

Hey, wanna learn some math?

HeyMath!, with its global math curriculum, is focused on improving the quality of math education around the world

By S.Prem Kumar

As I walked into the HeyMath office at Cathedral Road, Chennai, it was like going back in time. I could not help but notice the stacks of mathematics (math) books from all over the world. I spotted a book on *trigonometry* from the US education system; a book on *calculus* from the Cambridge system; and even an ultra-thick *geometry* book that I am sure is from our very own CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education). These were the very same books I dreaded in my middle school years. For a second, I thought I should run away, but, decided to stay back and chat with Nirmala Sankaran, co-founder and chairperson of HeyMath. Over the next hour or so, I heard the HeyMath jingle, saw photos of students in Alaska using the HeyMath software, and



Nirmala Sankaran
co-founder and chair person
HeyMath

built a prototype and setup a math helpline to connect students around the world with math tutors in India. Says Sankaran, "Our initial focus was to prove that using technology could value-add to the learning process." The prototype was built for the Singaporean education system and comprised 80 lessons. Several schools in Singapore loved the product and HeyMath's early adopters included the likes of Raffles Institution and Methodist Girls', two of the best educational institutions in Singapore.

Over the years, HeyMath has expanded to include the curriculum of several school systems including the CBSE, ICSE, Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education (GCE-O) and the California Learning Resources Network (CLRN) systems, amongst several others.

+ Snapshot

Company: HeyMath

Founders:

Nirmala Sankaran and Harsh Rajan

Year founded: 2000

City: Chennai

USP: Math education delivered to students in over 50 countries. Current large markets include Singapore, India, South Africa and U.S.

spoke about how HeyMath has the potential to redefine math education globally.

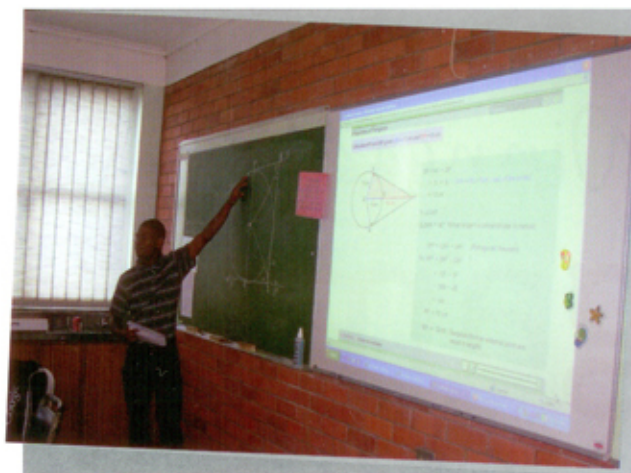
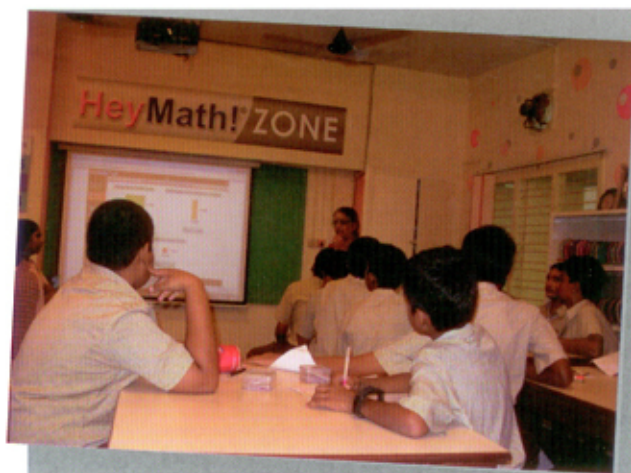
The big idea

Sankaran and Harsh Rajan, ex-bankers at Citigroup in the U.K., founded HeyMath in 2000 with the single-minded mission of improving the quality of math education around the world.

The duo strongly believed that lack of math teachers could be addressed using a global delivery model successfully adopted by the Indian information technology industry. With HeyMath, they partnered with the University of Cambridge, to help them build the curriculum. Over the next one-year, they set up a team in Chennai,

HeyMath methodically understands the 'pain points' in each of these systems, and sets out to address these problems through its tutorials. In addition to curriculum development, teacher training is at the core of what it does today. And while training, HeyMath looks to address what is missing in each educational system. "In Singapore, the quality of math content is pretty good. We primarily train students on methodologies – through math-related games and stories; the creativity is what we add. In Africa, it is the basic content knowledge that we bring to the table," explains Sankaran.

Today, HeyMath is used in government and private schools in four countries (U.S., India, Singapore and South Africa) and by



students in over 50 countries worldwide. HeyMath's workflow system enables teachers and users to give feedback to curriculum developers as and when the tutorials are being developed. This process helps make sure the curriculum for a particular system is contextualized and in sync with the requirements.

Sankaran says, "Currently, we believe our product is fairly exhaustive and the curriculum and learning methodologies have been tried and tested. We are now ready to go-to-market aggressively."

Approaching markets

Going forward, the key to HeyMath's success will revolve around its ability to deliver top-quality content in different markets. While the web-based delivery methodology is largely adopted in the U.S. and Singapore, India and Africa use the offline version in networked and non-networked classrooms. In addition to that, there are core differences in curriculum and assessment practices. While schools in India are more focused on learning

through practice, schools in Singapore want their students to learn through discovery. Students are made to think more and teachers act as facilitators.

HeyMath's ability to capture the finer nuances of teaching methodologies in several countries is what makes it unique. HeyMath organises 'MathTrails' in countries like India to enable more discovery-led learning. Students are taken on treasure-hunt-like trails, where at the end of the trail they use mathematical concepts to solve a puzzle. In Singapore, they organise what they call 'Web-Quests', where students independently research mathematical ideas, take a shot at related and interesting problems and learn new concepts as they progress.

HeyMath is also working on brick-and-mortar math-labs titled 'HeyMath Zone'. Says Sankaran, "The HeyMath Zone is a separate classroom where students take HeyMath lessons and discover concepts through physical manipulatives. It adds touch and feel to the whole learning experience." Sankaran believes that these HeyMath Zones will definitely be useful in schools where classrooms are not networked. "In some cases, it is usually our entry-point into schools in India."

They have also partnered with the Government of India's *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* programme to improve the quality of math education in government schools. They have run pilot programs at schools in New Delhi and Pondicherry.

People first

HeyMath currently employs around 90 people, a majority of them in curriculum development. Sankaran and Rajan have created a superb work environment with regular cricket matches, 'foosball' sessions and food fests. Several members of the team multi-task and play different roles at the same time. HeyMath's advisory board is star-studded. Jerry Rao, ex-Citibanker and founder of MPhasis is an investor in the firm. Raghuram Rajan, professor of finance at Chicago Booth School of Business and economic advisor to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, is involved in an advisory capacity. "We get a lot of strategic advice from both Jerry and Raghu. Jerry definitely adds huge value with the experience he brings from having build businesses from scratch and having worked and served clients in several markets. Raghu, in addition to providing strategic advice, also dons the academic hat and offers tips to improve the curriculum," says Sankaran.

HeyMath continues to be focused on delivering top-quality math education to students, teachers and institutions around the world. Till date, HeyMath's customers were primarily government and private schools. Now, they are ready to expand their services to individual customers, through web-based products especially in the U.S.

In India and Africa, the HeyMath Zones are bound to receive attention from students and schools alike, giving the team the opportunity to change the way people learn math.

HeyMath! - Creative delivery models

- ▶ HeyMath Zones
- ▶ Web-Quests
- ▶ Mobile HeyMath Zones
- ▶ Web-based animations
- ▶ MathTrails
- ▶ StoryMath