

'Packaging sector SMEs should hire qualified professionals'

India has around 22,000 packaging units, of which more than 80 per cent comprises small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The SMEs mostly do not hire qualified professionals owing to lack of awareness and financial issues. **N C SAHA**, director of the Indian Institute of Packaging (IIP), spoke to **Itishree Samal** about the importance of packaging education and the need for SMEs to hire qualified professionals to drive growth. Edited excerpts:

How big is the packaging industry in India and where is it heading?

The Indian packaging industry is pegged at \$17-billion, and growing at 15 per cent year-on-year. The industry is expected to touch \$40 billion by 2015. Packaging for essential products like food, beverages, milk, vegetables, food grains and pharmaceuticals are the key driving segments because of the huge domestic consumption. In addition, the export market, mostly food and pharmaceutical products, is expected to rise along with the per capita consumption of packaging material.

Why is a professional or certified course in packaging important?

Seeing the growth potential, the need for professional packaging education is extremely important to check quality and counterfeiting of products, and to bring in new innovations in packaging. Innovation in technology is also required to



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improve the shelf-life of products and to keep up with changing consumer preferences and market demand. The demand for different types of packaging in the consumer goods sector has been growing phenomenally. Large supermarkets and malls have driven

this growth even further.

Do you see the demand for skilled packaging professionals growing?

The packaging industry is facing a huge shortage of skilled professionals. There are around 22,000 packaging units in India, but only 500 professionals get trained every year by the Indian Institutes of Packaging (five at

present), which are autonomous bodies working under the ministry of commerce to promote packaging awareness, packaging education and to promote exports through innovative design and packaged products. If a unit hires one professional, then the current demand will be around 11,500.

How will the SMEs benefit from professional packaging education?

The small units do not hire any qualified professionals due to financial issues. As quality evaluation is a major aspect in packaging for both domestic and exports, SMEs should hire skilled manpower to stay updated and to create a better market.

What are the courses offered by IIPs?

IIP offers a two-year PG programme (in which the student intake is 120), a three-month diploma course (120 students) and an 18-month distance course (200 students). We plan to start a BTech in packaging and add two more IIPs, in Ahmedabad and Guwahati.