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IT firms look beyond the big engineering colleges when recruiting

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Kirtika Suneja,Diksha Dutta,Diksha Dutta

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New Delhi Driven by increasing demand for their services from clients in the US and Europe and desperate to fill in the vacancies, IT companies are looking beyond the big league engineering colleges and scouting more and more engineering campuses for talented students. No wonder, most IT biggies are scraping the bottom of the recruitment barrel, so to speak.

Sample this: the country's largest software exporter, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) , visited 371 colleges in 2009-10 as compared to 274 in FY 2007-2008. While the hiring process is still on for FY '10-11, it has already visited 310 colleges. The company has already hired 35,000 freshers, it said in an email. The company website states "hiring in October-December quarter has been in the ratio of 54:46 in favour of laterals, but going forward, that will come down and it will be more in favour of trainees rather than laterals, maybe around 52:48".

Infosys Technologies, the country's second-largest software exporter, has already visited 450 colleges for its 2010 hiring and has hired 27,000 freshers—against 332 colleges and 18,900 students in 2009. "We focus on colleges that provide us with better students to meet the growing competitive needs of the market and industry. While we look at profiles like systems engineers for most engineering colleges, for niche institutes like the IITs, we offer roles in research as well," says a company spokesperson.

Though HCL Technologies concentrates on lateral hiring as a strategy to curb attrition, fresher hiring has significantly gone up to 7,542 freshers in 2010, against 1,450 during 2009. Even the number of colleges visited has increased to 120 from 89 within a year.

Says Dilip Kumar Srivastava, corporate vice-president and global HR head, HCL Technologies, "We have added large private institutions to our list this year, including Gandhi Institute of Technology and Management (GITAM), Rashtreeya Vidyalaya College of Engineering , BMS College of Engineering, Thapar, Amity SSN, SRM, Sastra and so on."

Of the 60 companies that have visited Tamil Nadu-based SRM University, two-thirds are IT and include biggies like TCS, which hired 1,000 students; Wipro, which picked up almost 400 students for various jobs, and HCL Technologies, which recruited 235 students from a batch size of 2,400. Eight new IT companies have come for placements this year.

Sangeeta Gupta, senior vice-president of India's apex software body, Nasscom, says, "Both fresher and lateral hiring has increased manifold as compared to last year. Last year the focus was not so much on fresher hiring, but not this year. We will see a good blend of freshers and laterals. On an average, IT companies go to 200 colleges for recruitment, which has increased over a period of time. They have now started looking at tier-2 colleges as well." Adds Thiru, leader (human capital advisory services), Deloitte India, "Hiring from tier-1 colleges often increases attrition at IT companies. Hence, slowly they are going to tier-2 and 3 colleges as well. The total fresher hiring for 2011 is expected to be 2.5 lakh-3 lakh."

At Delhi Technological University (DTU), 26 IT companies made 70 job offers last year, while this year the number stands at 29 companies. The new IT companies that have come in are ITC Infotech, Patni Computers, One97 and Info Edge. Similarly, at National Institute of Technology (NIT), Kurukshetra, Haryana, of the 90 companies that visited the campus in 2009-10, IT companies comprised 36% of the total jobs offered. Recruiters included TCS, CSC, IBM and Google, along with Wipro and Tech Mahindra.

Needless to say, some companies have also spruced up or developed a new set of hiring strategy altogether. Explains Srivastava from HCL Technologies, "Toppers Shop is HCL's unique proposition to the top 62 colleges, including NIIT. The selection process for the students of these colleges is different as we do not require them to go through a computer-based test, which is one of the evaluation steps for other colleges. Students of premier colleges are recruited after direct discussions and we allow them to choose their own date and location of joining. However, the HCL on-campus criteria apply for the first short listing, which is 60% throughout academics and no history of arrears."

Shankar Srinivasan, chief people officer, Cognizant, adds, "Cognizant conducts consolidated campus recruiting programmes in which students outside of the top-tier T-schools and who meet our eligibility criteria can participate. If found fit in all aspects, we do make job offers to those candidates."

But Priti Rajora, global head (talent acquisition) at Wipro Technologies disagrees. "We do not differentiate either by profile or compensation based on age of institute. We hire engineering talent across streams and these candidates are then further groomed and trained as per our needs." Wipro goes to 100 institutes as a part of the on-campus hiring programme and covers another over 200 colleges under the off-campus programme. "The off-campus programme is typically conducted once students graduate and they cater to our just-in-time business requirements," she adds.