

Pioneers in the Most Affordable Tablets

Written by Rajeshkumar
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Datawind is the first Indian company to create a revolution in the affordable tablet computers segment in India. They are credited with the initiation of world's most affordable tablet computers with the launch of Aakash. Armed with technological strength, they are striving to connect the forgotten billions to the internet and have been working with various governments and not-for-profit organizations to bridge the digital divide. Besides Delhi, Datawind operates in Amritsar, London, Montreal and Mississauga.

SE talks to Mr. Suneet Singh Tuli, CEO, Datawind

Please explain your journey from small to big?

Creation of the brand UbiSlate has been significant and continues to be an exciting journey for us. The brand represents the core benefit and offering of DataWind – 'Ubiquitous Connectivity offered through a low cost web access and computing device'. Our patented technology helps us deliver internet faster wherever needed (through Wi-Fi or through cellular modem). That is where the 'Ubi' in UbiSlate originated from. Given the premise that our low cost android tablet computing device addresses the challenges of quality and access to education is where the

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'Slate' in UbiSlate arrives.

UbiSlate found its spark with the resounding success and interest in 'Aakash'. We created Aakash for the government as their key vehicle to address challenges of education; however the demand for this innovation propelled us to offer UbiSlate to audiences above and beyond.

UbiSlate is a global leading brand in low cost computing devices. With over 1.8million sold within the last 26months, UbiSlate enjoys a leader position in the top 2 tablet players in India and continues to generate excitement in 13 other countries including the US, UK, Canada, Mexico to name a few.

UbiSlate has created a new category of computing devices for the industry that simply focuses on fulfilling aspirations of customers at the Base of the Pyramid.

How do you see your business growth in India?

Ever since the launch of DATAWIND tablets in the country, the tablet market has grown exponentially. This is essentially because we've been able to surface a new customer segment that was lying dormant and lost all this while in the din of premium product segment. This is the forgotten billion, whose aspirations to join the digital age were being inhibited by the affordability price tag.

Customers enter into transactions with us for the value we deliver to them. They want affordable solutions and we deliver it. Our technology gives us the ability to offer 'optimized' products that is not only great on value and price but also representative of high-end technology. It is the right combination of price and feature set that has validated our performance in the low cost internet connectivity device segment, making us among the top 3 in tablet segment in India.

Datawind through launch of UbiSlates breached the affordability barrier for these budget conscious customers with low cost android tablets that deliver both quality and value at the most discernible price. So far we've placed close to 1.3 to 1.4 million devices. Our devices

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have found their way to the grass root communities in India and they are being used today for varied literacy missions and campaigns by several NGOs besides the everyday use.

Given the widespread adoption of technology and increased interest in this customer segment, we anticipate a consistent growth for the next couple of years. As we see it, we've only surfaced the tip of the iceberg and market for these low cost android tablets will grow as we up the ante with bundled in free internet.

How eventful was your entrepreneurial journey? What were the major challenges in your initial days? And what were the steps taken?

It has been an arduous one and continues to be exciting. While we had the necessary patents, the technology strength and a unique business model, we still came across a few challenges prior to launch of low cost android tablets. These ranged from arriving at the just right specs for the devices that would appeal to the customer, to pricing it just right and make it most affordable to putting in place a reliable supply chain backend that helps us deliver the ideal situation.

Now that we had the device ready and we were ready with our go-to-market program, the next significant challenge that we faced was convincing the market the potential of 'good enough' hardware to help people cross the digital divide. This was perhaps the biggest challenge in the journey of DataWind. We overcame this challenge with the opportunity that presented us in the form of Akash Tablet program for government of India.

It was the perfect opportunity, where we not only proved our belief in the success potential of 'good enough' tablets that provide connectivity but also proved to the market and the industry that achieving your aspirations to join the digital age needn't be expensive.

Ever since that launch and creation of a new segment, we have been steam rolling our way to ensure that we create greater access to our affordable devices.

We are now focused on carrier relationships to offer free internet with our devices as also expand geographically in the traditional and modern retail landscape to ensure that while

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greater access is created, we are at the same time able to drive costs further down for the end customer.

Just as we face challenges every day in our journey to help the forgotten billions connect to the internet, the recognition that we receive from time to time bolster our endeavor to do more.

What are the challenges you are facing now? And how these are being tackled?

As mentioned earlier, the market opportunity for tablets, simply put, is enormous and will continue to grow. The challenge on the other hand is absence of localized app environment. For any player to make a significant difference to the overall adoption of technology at the mass market level, the content and app ecosystem needs to keep pace with the dynamic consumer needs. The customers today are increasingly looking at affordable, knowledge rich and practical apps that would help them achieve their objectives of entertainment, productivity and empowerment. This is an area that requires a sharp focus.

Besides, the success on a local level can truly be envisioned when we would see creation of an electronics manufacturing microcosm that encourages local production and further reduces entry price point for the customers.

Government regulations, duty structure have been main challenges in the past. With the new Govt taking steps in the direction of 'all clearances under one roof' and fast track approvals, we are confident that the dream of 'Make in India' will actualize. Improved policies on manufacturing, duties, and skill development will enthuse players come to India for setting up their manufacturing units. Not only 'Make in India' but also 'Use Swadeshi' will also help produce low cost devices in bulk here.

What are the marketing strategies you are adopting to promote the brand?

Irrespective of their educational background, the customer and end users today are very much aware of their environment and they process information/communication very wisely. Our key focus is to deliver connected devices. We're tying up with wireless network operators to provide

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bundled connectivity solutions with our devices to help encourage mobile internet connectivity. Since our breakthrough web delivery platform allows for a superior web experience even on 2.5G networks in India, anytime/anywhere, the ability to offer that bundled with our devices will offer a real alternative in the tablet market.

In addition to connectivity, we continue focusing on price and driving price down to allow for greater affordability to the masses in India.

Future & expansions plans?

At Datawind, we are continuously engaged in design and development of devices and applications that help bridge the digital divide. We firmly believe that contextual application of technology is the only way to close the chasm between the educated and the deprived. Moving forward, we intend to roll out more devices and integrated solutions that address the educational segment. We are constantly on the look-out for partnerships and collaboration for content and app development specifically in the educational space. As in the past, we will bring free world class quality educational content for learners across age groups and their academic areas of interest.