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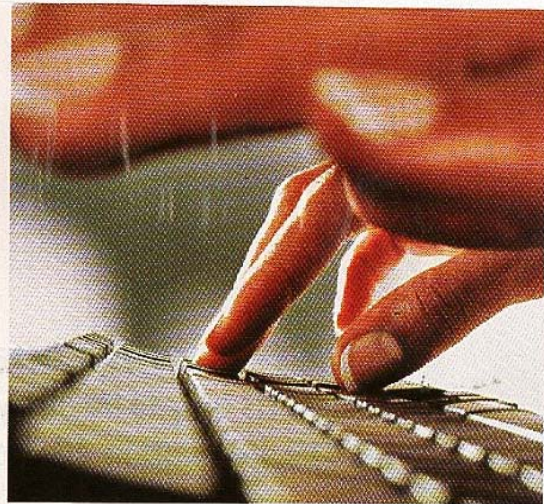
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UP Front

OVER THERE QUESTIONS? INDIA'S GOT ANSWERS

THE NEXT FRONTIER in outsourcing may be a sort of **Google Answers** on steroids. Launched by ex-McKinsey consultants, **PipalAnswers.com** fields business, financial, or marketing questions by e-mail and forwards them to its researchers in India. They quote a price and e-mail back answers in a PowerPoint presentation. The service is an offshoot of **Pipal Research** of New Delhi, the research arm of ICI, India's second-biggest bank. So far, it has around 10 clients, including **Bear Stearns**.

Sanjeev Arora, a Chicago-based vice-president of Pipal



Research, says such piece-meal research fills a niche between inexpensive services such as Google Answers, which rely on online searching, and high-priced consultants like McKinsey or Bain. Arora says most of Pipal's 100 Indian researchers have MBAs or master's degrees in finance or accounting. A one-day query costs \$300 to \$600; a weeklong project, \$1,500 to \$3,000.

That's 25% to 40% less than in-house or other out-

sourced research services, says Ravi Aron, assistant professor of operations and information management at **The Wharton School**. He thinks that PipalAnswers.com's model may give it an edge over outsourcing outfits with Indian operations such as **Pangea 3** and **OfficeTiger** that aren't purely transaction driven. In any case, he expects other research firms to jump in and expand into more specialized fields such as the law and biotech. —Elizabeth Woyke