

Mi-Fone to Target the Indian Market in a Big Way: Alpesh Patel, CEO

Written by Faiz Askari, Editor-Technology, Small Enterprise India.com



Recently entering into the Indian market, Mi-Fone the Africa-based mobile handset manufacturer, is shifting gears to enter the Indian market aggressively. **Alpesh Patel**, Chief Executive Officer, Mi-Fone exclusively interacted with **Faiz Askari, Editor-Technology, Small Enterprise India.com** and shared his plans for the Indian market and trends that are dominating this market segment.

Small Enterprise India: What positioning does Mi -Fone wanted to establish for itself for the Indian mobile market?

Alpesh Patel (AP): We wish to ensure that we fully satisfy our target market which is the urban, rural sector that requires value for money and looks for a mobile handset not because of low price but because of quality, aesthetics. The mass market is our niche market.

Small Enterprise India: It has been suddenly found out that there is a mushrooming of multiple mobile handset players in the Indian market. In such conditions, what are the opportunities that exist in India with regard to a new mobile handset player like Mi-Fone?

AP: There are enormous opportunities for mobile handset manufacturers, but with 40 Grade B brands, the competition is fierce and everyone wants to put their name on a phone. The majority of these brands were doing something else a few months ago whereas Mi-Fone has always been a phone manufacturer with a team of people with more than 25 years in the mobile handset business. The opportunities are there for companies who deliver real value. In India it is very common practice for companies who are into different verticals to put the same brand on a mobile phone. This is not what Mi-Fone is doing.

Small Enterprise India: According to you, what are the key market trend that is driving this business in India and what are the drivers for this market in India?

AP: Customers are looking for value for their money and this is the only major trend. I can figure out in this segment. However, in terms of drivers for the Indian market, price of the handset is of course one of the key drivers but quality and a need for brand association are also driving elements in the Indian market.

Small Enterprise India: Trends like smart phone, mobile internet are some of the leading drivers of this market. What is your observation on this?

AP: I agree, but these services need to be made more accessible and the best way is through low cost handsets.

Small Enterprise India: Mi-Fone has rich experience of doing business in the mobile handset business in regions like Africa and Middle East. What benefit you will get for Indian market positioning from this experience?

AP: There are many similarities, for example, similar demographics and an inherent knowledge of what the mass market sector wants. I come from one of the biggest handset brands on the planet and I grew their African business to more than \$500m in revenue in a short span of time – all generated from the mass market sector.

Small Enterprise India: So, what are the key drivers for such growth of Mi-Fone's market?

AP: Style with functionality and affordability with an emphasis on youths, and urban and rural consumers.

Small Enterprise India: Indian mobile subscriber base is increasing rapidly on a daily basis. But in the mobile hardware market there seems to be a monopoly of market with few players dominating this market. How do you look at this situation?

AP: Big brands will always be big – they have the money to spend for awareness exercises. But for us as a small company, it is not about how much money is spent – it is about how you spend it. That is the key to our marketing and brand awareness success. No one in Africa has done what we have done in less than 2 years of inception. Keeping aside the monopoly of big brands there is always room for the small players.

Small Enterprise India: In Africa, you function as a service provider as well. Do you have plans to foray into such business action in India as well?

AP: Not in the immediate future.

Small Enterprise India: What are the key issues and challenges ahead of Indian mobile market?

AP: There needs to be more regulation. As mentioned before there are lots of companies who are into different verticals other than the mobile handset segment, and want put the same brand on a phone, this does not make them a mobile devices brand.

Remember a person buying a \$30 handset will try and get the best value for money. He will be more careful than anyone else who could buy a \$300 handset. So why not give him a phone that is stylish with quality and at an affordable price point. Don't mislead him in anyway. I have seen lots of brands with lousy marketing campaigns selling only on price and with no after sales support. I don't want to treat our customers like that because the guy today who buys a \$30 handset – I want him in 1 year time to automatically upgrade to another handset from us. That for me is the most effective way of measuring success in this business.

Success for me is not about making money upfront– it is about building something long term that people genuinely buy into.

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