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Union Budget 2026:
9 Strategic Imperatives for India’s Consulting Industry

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Services as the Growth Engine

The Budget reinforces services as a primary growth, jobs, and export driver, with a clear long-term vision to expand India's global services share by 2047.

This positions consulting firms (strategy, IT, domain-specialist) as core partners for both government and enterprise transformation.

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IT/ITeS Tax Clarity and Scale

Software development, IT-enabled services, KPO, and contract R&D are unified under a single IT services category with expanded safe harbours and clearer transfer pricing rules.

This improves tax certainty and makes India more attractive as a global consulting and managed-services delivery hub.

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Digital Infrastructure, Cloud, and Data Centres

Incentives and tax benefits for cloud providers, data centres, and digital public infrastructure aim to make India a key digital hub.

Consulting demand will grow in cloud strategy, cyber and data governance, data-centre planning, and compliance for both Indian and global clients.

Skilling, Employability, and Workforce Programs

Higher allocations for skilling and the "Education to Employment and Enterprise" agenda pull consulting into designing, executing, and measuring outcome-based skilling programs.

Firms can build solutions around workforce strategy, curriculum design, employability metrics, and impact evaluation for ministries, states, and industry bodies.

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MSME and "Champion SME" Focus

Funds and schemes to create "Champion SMEs" through equity support and professionalisation expand the advisory market in MSME digitalisation, performance improvement, governance, and export readiness.

Consulting firms can design scalable, productised offerings, playbooks, platforms, and light-touch advisory, to make smaller ticket sizes workable.

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AI, Automation, and Future-of-Work Mandates

AI, data, and platform-based solutions are embedded across Budget priorities, tightly linked with skilling, MSME enablement, and digital zones.

Consulting opportunities lie in AI strategy, operating-model redesign, AI risk and ethics, and workforce transition; firms must, however, manage change and re-skilling narratives responsibly.

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Sector Plays: Healthcare, AVGC, GCCs, Infra

Priority for healthcare, medical value tourism, AVGC, and global capability centres in tier-2/3 cities opens vertical advisory opportunities in location strategy, incentive navigation, operating-model design, and talent planning. Infra-led growth and asset monetisation (including REIT/InvIT avenues) support steady work in project structuring, capital raise, and PPP advisory.

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Tax, Regulatory, and Compliance Reform

Simplification of tax structures, rationalisation of penalties, and trust-based administration reduce friction but increase expectations around compliance and transparency.

Consulting firms gain work in tax and regulatory advisory, dispute prevention, and governance design, but must avoid aggressive or purely arbitrage-driven structures.

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Where Consulting Must Be Cautious

The Budget's pivot from "spend and announce" to "productivity, employability, and measurable outcomes" means clients will demand impact, not just slide-ware.

Consulting firms should be cautious about overselling AI, delivering skilling projects without clear outcome metrics, or relying on tax/ incentive arbitrage; the winning play is transparent, capability-building, and execution-oriented consulting.

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