

Hey Math: Chennai co to launch Facebook-type Mathematics networking site

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CHENNAI: In 2005, American writer Thomas Friedman was so impressed with Chennai-based online mathematics education platform [HeyMath](#) that he featured it in his book *The World is Flat* and wrote that "HeyMath's mission is to be the math Google".

If Friedman were to describe its aspirations now, he could well make that " [math Facebook](#)". For, HeyMath, which has former IMF chief economist [Raghuram Rajan](#) and entrepreneur [Jerry Rao](#) on its advisory board, is on course to launch a [social networking site for mathematics](#), the first of its kind, within three months. Symbolically, it is happening in 2012 - the National Mathematics Year in India.



"I am visualising 3,000 teachers coming together (from key Hey-Math markets such as the US, Singapore and India)," says MD [Nirmala Sankaran](#). "There is a case for bringing this community together. They would face similar problems as teachers." Sankaran and her husband Harsh Rajan gave up high-profile banking jobs in London to start HeyMath in 2000 after they sensed a gap in maths education.

The maths social network, to be called 'Teaching Tomorrow', will be a separate non-profit venture. It is intended for teachers to share maths insights with each other. Down the line, Nirmala expects even parents of maths students to get a look-in. It will start with 30-40 teachers in the US, who more naturally take to the Web compared with India.

The hope is that HeyMath would eventually benefit as the networking site spreads the word. Strategically, that could take its maths lessons business to consumers, or B2C. Now, Hey-Math's business model is built on the acceptance of schools and teachers, more a B2B formula.

"An open platform such as this will help teachers resolve issues they face, and bring out creative ideas of teaching in an open environment," said Rao, the founder of software company [MphasiS](#).

Before all that can happen, however, Hey-Math would like to get a crucial question right: why would the usually busy maths teachers spend time on networking? The answer, for Sankaran, is that they will do so to make their jobs easier. Therefore, HeyMath wants to provide free applications that will, say, make question-setting possible in a jiffy. Having specialised content, including live talks by mathematicians, is another idea.

The site is currently being designed. When complete, it would have incorporated popular social networking features such as 'likes' and 'recommendations'.

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