



Snowden's Delhi Connection

THE WHISTLEBLOWER LEARNT HACKING HERE, AT A KOENIG SOLUTIONS CLASS. *By Anurag Prasad*

A steady stream of foreigners trickles in and out of the lower levels of KLJ Complex, a four-storey glass-fronted structure in Delhi's Moti Nagar. Once, Edward Joseph Snowden, the ex-employee of the Central Intelligence Agency and former contractor with the National Security Agency, was among them.

This is where Snowden honed his hacking skills to later expose the Internet snooping secrets of the U.S. The building is one of Koenig Solutions' five training centres in India, where students attend "boot camps" in ethical hacking and coding. Koenig is an authorised training partner of the likes of Microsoft, Oracle, Adobe, VMware, Cisco, Citrix, and Red Hat.

Snowden, we are told, spent a week in Delhi training in core Java programming and advanced ethical hacking back in 2010.

Other than the Snowden factor, it appears that Koenig is doing very little that's different from institutes such as NIIT, karROX Technologies, and IHT Computer Training & Servicing Centre, all of which offer IT training and certification courses.

But do they offer "edutourism", asks Koenig founder and CEO Rohit Aggarwal. That's his speciality. For \$2,500 (Rs 1.5 lakh) plus the cost of a plane ticket, a student gets airport transfers, lodging, food, and even a trip to the Taj

Koenig founder and CEO Rohit Aggarwal has pioneered a unique business model in India.

Mahal. Oh, and the IT training, of course. There are supplementary frills such as relaxation and massage rooms, prayer rooms, medical centres, and trained chefs—and a money-back policy.

Something seems off here, right? It all seems a little too good to be true. But the fact is, an equivalent training module (minus the tourism) costs four times as much outside India. So international students (27,000 of them so far) come to Aggarwal.

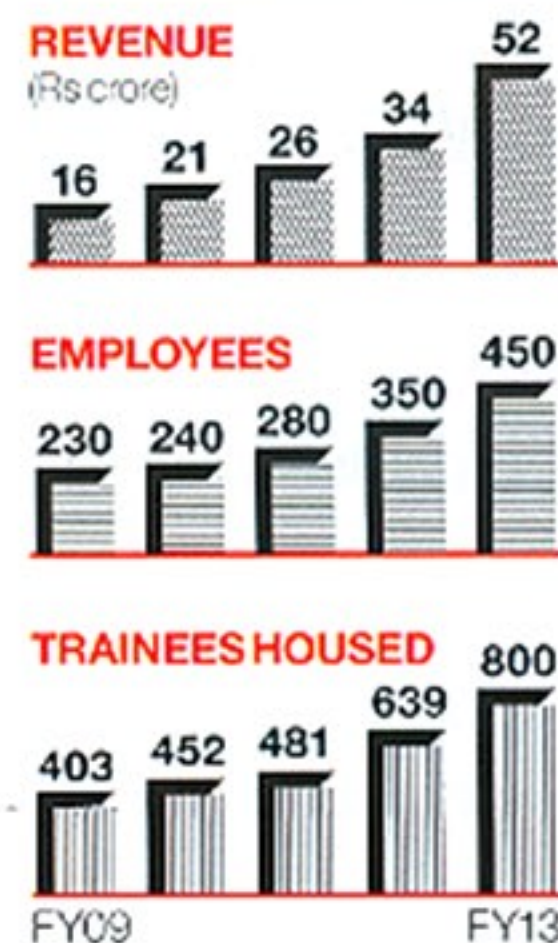
Last fiscal, Koenig hosted 1,000 employees from Tanzania's revenue authority, and helped



Inside one of Koenig's classrooms at the KLJ Complex in Delhi

Valuable Lessons

HOW KOENIG'S GONE FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH



sharpen their skills in e-governance-linked IT courses as well as advanced ones like ethical hacking and forensic investigations.

IT training and certification is a \$20 billion industry globally and is worth nearly \$1 billion in India alone. Aggarwal, a computer science graduate from Panjab University, wanted to be a part of this boom, and in 1993, set up Koenig.

It didn't start off well. At the time, NIIT was a virtual monopoly, and Aggarwal had to struggle to keep the company afloat. He was going down rapidly, defaulting on vendor payments and forced to downsize, when his luck changed dramatically.

A student from Boston,

Lawrence Maser, found Koenig online, and called Aggarwal offering to pay \$3,000 for a four-week certification course. Those days, a similar course in the U.S. would have cost around \$10,000. "I thought if I could get 10 students like him in a month, I could retire," says Aggarwal with a smile.

He did, and the rest is history.

Today, Aggarwal takes in 200 students every month on average at Koenig's six centres—five in India and one in Dubai. It also offers virtual classrooms in any city and, if needed, can fly any of its 300 trainers there.

No longer does Aggarwal have to rely on random calls from interested students. He's put together

an impressive client list of companies such as HP, Siemens, Chevron, BP, Toyota Motors, Schlumberger, and Dell, all of which send employees for training programmes.

Microsoft believes Koenig is a key learning partner in India and has proven its expertise and competency. "Koenig pioneered a unique model in India. It has been consistent in quality and has delighted customers for many years," says Pankaj Dikshit, area sales lead (learning experiences), Microsoft India.

Similarly, VMware, an American software company that provides cloud and virtualisation software and services, has 18 certified trainers in the country, eight of whom are under Koenig's wing.

In FY14, Koenig's

revenue exceeded Rs 80 crore, and by end of FY15 it hopes to cross Rs 150 crore. In the last fiscal, almost half the revenue came from virtual classes.

Sensing the potential, Koenig has invested Rs 4 crore in a data centre to take more courses online for virtual classes. There are also plans to add at least 100 trainers every year for the next five years.

With virtually no competition, Koenig is expanding to take in more students. "The competition is more from freelancers than actual classroom-based companies," says Aggarwal. Who knows, there may be another Koenig being conceived right now. It may offer the same facilities at a similar price. But it can't claim to have trained Snowden. ■