill updates after employment

8. Introduce a self appraisal system for assessment of individual achievements

9. Help in building careers through overall development of staff

10. Conduct seminars, workshops and programs for staff and students

11. Promote cooperation among companies to participate in training

12. Persuade Government and educational institutions to play a more proactive role in animation training

13. Collaborate with software and hardware vendors to enable cheaper training wares

14. Work closely with industry in order to understand the latest in manpower requirements

15. Provide strong emphasis on employment based training

16. Recruit staff for studio requirements from affiliated training programs

17. Enable students to get loans for animation studies from partner institutions

Be it setting up his own animation and sfx studio in 1995 or providing insights and project reports to help re structure

The immediate need is to provide suitable training to our abundant manpower resources so that it can seek gainful employment. Indians by nature are keen observers and

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learners. However conservative attitudes and age-old learning programs leaning towards theoretical knowledge have plagued us for far too long. Vocational studies have yet to gain ground and more importantly -reliability among the masses. Our social structure inclines heavily towards job security and one of the main casualties of this attitude is indifference towards the arts. This needs to be changed.

Maybe courses should be like extensions of existing animation business. While this will allow companies to provide recruitment opportunities to deserving candidates, a scheme wherein member companies may be required to plough back a small percentage of their revenues into these programs may be the answer. However companies will have to retain control over training activities in order to ensure that only industry relevant skills are passed onto students.

These are mere pointers that should allow companies, corporate institutions, training units and hopefully the education sector to take a good hard look at where we are today and where we would like to be tomorrow. The time to act is now.

End of Part 10

Part 11 of the series entitled 'BENEFITS' shall appear in the next issue of Animation 'xpress.

Read Part 1

Read Part 2

Read Part 3

Read Part 4

Read Part 5

Read Part 6

Read Part 7

Read Part 8

Read Part 9

The IMPORTANCE of INDUSTRY BASED TRAINING IN ANIMATION

by Ranjit Singh

PART -XI   Read Bio

Animation 'xpress presents **'BENEFITS '** the **Eleventh in a 12 part series**.. on The Importance of Industry based training in animation. The views expressed throughout the series are the Author's. Animation 'xpress may or may not subscribe to the same.

BENEFITS

TERM INDUSTRY STUDENTS

SHORT
1. Ready pool of skilled artists
2. Talent aware of industry requirements
3. Easy integration of fresh recruits
4. Cost effective recruitments
5. Specific skill vacancies quickly filled

1. Insight to industry requirements
2. Early practice of work conditions
3. Exposure to industry experts
4. Removal of misconceptions
5. Value for money training

MEDIUM
1. Talent training as per needs
2. Proper assessment of courses
3. Standardised skill sets available
4. Effective utilisation of resources
5. Better skills allow overall development
6. Diversification easily possible

1. Get into habit of upgrading skills
2. Better utilisation of acquired skills
3. Higher monetary returns
4. Increased utility to companies
5. Recovery of investment in training
6. Better employment opportunities

LONG
1. Large pool of talented artists
2. Creative development at new levels
3. Overall improvement in standards
4. Increased competition
5. Effective return on capital investment
6. International recognition of work
7. Attraction to larger global players

1. Higher remuneration
2. Promotes individual creativity
3. Advanced networking in industry
4. International exposure
5. Higher sale value of products
6. Effective option for generations
7. Force changes within industry

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End of Part 11

Part 12 of the series entitled 'CONCLUSION' shall appear in the next issue of Animation 'xpress.

Read Part 1

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Read Part 10

The **IMPORTANCE** of
INDUSTRY BASED TRAINING IN ANIMATION

by Ranjit Singh

PART -XII   Read Bio

Animation 'xpress presents **'CONCLUSION'** the **last in a 12 part series**.. on The Importance of Industry based training in animation. The views expressed throughout the series are the Author's. Animation 'xpress may or may not subscribe to the same.

CONCLUSION

An industry based training course is urgently required in India. If we aim to tap the growing animation market we have to arm our local talent with the right tools and knowledge.

With constant upgrades in technology, tools of the trade are changing on an everyday basis. In such a fluid and evolving situation sound fundamental knowledge becomes integral to individual and thereby collective growth.

Dedicated animation training in India has so far been chaotic and grossly inadequate to service the specialised demands of this budding industry. The growing imbalance between demand and supply of trained specialists has to be corrected if we are to survive in the global animation market. The lack of time, resources and inclination for such ventures by established studios in India has also contributed to the current situation. We have to urgently correct this situation or face severe consequences in the near future. Trained artists and animators willing to share their knowledge and experience will help to substantially reduce the lead time required for grooming new talent.

The answer lies in establishing industry based training centers across the country in order to standardise and more importantly raise the level of existing animation training. We have to shift focus away from the digital element and bring it back on to the human element.

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End of Part 12

This marks the end of the 12 part series by Ranjit Singh

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