

India has become the biggest engineering base of Nielsen: CEO Karthik Rao

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Nielsen is looking to strengthen its technology base in India by hiring thousands of engineers, as the audience measurement company tries to stay relevant at a time when Big Tech firms are consolidating data and the content viewing landscape is becoming increasingly fragmented.

The company has recruited about 2,500 people in the last 12 months in India, including 2,000 engineers specialising in artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning (ML), data intelligence, and analytics. That means about 57 per cent of Nielsen's 3,500 engineers now work out of India. The country is also the biggest centre after its headquarters in New York, with 5,000 employees out of a total 13,000.

"We are in the next phase of tech disruption, and for that, we need engineering talent at the base level. It would take much longer to hire 500 engineers in the US and Europe compared to India, where we can execute at scale. What should take us three years can be done in a year here," chief executive Karthik Rao told Business Standard.

Rao is following in the footsteps of other companies that, for the greater part of the last decade and a half, have built their engineering base in a country that produces millions of engineers annually. But he is doing so with a purpose, as he attempts to pivot the century-old company from an audience measurement firm into a media technology company.

Advertisement and content measurement have evolved as more content is now IP-delivered, allowing for precision targeting at scale. "It means you pick attributes rather than just age or gender and add context to content for connecting it to humans. While that offers more monetisation opportunities, to get there, we need a strong technology backbone. The old-school way of trying to solve this will not work," he added.

That refers to building panels and attaching them to home devices to gauge audience viewership. Rao says there is a limit to what the company can currently do with that data, though it remains relevant. "We need to use that as a source but also complement it with a lot of raw data from other devices."

This is because people consume multiple forms of content across multiple devices, such as laptops, desktops, smartphones, and legacy television. Globally, viewership is shifting towards online content as people consume it on the move rather than on television.

To process that data effectively, the company requires data scientists, and that is where India plays a crucial role.

Chief technology officer Anant Goel said that all of Nielsen's global measurement products are being developed out of India. "We are building most of the data processing engines, machine learning algorithms, and analytics engines that provide AI-driven insights to advertisers for precise targeting. All of the products have some components developed in India."

Nielsen has also tied up with the Maharashtra government to create 1,100 new jobs in technical roles, including AI experts, data scientists, data analysts, and other specialised technology positions.

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