Ashish Sinha: The Brain Behind Pluggd.in

Written by Nisary Mahesh

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If you are a tech start up looking for a platform to showcase your products, or if you wish to get a candid feedback of your product, here is an entrepreneur from Bangalore who would love to help you. An alumnus of IIT Roorkee & IIM Bangalore, **Ashish Sinha** started his career in the enterprise industry in 1999 and provided services to the tech giants like Aztec software, Ketara, IBM and Yahoo for about 7 years.

Declining the offers to be an H-1B worker, he decided to choose 'the road less travelled'. "India has reached the point of inflexion, where the skill of providing services is steadily escalating into art of making product and then making of a world class business out of it", says **Ashish Sinha the founder of Pluggd.in**

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He had chances to meet lots of entrepreneurs during his service and noticed one thing-the absence of a clear marketing strategy which results in premature death of start ups. He decided to work in this line and there was no looking back. To work for them he chose blog as a medium, as he was obsessed with the freedom a blogger has.

In 2007, a start-up directory- the first of its kind in the country called Pluggd.in took birth. "We aim to give many of them a leg-up, showcasing their products and services to potential investors and users" says Ashish.

Today Plugged.in has evolved into a full-fledged portal with channels on funding, strategy, jobs and an exhaustive start-up directory. This blog turned portal based in Jayanagar, Bangalore has reported this year a monthly page-view of over 5 million and about 1.3 million visitors, ranking them as the third largest online business readership service. With Alexa India rank under 500 and global Alexa rank under 8,000 Pluggd.in is among the top 5 Business Media sites of India

with significant presence in South East Asia.

Asish Sinha shares his success story with Small Enterprise India.

How did this idea hit you?

The idea of Pluggd.in came when I noticed that a whole lot of my friends who started their product companies had no proper platform for them to get noticed. While media was doing its bit, they focused on big companies and companies that were able to create noise. A whole lot of geeks were creating wonderful products and what they needed was community feedback and insights from other entrepreneurs. That was the birth of Pluggd.in.

Please tell us about the team?

For the last 2.5 years, I was the only one running the show, but we now have a wonderful team of part time contributors. They have a great work experience and immense knowledge on their industry.

Are you providing any paid services to entrepreneurs?

No. All our services are free. Our users are entrepreneurs and our customers are Investors. For example, companies like Dell / Microsoft are our customers, but most of our services are free for entrepreneurs. The only service which is charged nominally is the job section and startups are getting immense response from it.

What is your revenue generation model?

We clock monthly traffic of around 1.4 million and attract advertisers who want to reach out to

India's entrepreneurial/geeky community. So far, we have mostly focused on advertising as the main source of revenue, but will soon expand to other areas.

What are the major challenges you face?

The challenges are many – for instance, from reaching out to Tier-II towns, to finding the seeds of innovation across the country. We are a lean team and given the resource constraint, we do have to spend a lot of time in validating a startups' business plan/claimed revenue numbers etc.

Future plans?

We recently launched a Question/Answer site called 59Mins.com, where questions are answered by experts (like angel investors/ legal consultants/ technology gurus etc). Some of the leading angel investors are part of this venture.We are working on angel investment platform that will enable entrepreneurs to connect to angel investors directly and so far we have already connected a few entrepreneurs with angel investors.

What accounts for this popularity of pluggd in?

The entire awareness of the site has been created by Word of Mouth. So far, we haven't spent a single amount of money in advertising!!! Ours being a very honest and candid platform has attracted a lot of serious entrepreneurs who contribute to the site and add a lot of value.

What are the major issues tech start ups in India facing?

Apart from hiring challenges, there are challenges in creating awareness about one's products/services etc. Finding sources of Angel/Seed money is also difficult as there is no independent platform that caters entrepreneur's need. Smaller cities do not offer the exposure needed to build technology products and lack of customers also hurt them.

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Do you have something like 'Customer Connect' ?

Yes. What really happens is that the moment a start up is profiled on Pluggd.in, they get immediate traction from VCs/potential partners and customers. We do connect SMEs / start ups with customers and other players in the ecosystem, like Investors, Incubation centers, media etc.

Many bright startups are failing. What is your take on this?

I won't just blame this on lack of support ecosystem for the startups. Many startups don't build products keeping customers in mind. Over obsession with Silicon Valley will hurt Indian entrepreneurs and Indian start ups need to build products for the Indian market, the one they are close to and can experiment on. Most of the product startups lack the ability to think like a customer and incorporate the same in one's product.