



Even as India becomes an economic powerhouse, there is a long way to go before we turn into a mine of innovation. This conflict occurs because we are content with progress that arrives from conveyor belt processes. Amidst such a lag, Pune-based Uniken is laboriously engaged in the business of innovation.

Established in September 2003, Uniken has been able to develop more than 12 concepts that are at various stages in the innovation life cycle. One of these—the Virtual Private Secure Internet—has already been successfully commercialized. VPSI has made Uniken a market leader in the field of internet security solutions for the BFSI (banks, financial services, insurance) sector.

At Uniken, they believe that innovation is not about revamping your existing product line. Instead, it is about inclusive innovation that has the ability to bring about social and economic changes. It's not that difficult, they make you believe. ***Small Enterprise India.com*** speaks to **S anjay Deshpande**

***Chief Innovation Office and CEO***  
of Uniken and digs into the details.

The Interview Excerpts:

**SEI: Is there a future for innovation in India?**

**Sanjay Deshpande:** We firmly believe that the future of innovation in India is bright. However, this future is not immediate. It's a long journey and will take at least 15-20 years before the country starts seeing glimpses of a mature, innovation-driven society. We have the talent, the raw material, but we lack the environment and a culture that encourages and rewards innovators. It is a challenge that we have to overcome as a society. Individuals in our country are still subjected to strong peer pressure to be someone that they may not want to be. They cannot explore their true self due to the way society looks at independent thinkers. The future is definitely bright, but has to be built one step at a time.

**Do you think investments are a problem when it comes to innovation? If yes, what has been your strategy to tide over that problem?**

Investments, or for that matter any resource is always a challenge for any new concept/company. In India, it is relatively easier (yet not easy) to get funds between USD 10,000 to USD 100,000 but extremely difficult to get the next round of fund, especially in the USD 100,000 to USD 2 Million range to scale up the business. More than investors, we have focused on getting customers (early adopters). They are our true 'investors'. We firmly believed in bootstrapping our innovation strategy so we have a business unit that focuses on providing Innovation Consulting Services, the profits generated from this unit is what funds our R&D. We have been able to develop a sustainable innovation life cycle. We believe in the concept of "get a paying early adopter first before you build the prototype" model. All our concepts have early adopters and they PAY!!

**Please elaborate on some of your products that have taken a lead and done something out of the box.**

One of our first innovations - a next generation internet security infrastructure technology "VIRTUAL PRIVATE SECURE INTERNET" - has been successfully commercialized and is sold by one of our business units. This technology and the related products, has fundamentally changed the way one looks at internet security, it creates a virtual private internet between any two computing resources on the internet – based on a path-breaking Mutual Authentication Identity framework – Relative Identity. This technology has more than 500,000 end-users, currently used by some of the leading banks in India such as State Bank of India, Bank of India and multi-national banks like Standard Chartered Bank. More recently, our innovation in the field of energy solutions was selected as one of the TOP 50 innovations from 10,000 applications received by Lockheed Martin and Department of Science and Technology. This technology is a breakthrough in air-conditioning solutions.

### **Security-related technologies are changing at a rapid pace. Do you think this will slow down and stabilize at any point?**

Security technology, like an “organism”, has to continuously evolve and adapt to new threats and hence, this will continue to change, however, the nature of the change will be different, and one would see a trend towards solving the problem at the foundations rather than developing superficial solutions.

### **Institutions don't seem to be producing that many scientists anymore. Do you feel a dearth of a more driven workforce that is ready to take up the challenge?**

Our country lacks the scientific and political leadership that it needs to drive scientific innovation. It lacks the focus and the incentive structure that inspires, respects and rewards scientists. Our society's priorities are different - we tend to give extreme media attention to the members of the entertainment industry (bollywood and cricket!), more than scientists and citizens, who are developing solutions that impact human lives. Our society (hence the media) are reflections of our priorities. We need an innovation revolution in this country similar to the freedom struggle to make it a priority of the society. According to us, this will happen more due to necessity and with the right kind of leadership.

### **Any parting thought for budding innovators?**

Commercially viable innovation is possible in India - focus on the 'SALE' right from day one!