

'Time to automate business practices'

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The retail explosion in India, be it in financial services, car dealerships, FMCG or pharma sectors, is throwing up challenges in the area of sales and marketing. Players now have to be able to scale up rapidly while managing brands, issues which did not exist just a decade ago. Combined with a slowing US economy, this is creating an opportunity for [software companies](#) like Assetlink, an India-based, US-headquartered software company with a product in the marketing operations management (MOM) space. Chetan Saiya, CEO, Assetlink, spelled out some of these opportunities to ET. Excerpts.

What is MOM and how relevant is to India? Which sectors offer the greatest opportunity in India?

The Marketing Operations Management (MOM) solution allows the marketer to streamline the planning and budget allocation process, track and reconcile that spending, simplify multi-channel campaign tasks, manage an organisation's digital assets and distribution.

Just a few years ago, the financial sector in India was dominated by public sector companies, with limited products and offerings. In the past three years or so, several private players have entered and they are building their product portfolios. These new entrants have to scale up fast or they will perish. Scaling up means they increase their sales and marketing reach.

Then, there is the other category of Indian companies going overseas. These companies have conceived and built products in India which they are now taking outside the country, to areas where they and their brands are not known. So, they have to establish a new brand, add value to the brand in the context of the country they are entering, at their costs.

Typically, Indian financial [services companies](#) started off with 25-member marketing teams. They are now hiring up to 2,500 people for these teams. But what is needed are processes, systems to automate or streamline those processes. Which is what we can do for them.

We have identified four sectors in India which need our solution: banking and financial services for organisational transformation and scaling up, retail for operational excellence and localisation, pharma for outbound and the automotive which will need it to manage partners.

Indian companies may prefer, in the initial stage, to take our [software](#) on a monthly subscription model, which is what a lot of our SME customers do overseas. We realise this is a cost-sensitive market and we need to demonstrate the transformational power of the software. We expect the financial services sector to be the first customer.

Is this an indication that Indian companies are beginning to adopt technology instead of hiring more people?

Definitely, yes. That is because people are harder to get and productivity is becoming an issue because people are expensive. When wages were low, lower efficiency and productivity were not issues: when space (real estate) and people are both expensive, productivity becomes an important issue.

Also, companies earlier lacked scale so they were mainly domestic, which made it easier to handle. Moreover, now business users have overtaken IT, so that they manage to automate business practices. When you get software [on demand](#), as a service, it allows the user to bypass the IT department and work directly with the service provider.

Where are the other opportunities for your product?

We have a strategic partnership with Teradata Corporation, the enterprise data warehousing major. Our software enables Teradata to provide its customers with marketing resource management capabilities, in addition to its customer management solutions portfolio. We see huge growth coming through this partnership. So, there are opportunities in analytics, where we could add MOM features, or in the enterprise resource planning space. Then, there are the marketing and [advertising agencies](#) which could all become opportunities for us.

However, we are now looking at acquiring companies, regional companies with a niche focus. These would be companies which have grown in their regional, country, markets and now want to grow outside but cannot sustain that. We have already done the first such acquisition, the MOM software business of Citat, a Swedish communications production company. We are identifying a pipeline in the US, Europe and Australia, of software companies focused on marketing software solutions.

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