

At a time when parents and youngsters, fresh out of college consider 'What next' and come up with the response 'Join an MNC!' But few, like *Sanjay Vijayakumar*, CEO, *MobME*, opt the alternative and with determination move forward to be an entrepreneur. And within months of the startup, they are in the news and bag recognition, for creating innovative products! *Resmi Jaimon* finds out more.

You have come with an innovative and useful product for the police force. Share with us the details.

Mobile Crime and Accident Reporting Platform (MCARP) is a solution for the police to tackle crime, accidents and traffic issues. Since there is visual evidence, this solution is more effective. MCARP was launched in January 2009. Today, the fourteen flying squads in Kochi rely on MCARP for reporting traffic accidents, crime and similar problems. In the past five months, the force has uploaded over 5000 photos.

Though initially conceived for traffic accidents reporting, the technology was found to be of higher potential usage in crime investigation, digital FIR recordings, and digital recording of arrests, etc. It has also been recommended for additional technology development like streaming videos, GPS mapping, audio recordings, etc.

The advantage of MCARP is that it helps the police with visual evidence, for incidents such as riots and crimes. We use our exclusive 'MobShare' technology for MCARP.

Q. What exactly is MobShare technology?

'Mobshare' is mobile-photo sharing technology, which allows broadcast of photos between mobile-to-mobile and mobile and the Internet. The mobile market has great potential in India. The projected market size is 500 million users/handsets over the next few years. We noticed user-generated content dies out in India. When the memory is full, people tend to delete the existing photos. So, we worked on a solution to transfer or



STRIKING OUT YOUNG – SANJAY VIJAYAKUMAR, CEO, MOBME

upload these photos to networking sites like Orkut or Facebook and post them onto blogs. It was with this idea the MobShare platform was launched. Using this technology, photos in digital format can be transferred to the online sites or blogs.

Q. What other solutions do you deal with?

We have developed several core network elements for telecom operators in open source. This is being combined with intelligent and automated systems to provide completely managed services for telecom operators. Services are basically targeted at customer acquisition, customer retention and increasing ARPUs, and making use of SMS, voice and USSD solutions.

We have plans to expand our existing BlueZones, which are hotspots interconnected via the MobShare platform forming a smaller network of its own. Through a BlueZone, a person sitting in a BlueZone in Chennai can chat with another person sitting in a BlueZone in Mumbai. Our plan is to cover 5000 locations across 200 cities by the year 2010. This will then be the largest network of interconnected Bluetooth hotspots.

Also, we have tied up with Zoom TV, Autocar and other content publishers to provide rich content alerts on Airtel, using our award-winning platform, Mobshare.

Q. You started up when you were still in college. What were the reasons, which prompted you to be your own boss?

The three of us – Sony Joy (COO), Vivek Steve Francis (CFO) and I were students of Government College of Engineering, Thiruvananthapuram, when we started selling BPL recharge coupons and mobile SIMs. In three months, we made Rs. 8 lakhs. And we spent four lakhs partying and for such activities. When we were in the third year of college, we wanted to be independent. All were placed in multinational companies through campus interviews. However, there was no fun in getting jobs. I believe one should either start a firm at 40, with 20 years of experience to look behind or start a firm at 20, when you haven't tasted failure. And we decided to create jobs for ourselves as well as for others.

Q. What does innovation mean to you?

I can narrate this with an example of how we came up with an innovative solution while in the seventh semester of college. We created Open Voice, a voice platform package for operators. Next, we walked into a Vodafone data centre and made a server in Asterisk. Till then, we hadn't seen a data centre or the technology behind it. Yet, we found a solution and the service went live. Instead of server-class hardware, Windows and other proprietary software, we used a desktop PC, Linux and the Asterisk open source IP PBX engine and toolkit to deploy Asterisk in a carrier network. To our joy, we were successful in cutting the cost by 400 per cent, in comparison to the competitor's product. And this is what innovation is to us!

Q. In which way do you think, an entrepreneur's life is better than being an employee of an MNC? Have you ever regretted being an entrepreneur/or have you missed out anything for choosing business at such a young age?

Being an entrepreneur has been one the best things we have done. It is great to have a team, which believes in each other, and work with a common vision to make our own decisions.

The social change we have been able to make from starting in college, raise angel funding, being able to give employment to 40 people across Cochin, Mumbai and Delhi and being rated by Nasscom as India's most 'Innovative Startup' gives us a lot of courage to do more.

Q. What exactly is your daily schedule like?

I generally spend two weeks in Delhi, a week in Mumbai and a week between Bangalore, Cochin and Trivandrum. This is because you have to continuously interact with the clients to be in business and grow with them. Occasional trips to trade expos at Barcelona and Dubai are done to get real exposure with what happens internationally in our domain – Telecom.

As any entrepreneur, we are working 24X7. Even while sleeping, all of us are thinking on what next. With risk and uncertainty as your companions, there is hardly an hour going by without thinking about work.

Q. As an entrepreneur, what have you learnt so far?

The density of learning as an entrepreneur is very thick. The amount of things we have learnt individually and collectively is amazing as you are dealing with real people, real money, and real situations. I have learnt that there is so much to learn more; the journey has just started for all of us.

Q. You have won several recognitions in a short span of time. Which were they?

Mobme has won the title Nasscom's 'Most Innovative Startup in India for 2008,' ISBA's 'Best ICT Startup,' Wall Street's list of 10 start-ups to watch out for in 2008, Marico Innovation Awards in 2008 and Lockheed Martin India Innovates in 2007.

Q. What are your hobbies? Did any of your hobbies help you at work?

Am extremely passionate about basketball and I have played State/National and University level basketball captaining the team. This has helped me a lot – being a team player and able to lead a team, handle pressure situations and, more importantly, being able to overcome failures.

The biggest asset, however, was the eight-month Naval Officer Training I had at Naval Academy Goa, and Naval Engineering College. The amount of confidence they drive into you is amazing; they teach you that nothing in life is impossible.

Q. Share with us the factors that have contributed to your success.

It would be too early to call us a success in terms of what we have done, but yes – if you mean a campus startup successfully transitioning into an aggressive fast growth SME – we have moved into that league.

The team has been the most critical element right from our mentors to core management, investors and engineers – the sleepless nights and tireless days. The team, its passion and innovation melting in a pot to create a breed that lives like nomads and works like bulls has been the biggest contributor to our growth. ■