Stage set for crowdsourced design market, startups rope in talent

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HYDERABAD: A number of online platforms are offering designers a chance to bid for work outsourced by businesses. These young ventures, which have adopted the crowdsourcing model, are also making design affordable for small and medium enterprises.

Every time a client places a request for a new logo, print advertisement or brochure, these portals announce the project on their sites and social networking forums. Once a design is chosen, the portals split the fee with the lion’s share going to the designer.

"By crowdsourcing we could reach out to a great number of designers as well as clients," said Jaseem Thayal Shareef, cofounder of CrowdStudio. The Kochi-based company, which has signed up about 1,000 designers, concentrates only on logo and business card design for now. It has accepted 20 assignments since being set up in August. Shareef, 26, and cofounder Vivek Raghavan, both engineers, stumbled on the idea while looking to earn extra cash as undergraduates. They earned about Rs 15 lakh over three years by signing up with a Melbourne-based crowdsourcing design agency 99designs. Encouraged, the two decided to set up their own venture by pegging their fees at about half of what a mainstream firm would charge.

This approach, also adopted by other startups—such as Bangalore-based Jade Magnet and Printmind—is giving a number of growing businesses access to better design.

"Such firms have become essential for small and medium businesses. When I commissioned them for a logo design, I was amazed at the variety and the creativity," said James Joseph, founder of agri-services startup Jackfruit 356, who outsourced design work to CrowdStudio.

Joseph, a former director at Microsoft India, is now also a mentor to the startup that has roped in mobile technology entrepreneur Sanjay Vijaykumar as an advisor.

Currently, the company charges Rs 2,000 as listing fee to companies and takes 20% from the total price of a project. "If design is integrated with various businesses, such as marketing, there is tremendous scope and scalability for startups that use crowdsourcing," said Sonia Manchanda, cofounder and principal designer of Idiom Design, a Bangalore-based firm that has worked on numerous projects for large companies, including the Future Group.
For now, it is the price advantage and the range of work on offer that is helping the portals grow. "For an entire advertising campaign, high-end firms would charge ten times our price," said Manik Kinra, founder of Jade Magnet. The startup, founded by Kinra, 30, and Sitashwa Srivastava, 31, began with an initial investment of Rs 10 lakh in 2008.

Subsequent rounds of funding of around Rs 1.5 crore from investors, including Muki Regunathan, founder of the Bangalore-based digital agency Pepper Square and Eric Papcun, a US-based technology professional, has helped the startup expand.

"We now offer crowdsourced marketing solutions to bigger brands," said Kinra which counts automotive parts maker Bosch as a client and is targeting $2 million (Rs 12 crore) in revenues in fiscal 2014. With 19 people on board, it is now looking to ramp up the team by hiring more for sales and marketing in the Asia-Pacific region.