

Bioinformatics records Rs 145 crore

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The Bioinformatics sector in India is estimated to have grown to Rs 145 crore in 2006-07 as against the previous year's figure of Rs 120 crore. Though the figure may not be big, the industry in 2006-07 witnessed many activities in terms of launching new tools, opening an overseas subsidiary, acquisitions, getting funds from financial institutions.

Strand Life Sciences announced the launch of its SAR modelling and deployment platform - Sarchitect. Gilead Sciences has signed on as the first customer of Sarchitect. In addition to launching the platform tool, Strand Life Sciences entered into collaboration with Pharmidex, a key global player in assessing the ability of compounds to cross the blood-brain barrier (BBB). With this, now both companies focus on providing solutions to facilitate the discovery and development of new medicines. It has also integrated ChemAxon's JChem suite of software with admetis, its tool for modeling and predicting drug-relevant properties of molecules in silico. The integrated offering was launched in early 2006.

The developmental toxicology laboratory of Dr Dhawan of the Industrial Toxicology Research Center (ITRC) at Lucknow has selected VLifeMDS software developed by Pune-based VLife Sciences as its mainstream software for their computational research. Switzerland-based PharmaBase too entered into a strategic initiative in the pharmaceutical space with VLife to develop new candidates for anti-arthritis application.

The good news for the bioinformatics sector was positive initiatives taken up by the financial institutes during the year. Kotak Mahindra Bank, one of the premier private banks in India announced investments in VLife subscribing singularly to the entire

series A round of funding solicited by VLife.

Ocimum Biosolutions announced that International Finance Corporation (IFC), the private sector arm of the World Bank Group, will invest \$6.5 million of equity, for a minority stake, and debt in the company. Ocimum said the funds raised from this transaction would be used for financing both organic as well as inorganic growth of the company.

Strand Life Sciences and Ocimum Biosolutions have announced that they have joined the BioIT Alliance formed by Microsoft. The alliance is a cross-industry group working to further integrate science and technology as a first step towards making personalized medicine a reality. This alliance will help the companies to address the growing need for intelligent informatics solutions in the global life-sciences sector.

Formed in 2006, the BioIT Alliance is a cross-industry group working together to improve biomedical information technology on the Microsoft platform. Founding members include Affymetrix, Accelrys Software, Amylin Pharmaceuticals, Applied Biosystems, The BioTeam, Digipede Technologies LLC, Discovery Biosciences Corporation, Geospiza, Hewlett-Packard Development Company, LP, InterKnowlogy, Microsoft Corporation, Sun Microsystems, VizX Labs LLC and other key companies in the pharmaceutical, biotech, hardware and software industries.

Meanwhile, Ocimum Biosolutions has acquired the biomolecules synthesis business of Isogen Life Science based in The Netherlands. And it has also set up its German subsidiary in Ebersberg in order to expand its presence in the European market. This is a key milestone for Ocimum after its successful acquisition of the Microarrays division of MWG Biotech AG. The German subsidiary, Ocimum Germany GmbH, aims to tap the huge genomics market in Europe and provide quality R&D enabling solutions to universities, research institutes, biotech and pharma companies in Europe.

During the year, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has won a multi-million dollar contract spread over 12-months from the US-based life sciences firm Sequenom to develop software solutions. The software solutions will provide a framework of validated components that will allow Sequenom to rapidly develop and deploy software products to empower its clients. The genomics module from the Bio-Suite software suite, developed by TCS, is also being licensed to the firm on a non-exclusive basis. Life sciences and healthcare contribute 4 percent to TCS' revenues.

So 2006-07 was a happening year for the bioinformatics sector. Though the sector could not register much growth in terms of revenue, activities like funding, launching new products and tools, setting up of subsidiary during the year will definitely help the companies to increase the revenue in the coming years. Government initiatives and government supported R&D activities have given a boost to the sector, which is expected to see more activities in the coming months.