

## **Collabera's onshore bet helps it tide over sticky US visa process**

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Coimbatore, Sept. 19:

Strong offshore and onshore presence has helped Collabera tide over the problem of rising rejection rates for US visas, said Mr Mohan Sekhar, President and Chief Operating Officer.

“We are uniquely positioned in the mid-cap segment and will continue to do a lot of work for clients' onshore. Our offshore business is also growing at around 50 per cent,” he told *Business Line*.

He stressed the need for Indian IT service providers to transform themselves and become global. “Traditional Indian offshore companies are bound to be hurt as they have always preferred strong offshore presence. But this situation is witnessing a reversal of trend in recent times. Clients now prefer to send only some work offshore. They want to be more focused and do it themselves. Transformation is the need of the hour,” Mr Sekhar said.

He said as many as 250 Indians were deported from the port of entry in the US this year — this has never happened in the past.

Sharing information about the recent meeting with the US Consulate in India about visa norms that continue to plague Indian IT companies, the Collabera President said the industry took up the issue of the steep hike in the H-1 visa fee to \$5,000 from \$1,000, among other issues.

### **Troublesome interpretation**

Apart from the hike in visa fee, companies have also had trouble getting L1 visas in the past 12 months, industry sources said, adding that “the guidelines remain the same, but the application of these guidelines is leading to higher rejection”.

Difficulty in getting interview appointments, deportations from ports of entry and inconsistencies in visa interviews continue to trouble applicants.

Industry analysts said many rules are neither transparent nor predictable and are open to interpretation by US departments. There is no single service visa for people who travel for work, sources said.

Asked how Collabera managed through this sticky visa process, Mr Sekhar said the company decided to have offshore as well as onshore centres when he came on board three years ago. “There is actually no mid-cap company doing onshore work in the US. Therefore, those Indian companies that can transform onshore will survive.”

He said such a transformation would hit margins in the short term, but that would be offset by the gains made in the long term. The next six months or so could be a challenge, he added.

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