

Work is on to better network: Prometric

THE CAT for a ticket to the country's premier B-schools, has been marred with software and hardware glitches, disrupting the smooth flow of exams. Yet, the future is more about computer-based competitive exams rather than in the offline mode. In an e-mail interview with Shelley Singh, Ramesh Nava, vice-president and general manager, Asia-Pacific, Japan & Africa-Prometric, which is conducting the CAT exams, talks about the problems with CAT and what the company is doing to sort it out.

Why have there been so many problems with CAT?

CAT 2009 is a computer-based test. However, it is not conducted "live" over the internet. All data is hosted on local servers. For security reasons, we are not able to share further details. The launch of the computerised CAT involved the delivery of exams on 17,000 computers in 361 temporary testing labs at 104 locations in 32 cities throughout India. In order to secure such a large number of computer facilities, Prometric utilised the existing networks of computers within the colleges that were selected as

testing labs. Unfortunately viruses already existent on some of these networks and computers prior to the exam delivery infected the workstations that are being used for the CAT 2009.

In how many countries does Prometric conducts such tests? Can you name some of these computerised tests?

Prometric offers test development, test delivery and data management services to more than 450 clients around the world in the academic, professional associations, healthcare, government, corporate and information technology markets. Annually, Prometric delivers more than 9 million exams through a network of over 10,000 testing locations in 163 countries. We deliver tests that allow successful examinees to become certified as a Microsoft Engineer, personnel selection exams across the entire European Union, to government exams in the West Asia, Driver Theory exams in Ireland, employee advancement exams and securities dealer exams across all of Japan.

Review of online CAT 2009 experience on cards

Students, Faculty Across IIMs Favour Review Of Test Process And Agreement With Prometric

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CAT 2009 seems to have opened up a Pandora's Box. The overall experience has triggered off a none-too-happy line of thought among certain quarters in IIMs, all seven of which have been signatories in the agreement with Prometric, the leading global provider of testing and assessment services, which is conducting online CAT this year.

ET spoke to directors, faculty and students across IIMs over the weekend to test waters on an individual basis, and even though some chose to remain non-committal, others were surprisingly vocal about the need for a thorough review of the CAT 2009 happenings in the light of the agreement with Prometric and vice versa. The findings were very interesting. IIM students favoured a review because they felt irrespective of who conducted the test, CAT is also a test of the IIMs' reputation. Senior faculty in most cases felt that same way. The IIM managements were a mixed lot. Some chose to avoid the issue, although others were categorically in favour. CAT committee chairperson Satish Deodhar also had an interesting take on it and although he took a very delicate line, it was fairly clear from what he said that a review was on the cards.



IIM Lucknow director Prof Devi Singh was first off the block. "There is a certain level of output that is expected and everything will have to be reviewed. We will evaluate the entire experience of CAT 2009 after all this is over and if problems pile up, everything concerning the 5-year contract with Prometric will need to come back to the table afresh. We will be professionals," he said.

IIM Ahmedabad director Samir K Barua was defensive. "All seven IIM directors had signed the contract with Prometric and this is

a decision that has to be taken by all of them. I cannot make a statement on this," he said. IIM Bangalore director, Pankaj Chandra also chose to play with a dead bat. Asked whether the experience so far would perhaps necessitate a review of everything, including the deal with Prometric, Mr Chandra said: "This is not the right time to answer this question. At this juncture, we have only one objective and that is how we can get everybody to take a fair test." IIM Calcutta director Shekhar Chaudhuri wasn't available. But Prof Ashish

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Bhattacharyya, a very senior member of the IIMC faculty and former CAT group chairperson was very categorical and balanced.

Tackling the issue head on, Prof Bhattacharyya said, "At the end of the day, we need to use technology. That's the way ahead. But a review is essential. That doesn't necessarily mean that Prometric needs to be replaced. It can also be that they learn from what has happened and subsequently rectify their mistakes. If there is a contract, there can also be an exit clause. But changing someone is not necessarily the answer. After all, a lot of things were taken into account before zeroing in on Prometric. So it is not guaranteed that replacing them will lead to better results," he said.

Summing it all up, CAT committee chairperson and IIM Ahmedabad professor Satish Deodhar told ET: "This was the first time that our guys received any training. The CAT's demands are such that we need to hold it for 2.4 lakh-plus students and we don't have a 365-day window. It was a gargantuan task, but we made a sincere effort. A change to the online format had to come one year, but yes, it could have been better," Mr Deodhar said quite apologetically.

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