Visionary Entrepreneur who Encashed Pandemic to Launch Startup

Muralidharan Thoykkat
A Continuous Drive Towards Excellence

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HIGHLIGHTS
- Spreads across 7 acres area
- Operating in 3 shifts – 750 employees
- 2 production lines - Current capacity - 3000MT/Month
- 9 products with various cream varieties
- Consistently delivering high class quality products
- Strong management, commitment & disciplined workmen are key factors for success

CSR ACTIVITIES
- Sponsored 1 lac litre capacity drinking water tank in Abban Kuppe village
- Monthly feeding of orphanage children
- Text book & note books distribution for school children

PRODUCTS
- Kwality Glucose
- Tiger Glucose
- Bourbon
- Good Day-Cashew
- Good Day-Butter
- Tiger Krunch
- Milk Bikis
- Milk Cream
- Treat Creams

Award and Recognition
- IMC Ramakrishna Bajaj National Quality Award 2011
- Business Profitability Partnership Award, 2012 from BIL
- Rotary BSE SME National award for excellence, 2012
- Good Day Gold League Gold Trophy Award 2013
- 2nd Place in Everyday Perfect Good Day Contest 2014
- Best Good Day Cashew manufacturing unit, Perfect Good Day Contest 2015.

Global Recognition by AIB International
Paramount added another feather in its cap when it was adjudged the 1st Britannia CP unit to get AIB Recognition in India scoring 820 out of 1000 in February 2018. AIB is considered as one of the stringent Food Safety norms across the globe.

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Top 3 revolutionary Tech Brands that got featured in Shark Tank

In the last few months, Shark Tank India has become one of the most popular shows in the country. Besides the humour and overall entertainment that the show offers, one of the prime reasons for its popularity could be attributed to the fact that entrepreneurship has become a dinner-table conversation in the country. People have understood the importance of seemingly small and funny ideas and how these could be converted into big businesses. The show is often touted as a crash course on entrepreneurship.

Ashneer Grover, co-founder of BharatPe, Aman Gupta, co-founder and CMO of boAt, Anupam Mittal, founder and CEO of Shaadi.com, and People Group are investors spearheading the show.

The expert panel comprises of Ghazal Alagh, MamaEarth's co-founder and CEO, Namita Thapar, Emcure Pharmaceuticals' executive director, and Peyush Bansal, Lenskart's co-founder and CEO. SUGAR cosmetics CEO and Co-Founder Vineeta Singh. The inputs of these industry bigwigs could prove as a great asset for the young entrepreneurs watching and participants of the show. The show has managed to break a number of stereotypes related to the role of women in businesses, family business combinations, and the availability of business ideas in rural India.

This article, however, is about the pitchers who stood out from the crowd and got the attention of the so-called sharks and audiences alike for their business idea and execution.

Proxgy

Proxgy is a global service that provides real-time multi-way collaboration between people located across the globe with a distinct 10X advantage over any existing solutions. Using its patented industrial IoT hardware, Sensory layer and custom software layer, Proxgy achieves virtual teleportation and enables remote assistance in a more immersive, collaborative, handsfree and intelligent manner. Proxgy has received validation for its technology and hardware from various industries for numerous use cases including shopping, tourism, real estate viewing, warehousing, remote video KYC, mining, High value delivery, monitoring, and more. On SharkTank, the start-up earned a-crore investment for a 10% stake in the company.

Aliste Technologies

Aliste Technologies claims to provide the most incredible home automation solutions on the market, with the largest load-bearing ability and the fastest response rate in the business. Thanks to full-end analytics, the tools are inexpensive and help customers save money on their bills. Geo-tracking, which allows users to leave their homes without having to worry about electronic appliances that have been turned on, automated switchboards, voice assistant control, smart Lock, IR Blaster, RGB Controller, Motion Detector, Touch Panel, CCTV Camera, Wave Sensor, and Smart Gate are among the services available. The company's goal is to make the home entirely digital.

PlayBox TV

Modern issues necessitate modern answers. PlayBox TV provided one such solution. It allows you to purchase several OTT platform memberships at a discounted rate. As a result, you can buy just one using this site rather than purchasing a million subscriptions. It can also be used to replace several TV remote controls with a single one. The show has enabled something absent in Indian TV, i.e. showcasing entrepreneurship talent. It is a positive step towards promoting good business ideas and at the same time underlining the flaws in frivolous proposals and ideas. Overall, the mentioned ideas could be considered stand-out performances in the show's first season.
Contrary to popular belief, the largely unorganized and underserved MSME sector turned out to be a better bet for lending, than large corporates. At a NPA rate of 12.5% they were significantly better than large corporates who had a NPA rate of 19.7%. The total lending of ₹64.45 lakh crore (as of January 2020) to businesses in India, of which MSMEs accounted for ₹17.75-lakh-crore credit exposure.

The Deployment of Gross Bank Credit to MSMEs and outstanding as on 31 Dec, 2021 was Rs. 4,47,566 crores, up from Rs. 3,87,220 crores as on 26 Mar, 2021. The MSME sector contributes 30% to the national GDP and 45.9% to the total exports by the country. However, despite this impressive numbers Brick-and-mortar banks cover hardly 15% of the total MSMEs in India and a large section of this segment remains out of the purview of banking network in the country. Hence, it has been found that promoters of more than 22 million MSMEs in India must depend on their own funds or loans from friends and families for the capital requirement. Such sources remain often inadequate or expensive.

These are some major findings of a report titled MICRO, SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (MSMEs): CHANGING LANDSCAPE released by Infomerics Valuation and Rating Pvt Ltd., the well-known SEBI-registered and RBI-accredited financial services credit rating company.

The report also mentions that MSME segment in India is facing a huge addressable credit gap which is Rs. 25.8 trillion & growing 37% CAGR. Total addressable market demand by the MSME sector is approximately Rs. 37 trillion. Banks, other institutions, and NBFCs supplies to the MSME sector are about Rs. 10.9 trillion.

As on 24 February 2022, there was 73,42,646 Udyam Registration, 42,660 projects (PMEGP), 5,97,569 proposals approved (CGTMSE), 2,790 Khadi Institutions (KVIC), 486 MSE CDP (CFC/ID Projects) and 3500 Export Target (Coir Board).

Over 6 crore MSME units in India employ about 11 crore people. There are many women-led enterprises in rural, urban, and semi-urban areas that contribute over 20% of the total MSMEs with the scope for acting as a catalyst for economic growth across the geographic, social, and cultural strata of the country.

Government interventions

The Government is taking several measures to minimize the credit gap in MSMEs operating in the informal and unorganized sector the ambit of formal lending through registration under 'Udyam Portal'. The enterprises registering through this portal can avail the benefits of schemes of the Ministry of MSMEs and Priority Sector Lending (PSL) from banks.
Meet Muralidharan Thoykkat, fondly known as Murali, the man of many talents and donning many hats. He has been a Commodity Trader for more than 3 decades. His journey started way back in the early eighties when the roads he was set to tread were bumpy and rough. But his confidence to make his way come what may kept inspiring him and steering him slowly towards success and more. “It must have taken a decade or so to make me stronger with abilities to cross level after level. It was only in the early 90s that saw me holding responsible positions,” recalls Murali wearing full-blooded smile on his face.

His story is the story of growth and guts, of sweat and blood, progress and perseverance which won him laurels speaking of his uncanny abilities. He knows the pulse of the commodities and can predict with spontaneous ease which way the wind will blow. “It is not all inborn but the result of experience and hard work gained over long four decades. You only have to keep your eyes and ears wide open. But maybe I learnt to smell things”, says he with confidence oozing out from his face.
Door of opportunities

When the door of opportunities flung open for Murali, he didn’t look back and immersed himself in work and harder work. He has since worked with large corporate conglomerates in steel and steel raw materials, producers of solid fuels and multi-billion trading companies as a profit-center head. Murali is currently heading a large Bauxite Mining Company from Gujarat as CEO and Managing Director in addition to trading of other commodities such as Steel, Steel Raw Materials etc. However, marketing of coal is his forte, as he has todate sold and exported millions of tons of coal to India, China and Thailand.

Presently, he is in an independent leadership role as Managing Director & CEO of Caravan Resources Pvt Ltd., an international marketing and trading company in India. After China almost left with surmounting aversion of exporting of Bauxite from India to China, Murali smelled the opportunity got into interlocutory role and started the export of Bauxite following his meaningful dialogues with the stakeholders and presentations at Asian Metal Conference in Jinan in 2018.

Acknowledging Murali’s remarkable abilities and mastery, the banking and financial institutions including index rating companies for solid fuels and agro commodities made it a point to often turn to Murali for his expert advice on pricing formulation and price movements of these commodities. No wonder, banking institutions have often taken a weekly update from him on these commodities in a tribute to Murali’s position as a standalone adviser of a high credibility.

He has been conferred with the prestigious Award - Entrepreneur of the Year 2020 in ‘Recognition of Outstanding Professional Achievement & Inspiring Social Contributions’ by the Indian Achievers’ Forum, New Delhi.

Muralidharan Thoykkat in an email interaction with SME WORLD:

You have been into the business for over 4 decades with a varied experience; what changes you have witnessed in the business ecosystem?

Yes, I have been business for almost 4 decades which afforded me varied experience. I started as a backup marketing management, business development and moved up the ladder over a period of time. The changes in the 4 decades have been very enormous as much as that I would like to describe it from “typewriter & telex” era to palmtop or mobile app-oriented technology. This transition speaks volumes on the businesses then and now. The opportunities we get now are far more superior and advanced than the snail pace and anxiety we witnessed 20-30 years ago. I always felt when I started my career, government restrictions and opportunities for doing business with ease was on a difficult wicket. Right now, the liberalization has taken a fast forward approach and doing business has attained new dimensions.

How has been your experience in dealing with the corporate?

I have never felt any uneasiness to deal with the corporate in as much as that mingling with them for almost 4 decades. In my case, I developed cordial relationships with the strong and the mighty. This cult stemmed out my sheer sincerity in dealing with them in various forums and faculties from time to time.

Kindly describe your entrepreneurial journey over the years?

My entrepreneurial journey has been quite eventful. As recent as the last three years I was working on a senior position in Singapore as CEO of a large trading company- a 100% owned by a public listed in the main board Singapore Stock Exchange. However, a wish was slowly simmering within to come back to India to do something of my own with the kind of knowledge I gained over a period of decades-long working.

My first venture Caravan Resources Pvt Ltd was formed as an international commodity trading company for Steel and Steel raw materials, Aluminium and Aluminium raw materials, Cement and Cement raw materials, Fertilisers and Fertilisers raw materials, Coal, minerals and ores. We are associated with large corporate conglomerates such as Tata Steel, Vedanta Ltd, Murugappa groups, Zuari Cements, Dalmia India Ltd. and others likeCellMark India Pvt Ltd, Swedan, Maadan Aluminium, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Harrison Malayalam Ltd. and internally we have excellent client deal having worked with them for several years.

During the time when Covid-19 was getting into peak and when survival for many enterprises was difficult especially startups, mine was a different story altogether. Covid-19 did never frighten me because I began to saw opportunities in the difficult times as my confidence remained unshaken.
Due to some family compulsions I had to come home in Kerala in February 2021 and got locked up. It was time when international markets almost reached a standstill process and the only alternative was to do business in India. That is the reason I thought of forming a company for domestic trade thereby floating a new company namely Caravan Unisafe Pvt. Ltd. I was always under a strong impression and belief that the construction industry will definitely move up because of:

a) Older and dilapidated buildings will need to be replaced.

b) With population expansion happening in India, new hutments and infrastructure will take place thereby throwing opportunities for any entrepreneur getting into construction raw materials.

c) Infrastructure development by the Government of India will get underway.

That is how I thought I should create a company which should be one stop shop for all construction raw materials. This company is now representing:

1. Tata Steel Ltd for Tata steel Doors and Windows
2. Heidelberg’s Zuari Cement Ltd
3. ARS for steel rebars
4. TI macho for Steel rebars from INR329 billion Murugappa Group conglomerate.
5. Berger paints
6. Dalmia India Bharath

In addition to this we are also focused in Merger and accomsquisition (M&A).

What are major challenges you faced along the way and how did you overcome these?

The major challenge I could see is that the banks not coming forward to give finance to any new project in India. This culture needs to change and the cumbersome and tough procedure always discourage a new entrepreneur and the new enterprise making their journey thorny and difficult. Banks need to adopt liberal attitude and must become industry-friendly affording the much needed impetus to the entrepreneurs’ journey.

What is smooth and easier- selling to India or exporting overseas? Kindly explain.

Selling in India and exporting overseas has a different navigational procedure. However, I have always felt bringing foreign exchange to our country is always good. For selling in India one needs an extremely price sensitiveness while for export it is more on the quality to meet the international standards.

As a professional with achievements, what made you change platform in quick succession- from working with corporate to exporting coal to heading company in Singapore to mining?

The professional achievements working in different areas such as working with corporate and trading of commodities including Coal, minerals and ores based in Singapore, for meticulous meritocracy in centralizing and shipping where as heading a mining company is needed to put in a lot of management thinking to a level of heading a manufacturing unit. Trading a commodity, one has to be very careful with pricing Index and any sudden upward momentum can bring in heavy losses in commodity, physical trading. When trade happens in Singapore it’s all rule book oriented and one cannot bend or break any rules.

What are your views on the fresh breed of professionals being churned out by B-schools in India and overseas looking for fat packages for settling down in big companies rather than choosing entrepreneurship?

I always feel the top 10% layers of professionals churned out from business schools from India and overseas are definitely Admiralty, shipping trade and commerce need to move ahead with great disciplines and ease in Singapore.
successful and can take over the positions and succeed.
The young breed of professionals is no doubt fast in their approach but most of them are invariably in a hurry to make fast buck. They easily lack patience or perseverance. They believe in ‘2-minute-noodles’ management. Earning degrees from plus institutions is one thing while facing life and livelihood is another.

What will be your advice to the young professionals in a hurry to embrace success and make quick bucks?

My advice to young professionals would be that they should keep up at optimum levels of their patience and perseverance so as to succeed in their mission. They should glide and navigate seeing the wealth forecast of the global trade. They generally see what comes out first and probably miss out what is coming in the final stage.

Describe the story of ‘Murali’ in a few words.
The desire to succeed in life was there from my childhood! The inhibitions and intuitions always sintered my thought process to elongate myself, adjust to situations and amalgamate success! The leadership quality I imbibed having got an opportunity to work with great Management practitioners, administrators, business personalities. Born in a small village namely Ramassery, Palakkad in Kerala State, I studied throughout in village government school. I always had the eagerness to be watchful of situations and had high observing power since my childhood itself. The muddy road outside my house used to become high flowing river during high monsoons. I used to make small paper boats and keep it flowing along with rainy water. I used to flow my paper boat until it vanished or crushed inside big potholes on the road naturally created in the monsoon rains during her flow along on the temporary river on the road created by sudden downpouring of monsoons!!! Those were the moments that nurtured within me a desire to engage in shipping, trade and commerce and as the fate would have it, the business of shipping trade in reality would become my forte.

I feel lucky with my family, my wife Pushpa, a simple housewife but a qualified jewelry designer. My only child, my son Nitin is a Senior Creative Producer and Director of one of the top 3 Television Broadcasting Channels!

Life is good. Almighty has been kind.
Ashwani Awasthi has over 21 years experience in infrastructure and project management, facility management, strategic planning, and organisational and human resource management across varied industries.

Prior to joining RICS, Ashwani was chief administrative officer with Pramerica BHI Advisors, a US-based real estate advisory and investment management company.

Wide experience

Previously Ashwani also worked as a chief operating officer with Helix Financial India (now Black Rock Solutions) where he was responsible for overall strategy of the offshore operations, implementation, compliance and administrative matters of the company. Ashwani was the first employee hired by Helix Financial to help setup its operations in India and worked to establish it as one of the leading professional services firm in the real estate and capital markets arena. Previously Ashwani also worked as a senior manager with Convergys India Services and Jones Lang LaSalle where he was responsible for setting up and managing large corporate infrastructures. There his main responsibilities included site identification, project management and facilities management.
Ashwani is a start-up specialist and has helped organisations such as Convergys India Services, Jones Lang LaSalle and BlackRock Solutions India to grow from a start-up organisation to large profitable ventures.

Ashwani Awasthi in an email interaction with SME WORLD:

Kindly explain the underline concept on which the RICS School of Built Environment works.

India lacked structured education in construction management, real estate management and infrastructure management to meet the industry demands, resulting in civil engineers, architects, and other aspirants joining the industry without the requisite skillsets and having to learn them on the job. Thus, the need for industry-ready professionals was identified to assist the sector which was rapidly growing and RICS School of Built Environment was established in response to a strong call from the industry to address the skills gap. It is the only school in India offering competency-based programs in the built environment sector.

What is the Built Environment industry scenario in India?

The key to generating growth is to embrace change and new possibilities. With a marketplace that is rising in competitiveness and developers who are more eager to alter the way things are done, India's built environment industry offers tremendous untapped potential. One of the major demands is in the affordable housing category, and the government has set an ambitious objective of supplying 22 million houses by 2024 through different programmes such as PMAY and credit subsidies under its "Housing for All" programme.

By 2025, India's construction industry is projected to be worth $1.4 trillion.

Cities Will Drive Growth - The urban population will contribute 75% of GDP (up from 63%), and 68 cities will have a population of more than one million people, up from 42 currently. The Indian real estate industry is predicted to be worth $1 trillion by 2030, accounting for 13% of India's GDP.

India has a $1.4 trillion infrastructure investment budget under NIP, with 24 per cent going to renewable energy, 19 per cent going to roads and highways, 16 per cent going to urban infrastructure, and 13 per cent going to railroads.

The prospects and future of built environment in India is very bright with large public and private capital investments chasing various projects in the years to come.

What are the types of Built Environment?

The Built Environment is a relatively new way of thinking about the design, building, and management of man-made structures. It is a man-made environment that provides a place for human activities, ranging from buildings and parks to neighbourhoods and cities, and can frequently contain auxiliary infrastructure such as water supply and electricity networks.

It has residential buildings, office buildings, roads, pavements, malls, hotels, sports complexes, highways, airports, railways and transit systems, bridges etc are examples of places and spaces built or modified by people. On a daily basis, it is a framework in which people live, work, and entertain. The built environment also promotes children’s and young people's development and well-being, as well as healthier communities.

What is the role of technology in BE?

Emerging technology is radically transforming the sector. New technologies are playing an important role in the sector's development by bringing in major advancements in the Built Environment. They are reshaping cities from the ground up at a faster growth rate. These tremendous technological developments are increasing efficiency and production at every level, from planning to construction.

Artificial intelligence, drones, robots, and virtual reality are just a few of the emerging technologies that have a big influence on the BE sector.

Artificial intelligence (AI) along with machine learning (ML), is reshaping outputs throughout the world and is among the most potent and ground-breaking technologies to revolutionise marketplaces in recent times.

Drones are becoming increasingly popular in the construction business and it's usage is expected to multiply many times in the coming years. Drones are often used to do site surveys, while augmented and virtual reality allows for real estate site tours. In addition to these, robotics is assisting in the automatic completion of a complicated series of tasks.

It is expected that new technological solutions such as 3D printing (large-scale manufacturing of dwellings) would transform the way
construction is done during the next decade. 

**What kind of technologies the institute is using to educate students?**

There are different dimensions to the project management and quantity surveying programs run at RICS SBE wherein one dimension is the technology interface. RICS SBE offers a plethora of software to educate the students. Scheduling and monitoring courses are equipped with software such as MS Project, Primavera and TILOS. Cost management courses are equipped with software such as CostX, Candy CCS, P6 Risk analysis. RICS SBE educates its students with Building Information Modelling (BIM) platforms through Revit, ArchiCAD and Navisworks. @Risk software is covered in the Risk management course taught to the students.

Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Web Portals, Project Information Management Systems, Digital Fabrication (3D printing), Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR); Digital Twin; Developing simple 3D modelling techniques; Digital documentation techniques; Digital communication techniques are discussed in Digital Built Environment course. Emerging methods and technologies in construction such as offsite, tall buildings, prestressed and prefabricated technology etc are taught to SBE students. In addition to the above emerging Tools & Techniques in Data Science and its application in the built environment is taught to students with big data visualisation techniques and colour management using MS Excel and R Studio. MS office (excel and PowerPoint) is utilised by the students for designing their assignments and submissions in every course.

**What is the response of students towards Built Environment studies?**

The response of the students, in the beginning, was very slow as there were no structured education programs in the built environment domain when we started, barring some technical courses like engineering, architecture, and planning. Hence when the programs in construction management, real estate management, quantity surveying and facilities management were launched by RICS SBE, not very many students opted for these programs due to a lack of awareness. However, over the years with a consistent awareness effort by us, we have not only created awareness about the programs that we deliver from RICS SBE but have also made students aware of the career prospects in the built environment. It is heartening to note that now students have started considering the built environment as their career of choice and more and more students are now opting for built environment courses delivered by various academic institutions across the country.

To mention a few benefits, we provide world-class faculty, tailored curriculum, international exposure, cutting-edge technology, assistance from industry pioneers, experience-based learning, and a dual-accredited degree.

Today, our graduates work in leading domestic and international firms as senior and mid-senior executives. Since the industry is aware of the RICS standards, our students get placed without any hassle.

**What is the scope and potential India holds for BE industry?**

India is on a rapid growth path and BE industry will have to play a critical role in India's growth journey. No country can grow without a strong infrastructure development hence built environment will remain the focal point in the years to come. Besides the rapid urbanization and industrialization, the need to develop new highways, airports, ports, waterways, smart cities, power, and communication infrastructure will give a huge impetus to the built environment industry in the years to come.

To achieve this planned infrastructure, over the next decade India will require almost 44 million built environment specialists. Given the present shortage of competent built environment experts, the existing demand-supply gap would be between 82 to 86 per cent, opening large job opportunities for skilled professionals.

**What is the road map for RICS SBE and its growth trajectory?**

RICS SBE was set up to address the skills gap that existed in the built environment industry and is doing a phenomenal job in bridging this gap. The industry has been a great support in helping us develop and deliver the competency-based curriculum and I am happy to share that our graduates, who are provided with technical and managerial skills alongwith the RICS values are very warmly welcomed by the industry. We are going at a good pace in our student acquisition efforts and will look forward to providing
approx. 1000 competent and skilled professionals every year to the industry in the future to meet its growth requirement.

RICS SBE along with RICS is also helping the existing workforce in the industry to upskill through various training activities being conducted by us. This is an effort to help the industry in enhancing their productivity by training their employees in the latest technology and management techniques used in the built environment. We are planning to launch our programs in an online mode as well for the working professionals who cannot leave their job and be full time on campus. This will help them in upgrading their skills and academic qualification to take on more senior roles and responsibilities in the industry.

Additionally, RICS SBE is engaging with the government and industry in research activities to help find a solution to some of the complex problems faced by the industry. We endeavour to make RICS SBE the key destination for the industry to meet their resourcing requirements along with finding research and consulting on some of the challenges faced by the industry.

**Let us know about the demand for industry-ready professionals?**

Given the outlook for economic growth and the rise of the built environment industry, there is a significant need for industry-ready professionals. To cope with the pace of development needed industry cannot afford too much training time for the entry-level professionals and would need them to be fit for purpose from the day they join the organization.

India has an annual need of 4.4 million built environment professionals and would further need 44 million professionals over the next decade. I believe, the approach RICS SBE has adopted, is important for more academic institutions to take that route and collaborate with the industry to meet prepare fit for purpose professionals who can be productive from the day they join their respective organizations.

**Do you have any competition?**

As discussed above, RICS SBE is India's first and only school to have PMI and RICS accreditations. MBA Construction Management is the first-ever program in India to be accredited by GAC-PMI and MBA in Real Estate, Construction Management, and Quantity Surveying are the only RICS accredited programs in the country. There is no other institution in India to provide the techno-managerial skills required by the industry. We provide specialized, competency-based programmes that focus on practice-based learning and are aligned to the market needs.

**What is the USP of RICS SBE?**

RICS SBE is India's first built environment education school that offers RICS and PMI international accreditations, enabling students to become globally employable and eligible to enrol as RICS members. The school is the only institution that offers practice-based education from undergraduate to doctoral level.

**What solutions you would suggest to the low-budget schools unable to afford tech-savvy infrastructure?**

The government is investing in digital infrastructure to reduce the cost of education.

Digital universities named 'DESH-Stack portal' for online learning are being set up to help various government-sponsored education institutes across the country to provide digital tech-savvy courses. Additionally, each educational institution should provide a need-based scholarship to support the students who cannot afford the payment of high fees.
The 9th World Water Forum took place in Dakar, Senegal from 21-26 March 2022, under the theme: 'Water Security for Peace and Development'. It is the first time that an international event of this magnitude has been organized in sub-Saharan Africa. The location was aptly chosen as Africa faces acute challenges of universal access to water and sanitation while also battling the challenges of poverty and growing pressures related to climate change, rapid population growth, uncontrolled urbanization, pollution, etc.

The Grand Opening Ceremony was attended by more than 2000 participants from all over the world. The ceremony was graced by His Excellency Macky Sall, President of the Republic of Senegal. In the presence of his counterparts from Ethiopia, Congo, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania, the Vice-President of Gambia, the President of the World Water Council, Mr Loïc Fauchon, the President of the World Bank, the Director-General of UNESCO and other participants from the water community all over the world. The Forum was opened by H.E. Macky Sall, he noted that water is at the beginning and at the end of life and is important for peace, development and security in Africa, as well as globally. The President invited the international community to pay attention to water issues and asked participants to do everything to meet the expectations of the forum. Mr Loïc Fauchon, President of the World Water Council and co-organizer of the Forum spoke at the opening ceremony and reiterated calls for all to work together to combat global water challenges and to adopt dialogue and cooperation to bring an end to water conflicts. He also called for the international community to set up a blue fund to help prevent the extreme shocks imposed by climate change.

The opening ceremony also had speeches from One of the most prestigious and globally recognized prizes 'The Hassan II World Water Prize' was given to the Organisation for the Development of the Senegal River (OMVS). It contributes to creating global awareness and taking concrete measures to promote the cause of water.
Development’. He talked about India’s challenges in the water sector and explained how India has dealt with it through programmes like the Swachh Bharat Mission, Jal Jeevan Mission envisioned by PM Narendra Modi. Ms. Debashree Mukherjee, Additional secretary, Jal Shakti ministry also spoke during the Forum on water supply and sanitation where she showcased India’s successful endeavours to improve the water supply and sanitation situation in the country.

As a cherry on the cake for India, The Kyoto World Water Grand Prize worth 2 million Yen has been awarded to an Indian structure called ‘Pragati’. The Kyoto World Water Grand Prize is jointly organised by the Japan Water Forum and the World Water Council.

India Water Foundation at the World Water Forum

India Water Foundation (IWF) had a big presence at the 9th World Water Forum. As Governor on the board of World Water Council, Dr. Arvind Kumar spoke as a panellist in the session on 'Participatory governance for rural water supply and sanitation' one of the thematic sessions of Rural Development’ Participatory governance for rural water supply and #sanitation'. Dr Arvind Kumar, elaborated "If the services of watersupply and sanitation are up to the acceptable standard then even the ruralcommunities would pay to avail them because paying for this is better than to incur the medical expense in lieu of these services. The session was organized by Mr Programme Solidarite Eau at the 9th World Water Forum on 21st March 2022.

Dr Arvind Kumar also spoke as a panellist in the thematic session on Localizing Multi-stakeholders partnership for Sustainable Resilient and Inclusive Water Resources Management in Africa and Asia. During his panel discussion he elaborated how we must encompass an integrated approach incorporating 'Transversal' shift interlinking vertical linkages between water-food-energy nexus with horizontal indicators like Heath, Education, Agriculture, Gender etc. must be weighed against efficiency, effectiveness and equity if we have to realize 2030 agenda. The thematic session was organized by #JapanWaterForum and #OECD on 23rd March 2022.

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, Union Minister of Jal Shakti, gave a presentation on 'Water for Peace and Development'. He talked about India’s challenges in the water sector and explained how India has dealt with it through programmes like the Swachh Bharat Mission, Jal Jeevan Mission envisioned by PM Narendra Modi.

India's Footprint at the World Water Forum

The Indian Government participated in a big way at the 9th World Water Forum. The Prime Minister was represented by a high-level delegation under the honourable Minister of Jal Shakti Sh. Gajendra Singh Shekhawat including officials from the ministry, Wapcos Ltd, a Government of India undertaking, state governments like Meghalaya sending a high-level delegation, more than 100 delegates attended from India like members of world water council, other states and agencies. The Jal Shakti Ministry showcased India's successful initiatives including, inter alia, success stories of the Swachh Bharat Mission, Jal Jeevan Mission, projects between India and Africa, via a country pavilion which was organised by Wapcos Ltd. The pavilion was visited by the President H.E. Macky Sall himself and was appreciated.

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Ms. Shweta Tyagi, Chief Functionary of IWF was part of a high-level panel discussion in the session on 'Systems approach to deliver water to people'.

Dr. Arvind Kumar organised and contributed to various high-level panels and sessions.
The objective of this session was to present a preliminary vision Systems Approach to Deliver Water to People and to solicit feedback from the broad water community on the vision. During the session Ms. Tyagi elaborated on how adopting an integrated approach instead of a sectoral approach for achieving and implementing SDGs and also stressed on how cooperation and coordination among various agencies is imperative to deliver water and sanitation facilities to all. The session was organized by the WorldWaterCouncil.

To commemorate India Water Foundation’s founding day, IWF organized a special session on ‘Ecosystem based Adaptation for Complete Water Security’ at the World Water Council boot at the Forum. The session was moderated by Mr. Atul Bagai, Head, UNEP India Office, other speakers in the session were Mr. Lifeleng Li, Director, FAO Land and Water Division, Mr. Piyush Dogra, Consultant World Bank and DrArvind Kumar President, IndiaWater Foundation. During the session Mr. AibanshingainSwer, OSD of MBDA MeghalayaGovernment presented the case study of Meghalaya during the session. The session was inspired by the latest book of DrArvind Kumar with Elsevier publications on EcosystemBasedAdaptation.

Looking to the Future
The 9th World Water Forum concluded with the release of The Dakar Declaration- A ‘Blue Deal’ for Water Security and Sanitation for Peace and Development aimed at guaranteeing access to water and sanitation for all, ensuring adequate financing and inclusive governance, and strengthening cooperation.

Through this declaration in four main areas, the aim is to accelerate the implementation of the right to drinking water and sanitation for all by providing appropriate legislative frameworks, said Abdoulaye Sène, Executive Secretary of the 9th World Forum. The declaration also emphasizes the need to mobilize all stakeholders through integrated and inclusive strategies. The Forum had a footfall of over 30,000 participants with over 3000 projects launched and 5000 contributions made. The Dakar 2022 has shown initiative, imagination, and dedication in placing various countries on the path leading to the improvement of the various indicators relating to water. This Forum has made the horizon clear and the road well marked towards the 10th World Water Forum which will be hosted by the Republic of Indonesia in 2024.

About Dr. Arvind Kumar
Dr Arvind Kumar is Governor, World Water Council and President, Founder of India Water Foundation, a non-profit organization and think tank established for generating a heightened public awareness at national level in India and sub-regional level in Asia, regarding water and its impact on human health, economic growth and environmental sustainability, Special Consultative Status with UN-ECOSOC, Observer Status Governing Body of UNEA, Observer Status with UNFCCC, Observer Status with UNCCD, CTCN membership for Southern Asia, member IUCN and member South Asia Network for Sustainable Development (SANS) platform of the SSSA office of UNESCAP.

He is a strategist and key-influencer in development sector with more than 26 years of experience, author, columnist, Water activist, and specializes in ecosystem-based adaptation, water-energy-food nexus, with specific emphasis on inter-linkages between water, environment and SDGs. He has published over 400 research articles and is a Ph.D. Defense Studies. He jointly edited a publication with SAC Dhaka titled “SAARC Outlook on Water-Energy-Food Nexus in SAARC Region”. Author of recently published book ‘United Nations: 75 and Beyond’ to commemorate 75 years of service of UN, and “Ecosystem Based Adaptation: Approaches to Sustainable Management of Aquatic Resources” a publication with Elsevier. Upcoming publication “India @75 and Beyond” releasing in April 2022.

He is member of the National Wetlands Committee, MoEF&CC, GOI, member Technical Advisory Committee for India’s Third National Communication and Biennial Update Reports to UNFCCC, member of the Meghalaya State Water Resources Council and Meghalaya council for Climate Change and Sustainable Development, Member of the General Body of CAPART, Member Working Group on Water Resources Development, Management and Efficient utilization to seek inputs for development agenda for New India @75, NITI Aayog, GOI.

Conferred with the Achievers Award for his exemplary contribution and commitment for protecting environment by India Eye IHRO in collaboration with UNIC for India & Bhutan on the occasion of World Environment Day 2017 in New Delhi, Water Digest Water Awards “Water Warriors - United for Water!” 2017-18 under the Category “BEST WATER NGO - WATER EDUCATION”.

www.smeworld.asia
4 Tech Startups that are using Conversational AI

During the pandemic many companies have started using artificial intelligence and cloud based service to give people a satisfaction of personal conversation, solving their issues. Conversational AI allow companies to give their users a feel personalized conversation leading to optimisation of communication across industries.

According to Markets and Markets, the global conversational AI market is expected to be worth $18.4 billion by 2026 from $6.8 billion in 2021, growing at a CAGR of 21.8 percent between 2021 and 2026. The market is constantly growing and evolving and is currently dominated by Big Data and Natural Language Processing (NLP).

Here are few startups that are using conversational AI with full potential:

**Gupshup**

Founded by IIT-Bombay alumni Beerud Sheth, smart messaging platform Gupshup is headquartered in the Silicon Valley, with a presence in India. It enables customer engaging messaging. According to its website, Gupshup powers over six billion messages per month. The conversational messaging startup entered the unicorn club in April last year. It is backed by marquee investors including Tiger Global, Think Investments, Harbor Spring Capital, Fidelity, and Malabar Investments, among others.

**VDO.AI**

VDO.AI founded in 2017, is a global advertising technology innovator, providing brands with intelligent high-impact solutions that win the war for consumer attention. Their solutions offer unparalleled monetization management solutions across CTV & OTT apps. They provide one-stop answers to drive the right outcomes for brands by combining creativity, reach, and targeting across devices. At VDO.AI, they think innovatively. They are diverse and celebrate each other’s achievements and knowledge. They believe that equality in the workplace drives progress and works as a catalyst to holistic growth. They are enabling meaningful connections between brand and users.

**Uniophore**

Uniophore, a conversational automation platform that are evolving conversations with the trifecta of voice AI, computer vision, and tonal emotion. With Uniophore, no matter who you are, where you are in the world, or which language or dialect you speak, our Conversational Automation Platform can deliver the most sophisticated, accurate, personalized, and automated customer experiences on the planet. A natural conversation. No frustration, just true understanding – including emotion and intent in real-time.

**Qure.ai**

Qure.ai was founded in the year 2016. This AI start-up aims to make health care more affordable and accessible with the use of artificial intelligence or AI. It is one of those artificial intelligence start-ups in India, that uses machine learning to build programs that aids in detecting illness patterns from medical photos. Qure.ai has successfully delivered code with any X-ray, CT scan, or MRI machine. It is one of the top AI start-ups in India, with a bright future ahead.
Ms. Pallavi Singh recently took up India Brand Licensing for White-Westinghouse. She has also been felicitated with the award - 'She-preneur to watch for in 2020', by the Entrepreneur India magazine. Pallavi is a fun-loving and fiercely independent womenpreneur.

She started her journey in the e-commerce sector back in the year 2013, when her idea to go online with SPPL’s first global licensed brand Kodak TV was looked upon with critique and scepticism. Mother to a young toddler, Pallavi has been bringing her baby to work since he was 45 days old. She prepared a nursery for him in office before joining back so she never felt she was not giving time to her child and at the same time, she did not want work to suffer, since SPPL was still in the expansion stage.

Pallavi Singh, Vice President, Super Plastronics Pvt. Ltd. (SPPL) (India brand Licensee of American consumer appliance brand -White-Westinghouse.)
SPPL today, is the country's largest consumer technology manufacturing (OEM), standing at a valuation of USD 120 Million and the only firm to obtain an official license from Google to Make Android TV's in India.

About Super Plastronics Pvt. Ltd. (SPPL):

SPPL is a manufacturing concern established in 1990 with its Head Office in Noida. Its initial business was plastic injection moulding which then graduated to the manufacturing of CRT TVs and LED TVs on a date. We were one of the largest manufacturers of CRT TV cabinets in the 90's and early 00's. Today it stands as one of India's foremost OEMs in CRT and LED Television makers. With 3 manufacturing plants in India located in Noida, Una and Jammu. SPPL has an employee strength of over 1000 across India and is expanding.

Currenty the company's leading brands are - Thomson Tv (under licensing contract with Europe's leading technology Technicolor SA), White-Westinghouse (America's leading consumer appliance brand), Kodak and Blaupunkt are available in 18,000 pin codes and has a service network in 19,000 pin codes.

Pallavi Singh in an email interaction with SME WORLD:

Kindly describe your entrepreneurial journey over the years.

My entrepreneurial journey over the years has been an amazing ride. We started an entire industry from scratch, that of bringing in franchises in India for completely new product categories. It was a big move to convince and have the confidence of globally acclaimed, trusted brands to come to India with a complete overhaul, which was to be executed and planned by us entirely.

It is a 24*7 job to be an entrepreneur and ensure that the company is considered as a leader in the industry across categories. The path has been nothing short of exciting and creative. This journey also gave us the opportunity to have allies who are our colleagues and employees-our extended family that is; who work equally hard to stay on top of their game and have brought SPPL to the height that it is at today.

Entrepreneurship for me allowed me to have a free hand in experimenting to create products and strategies that have not been done before. When we started with Kodak and Thomson, the online shopping market had only begun taking off but for very different sectors; we were one of the firsts who were selling SMART TVs online across India.

Entrepreneurship has helped me learn and grow as a person. Although my husband and I work together, we handle completely different aspects of the business and are accountable to each other with respect to our areas of supervision. Being able to call the shots, taking feedback and putting it into action has truly helped me grow as an individual.
Being an entrepreneur is in itself a challenging journey. Our company goal had always been to be at the top and that required us to take a lot of risks. Most worked but some also failed and as a business owner it is important to quickly focus on the learnings from it rather than remaining disappointed.

What kind of challenges she faced along the way and how did you manage?

Being an entrepreneur is a challenging journey. Our company goal had always been to be at the top and that required us to take a lot of risks. Most worked but some also failed and as a business owner it is important to quickly focus on the learnings from it rather than remaining disappointed.

What are the advantages or disadvantages of being a woman entrepreneur in India?

Being an entrepreneur in general is hard. We start ventures to not only serve the audience but also to make it successful and grow it into a bigger company than originally imagined. As a woman, the biggest advantage of being a business owner is the novelty we bring to the profession. Historically, women were always left out of the workforce and that enabled only certain ideas to thrive. Now with the increasing participation of women in the workforce, we have more ways of doing business coming into fore.

Women are leading many male dominated industries too. A disadvantage to being a woman entrepreneur is the hard work that goes into building credibility as one. While it is already difficult for a newbie, we ladies have to put in more effort into doing so considering the labels that are attached to us.

What is the future of manufacturing in general especially when the Indian market is threatened by the overseas brand?

The government has put in place necessary compliances and is now investing into huge projects that will further manufacturing in India. We have always had the capacity to maximize the potential that manufacturing allows in our country but what was missing is the infrastructure and knowhow. The entire globe was dependent on one country for all their manufacturing needs and when the pandemic started we all faced the brunt of it. While demand for screen-based gadgets skyrocketed, the supply fell short and thus prices also hiked along with that of logistics.

Earlier manufacturing was centralized, but that won't be the case anymore given the lessons we all have learnt. While the threat of overseas brands still looms, countries like India have now taken serious steps forward to establish state of the art manufacturing hubs. The government has also banned the import of CBUs for ACs and refrigerators.

Indian is a fast developing consumer market, we have the largest internet generation in the world. We see this as an opportunity as a make in india brand to understand our customer preferences and better our new launches by custmosing as much as possible for our audience.

Our manufacturing portfolio includes TVs for 4 globally acclaimed brands and White Westing House & Thomson washing machines.

What is the road ahead for Super Plastronics?

We plan to expand our portfolio to include more categories of products across brands. We would like for SPPL to be known as a household name for its quality products.

What is her advice to the young women aspiring to be entrepreneurs?

Being a mother full-time and also working and building our portfolios from scratch has been quite a journey for me. These are two very important things in my life and the only challenge is changing my role at the drop of a hat. I always have to be on my feet and ensure that I don't lose out on either capacity because of the other. While it was challenging managing both, perseverance has kept the ship sailing for me.

It is important to keep your ultimate goal as the focus and the rest falls in place as you come closer to it.

Super Plastronics Private Limited has always been in the game to manufacture some of the best quality products with much investment and thought into R&D and talent, to ensure that we have the outputs possible. While doing this at scale, it has also allowed us to really work on ensuring that we are able to offer our products at the best prices possible. And hence our sole purpose has been to provide the best in class products at accessible rates.

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What is the prime purpose of Super Plastronics and describe its manufacturing portfolio?

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A joint life insurance policy is an insurance policy where both partners are covered under a single insurance policy.

Different types of Joint Life Insurance

Just like individual life insurance plans, there are multiple options in joint-life insurance plans too. One can go for a basic joint-life term insurance plan or choose a joint life endowment insurance plan.

Joint life Term Insurance Plan

Similar to an individual term insurance plan, the joint-life insurance term plan offers basic financial protection in the event of the death for a nominal premium. In the event of death of one of the partners, the surviving partner will receive the death claim benefit and the policy will cease to exist.

Joint life Endowment Insurance Plan

Like a normal individual endowment policy, a joint-life endowment plan also has an investment component associated with it. While the policy benefits vary from insurer to insurer, most joint-life endowment plans offer a lump sum amount or regular monthly income to the surviving partner in the event of death of one of the partners. Some insurance companies also provide an option to raise separate death claims for each partner.

In the event of death of both partners, the policy benefits are payable to the legal nominee.

Benefits of Joint Life Insurance Plan

Income replacement

In today's world of nuclear families, the loss of a partner can not only cause great emotional stress but also a lot of financial stress. The monetary benefits received from a joint life insurance plan can never replace a loved one but it can definitely help the surviving partner to live a comfortable life.

Limited paperwork

As both partners are covered under a single plan, there is no additional paperwork required.

Convenience

By purchasing a joint life insurance policy, one can avoid the hassles of paying two different premiums for individual policies on each partner. Single payment to cover both the partners offers convenience as well as savings of time.

Lower premiums

Joint life insurance premiums are significantly cheaper as compared to purchasing two individual policies for each partner. Hence, it is ideal for those with a limited budget.

Bottom line

It is said that “Two are better than one, if two act as one”. This holds true in case of joint-life insurance too. Given its cost effectiveness and convenience, a joint life insurance policy is ideal for all those who wish to financially protect their partners from all eventualities in life.

About Abhishek Mishra

With an experience of more than 21 years and familiarity with the BFSI Industry, Abhishek Mishra has been a vital part of the organization since its inception.

His self-evident leadership skills transformed the company into a mammoth and fastest growing fintech brand in India. After a strong and successful stint with Karvy Insurance Broking Ltd as Principal Officer, Abhishek joined Bonanza group in 2013 and Bonanza Insurance in 2015.

Abhishek has excelled in wealth management, Debit Instruments, Life & General Insurance distribution, and channel and relationship management. Having implemented pioneering strategies for distribution & advisory has helped Abhishek build strong corporate relationships and management skills.
While digitization is helping MSMEs deal with the challenges brought forth by the pandemic, almost all industries in India including MSMEs are undergoing notable transformation owing to digital initiatives brought about by new-age technologies such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, machine learning. Modern-day technologies are also encouraging new plans of action in MSMEs. Most of these technologies are intended to assist MSMEs to automate and generate intelligence from their everyday operations or connect with stakeholders to assist them to increase productivity and advance further.

The world is adjusting to a new normal where digital platforms enable the entire ecosystem. In today's time, an impactful digital identity becomes the Holy Grail for any business. It is now more important than ever for MSMEs to enhance the website image, strengthen search abilities, improve website usability. It helps in making impactful and interactive website, to connect with their customers. It can drive greater customer engagement by helping create a website in their own native language to connect more with their clients. In today's time, web development is growing at an unprecedented rate. Everyone wants secure and feature-packed web applications. The desire of users for elevated experiences along with graphic interactive content is ever-growing.

Here are ways in which AI is digitally enabling the MSME sector:

1. **Empowering Digital Identity:**

   Artificial Intelligence empowers MSMEs to enhance the website image, strengthen search abilities, improves website usability. It helps in making impactful and interactive website, to connect with their customers. It can drive greater customer engagement by helping create a website in their own native language to connect more with their clients. In today's time, web development is growing at an unprecedented rate. Everyone wants secure and feature-packed web applications. The desire of users for elevated experiences along with graphic interactive content is ever-growing.

2. **Conversational commerce and customer engagement**

   The AI Chatbot across preand post-sales channels has beenin demand lately. From customer service requests to tracking packages and/or handling returns,
AI can offer solutions in many cases before customers even ask the questions which is a non-negotiable for the modern-day consumer. Using an AI-based conversational interface, MSMEs can drive greater customer engagement which can help in understanding customer requirements and show purchasing patterns. Analyzing customer feedback with the help of AI-based models can lead to futuristic insights.

3. Smarter marketing and identifying new opportunities

Businesses can leverage AI for customer segmentation and build their digital strategies. AI can help predict customer behavior to forecast sales, while advanced tech systems can combine data, statistics, and analyze them to predict future outcomes. AI-led analysis tools help understand what their competitor’s strategies are, and therefore help them tweak their own as needed, in order to be future-ready.

4. Optimizing operations

Using AI-led digital platforms, MSMEs can improve supply chain and logistics for better inventory management, improved shipment, and rote optimization. The use of modern-day technology can reduce operational costs and help in gaining better insights from data.

5. Fraud Prevention

For Small enterprises, getting into a fraudulent transaction is far more dangerous than a large corporate and can result in severe losses which are hard to recover from. Technologies like blockchain can help in real-time fraud detection and strengthen the digital trust ecosystem.

6. Automating Workflows

Due to a lack of enabling technology, small businesses spend almost 50% of their time every day managing day-to-day business functions. Automation significantly cuts down the requirement time spent on repetitive tasks. For example, AI Chatbot addresses repetitive queries like Refunds and Shipment and also brings in supply chain efficiencies.

Interestingly, India’s technology start-up sector is also fueled to revolutionize the entire business environment backed by favorable government policy, an ever-growing consumer base and increased technology skills set among the young population.

About Gaurav Kumar

An IIM alumnus and a self-taught programmer, Gaurav founded Myraah in 2018. With over 15 years of corporate and entrepreneurship experience, Gaurav is responsible for setting the overall business goals, making top-level managerial decisions and for leading the development and execution of long-term strategies of the company.

An entrepreneur at heart, Gaurav was associated with start-ups like Physicsuniversity.com, Skill Insighter, Midday Sale, 360 Digital and Flatons prior to Myraah. He has also held senior positions in Marvel Realtors, Informa and Lloyd’s Register. Gaurav holds an MBA from IIM Ahmedabad and occasionally blogs about start-ups and technology.

Generation India collaborates with AWS to upskill individuals for cloud careers

Generation India today announced a collaboration with Amazon Internet Services Private Limited (AISPL) to provide free cloud computing skills development and job training through the AWS re/Start program across 10+ cities in India. AWS re/Start is a 12-week training program covering cloud fundamentals, AWS core services, as well as practical career skills (such as interviewing and resume writing), to help unemployed and underemployed individuals prepare for entry-level cloud roles. The first cohort taking part in the AWS re/Start program with Generation India kicked off this month.

The tech Industry needs tech talent, but there is a lack of skilled individuals to fill those roles. According to research from AlphaBeta, the number of workers in India requiring digital skills will need to increase nine times by 2025. [1] To address this challenge, Generation India and AWS are working to build an inclusive, diverse pipeline of new talent that have cloud technology skills by training unemployed or underemployed individuals who otherwise might not have had access to this career path.

The program helps prepare individuals for new careers in technology through scenario-based exercises, hands-on labs and coursework. Students build Linux, Python, networking, security, and relational database skills. The program also covers the cost for learners to take the AWS Certified Cloud Practitioner exam, providing them with the opportunity to validate their cloud skills with an industry-recognized credential. Ultimately, the AWS re/Start program, in collaboration with Generation India, helps individuals prepare for roles in operations, site reliability, and infrastructure support. The AWS re/Start program is part of Amazon’s efforts to provide free cloud computing training to help 29 million people globally grow their cloud computing skills by 2025.
The Future of Education Industry and the Challenges Ahead

Lack of technology Infrastructure
Digitization is rapidly changing the way we consume content, but that is only possible when we have the primary means to access it – the internet, smartphone, and laptops. While urban school students are tech-savvy and privileged with better access to all the learning tools, this is not the case with rural school students. What adds to this is constraints like poor home environment, inconvenient study spaces, and unreliable power supplies in these areas.

To address this challenge, both the government and private institutions should collaborate with EdTech players, make tools available to the rural population either free of cost or at highly affordable price points, and eventually provide them with quality education. With these solutions in place, children will be able to study at school as well as at home with access to ample online study material. Most importantly, their progress can be tracked at every point of learning and worked upon accordingly. With the help of practical implementations such as case studies and other such content, students would not only learn the basics clearly but also understand their practical applications, which actually open doors to job opportunities in the future.

Curriculum Revision
Over the years, we have seen technological innovations changing the face of education. As a result, it is also pivotal to upgrade the educational content taught to students at school and college level because in today's
time, it is impossible to secure a job with mere theoretical knowledge. Practical application of things that we learn in classrooms is a must. On top of this, we must understand that the world is evolving at a rapid pace, and to remain relevant in this scenario, one must acquire skills that are not only in demand today, but will remain so in the future, too. EdTech players know this fact and thus are devising tools and technologies that can make specific skills and information easily learnable and readily consumable, respectively.

**Teacher Training and Upskilling**

Now that the educational content and the way it is consumed is transforming by the day, it is also vital to upskill its providers, that is, teachers and educators. It's a fact that students are increasingly becoming tech-savvy and using new-age tools is effortless for them. But this is not the case with all the teachers. Not all teachers are adequately skilled. So, it becomes imperative to train and upskill teachers and help them adopt new-age digital learning tools and platforms. This way, they will be able to respond to today's fast-changing demands of the education sector, cater well to students' needs, and help them excel in the process.

**In a nutshell**

The pandemic has proved to be a newfound opportunity for the EdTech sector. While this segment was already gaining pace, COVID-19 further accelerated its development. Currently, India's EdTech market is sized at about $700-800 million and is poised to become $30 billion behemoth in the next ten years. With tech-based learning solutions being the new necessity, it is clear that EdTech will be the future of education that will be backed by a blend of AI, practical teaching tools and learning methods.

The idea is to mix traditional wisdom and technology to create a new system of learning, which is not only engaging, but also measurable. Schools and colleges will be there, but the way they cater to students will change with the incorporation of new technologies and learning methods. As we step into 2022, we are likely to witness more investments, innovations, and rapid technology adoption in this space, with new companies joining the EdTech bandwagon to improve the quality of education and make it accessible for every willing learner.

**Digitization is rapidly changing the way we consume content, but that is only possible when we have the primary means to access it -- the internet, smartphone, and laptops. While urban school students are tech-savvy and privileged with better access to all the learning tools, this is not the case with rural school students.**

**About Ujjwal Singh**

A tech enthusiast and innovator, Ujjwal Singh is responsible for the overall management of the fast-growing brand, ensuring that its mission and vision are successfully implemented across the operations. Keeping values of ideation, innovation, constant improvement, and inclusivity, he strongly believes in modernising education by breaking the barriers of conventional education systems. With 22 years of experience in the education domain, he has successfully delivered business value through frugal product development with two patents filed in his name. Before Infinity Learn, he was associated with Pearson, where he has successfully built businesses to scale from scratch and implemented education programmes across geographies. At Pearson, he has served leading roles like Chief Product Officer and Vice President. So far, he has created multiple innovative digital-first education products that have received tremendous positive customer responses.

Ujjwal believes in being a better self each day. He encourages and supports his teams to outdo themselves consistently and pushes them to the highest level of self-actualization. Ujjwal dons several hats with ease—an empathetic leader, a design thinker, a serial entrepreneur, an inclusivity advocate, a customer-centric product developer, and an IDEO certified rapid prototyper. His career straddles management and product development in equal stead and he always enjoys a challenge, especially if it is a time-bound one.
As SMEs adopt cloud computing as a viable solution, data localization may give rise to the concept of local clusters providing cloud services. In such a scenario, UnitedSMEs focus at lowering the cost of IT infrastructure for SMEs and increasing their competitiveness through a state-of-the-art IT standardization method. Data preservation, data security, fraud avoidance, hardware cost minimization and software license cost minimization are all priorities for these systems.

The challenges faced by SMEs in India

Small and medium-sized businesses are the spine of the economy that brings forth the growth and advancements in a nation. SMEs are important not only for providing labour and employment opportunities, but also for a society's socioeconomic development. Small and Medium Enterprises in India, however, have face several obstacles and challenges that impede their growth, despite their critical role in the country's economic makeup.

SMEs are lone purchasers, scattered and fragmented in millions, with limited or no bargaining power. Looking for field experts for a part-time or on-demand service is one of the most back-breaking issues of SMEs. This is followed by high running cost and inadequate management of human resource. This is the reason why small businesses are increasingly embracing the internet to operate, exposing them to cybercrime concerns. As a global means of communication and commercial operation, Information Technology has provided a variety of opportunities to SMEs over time. These businesses may be an
attractive target for cybercriminals due to their client interactions with larger organizations. As a result, safeguarding SMEs from cybercrime and cyber security threats should be a top priority. However, cybercrime protection continues to be a major issue for them and needs immediate attention.

They also fail in optimizing available services and end up spending over a budget. An individual approach to any service, based on a smaller company size, always caters to a huge budget. Non Licensed Windows OEM, zero discounts on IT and services expenditure in regards to a smaller volume in the work-force, unjustified costs of digital marketing and lack of professional trainers in an organization – are other unavoidable problems associated to all individual SME owners in India.

**United SMEs: A viable solution**

The UnitedSMEs offers a cutting-edge solution to the problems associated with time, infrastructure and resource requirement of the SMEs, on a sharing basis. It focuses on the aggregation of services for SMEs that aims to reduce the cost of purchase and management. It is based on the simple concept of bulk-purchasing – where the buyer adds more value for money, for each product or service that is availed. This feature has recognized enormous gaps, new support possibilities and fresh business opportunities to assist SMEs in their growth and works as service oriented pain reliever. United SMEs is an initiative, that is delivering an aggregation of services to individual SMEs, which are crucial, supportive and essential for their growth as well as maturity in business.

**The new-age concept of UnitedSMEs**

UnitedSMEs aim to deliver deeply discounted and aggregated hardware and software related services to manage simple, cost-effective, and innovative methods of profiling, training, information security solutions and services to SME owners. They aim to provide data localization services, hire expensive professionals, engage experienced agencies and invest in software to processes, hardware sourcing by the method of united purchasing power, subscription based G-Suite services, data localization and subscription based network security services.

**The vision of the UnitedSMEs**

The concept of UnitedSMEs is a division of Synersoft which is committed to serve SMEs of India with the products specifically designed for SMEs. It aims to fill India's enterprise service gaps with the use of a common platform that combines superior HR development services, design services, technical services, AR adoption services, procurement services, and on-demand event-based services in a comfortable environment. It aims to become an enterprise medium to bring in advancement with simplicity and agility into the SME businesses and is dedicated to constant optimization of services for their rapid business growth.

**Summing up!**

UnitedSMEs were formed to address and answer the vexing challenges that SMEs face by offering superior, aggregated and on-demand services. They have emerged at the forefront to address and resolve the existing roadblocks faced by SMEs by providing superior business offerings comprising human resource development, augmented reality adoption, design services, procurement services, technical services, and event services. The members can get the supplies they need at the best prices. They can seamlessly meet the strategic objectives of talent acquisition, HR development, training, Digital Marketing, online branding, business development, lead generation, and risk management by incorporating the UnitedSMEs services.
Financial Inclusion of Small Merchants by Empowering SME Platforms via APIs

Decentro

Rohit Taneja
CEO and Founder, Decentro

Fintech has been on the rise globally, helping existing businesses seamlessly adapt to the digital economy. In India, there's been a swift demand for BaaS platforms like Decentro that enable SME-facing fintech companies and help their users with rich and contextual financial services in a native and embedded manner.

Decentro has grown exponentially in the past year and is helping SME-focused fintechs like Jumbotail, Pagarbook, and Superzop drive digital transformation for MSMEs across the country.

Digital enablement of MSMEs in India presents a multibillion-dollar business opportunity in the near to long term. And, fintech companies have started recognizing that. India has taken some key steps in the right direction by partially standardizing and enabling certain financial services (using UPI, account aggregators guidelines, India Stack, etc.); and with a vibrant fintech ecosystem, we are likely to witness a huge disruption led by API banking.

Decentro is a full-stack API banking platform that was launched in the midst of the pandemic - August 2020 - with 2 companies onboard as customers and has to date grown the customer base to 125+. It raised its first round of funding (angel) in May 2020, followed by a larger one (seed round) in October 2020.

Tech-savvy layer

Since its inception, Decentro has built for the long-standing infrastructural gap in the financial space by becoming a tech-savvy layer between banks/financial institutions and businesses. Decentro has created a brand value in the Fintech market and is working with some of the most trusted banks in India to provide innovative solutions to its clients. Further, it enables businesses to experience seamless integration and reduce the overall time and money being spent by ~10X via simple plug n play banking APIs.

Decentro didn't take flight in a situation that you'd exactly call ambient. The pandemic was right at the doorstep, and the lockdown had just been put into effect in 2020. After the initial launch, one of the most challenging tasks for
any startup is to bring onboard the first set of customers. We all took turns to talk to customers and attended calls to understand the pain points faced by customers in greater depth. Even then, since there were no case studies to showcase back in the day, the cold start problem is always hard.

The company quickly became profitable on a monthly basis and is now raising growth capital as its next round for expansion. It has more than customers to trust the product and its potential.

In 2021, the company also entered 2 new categories like B2C/Consumer lending apps, and Logistics with its recent integrations with the likes of MoneyTap, Uni Cards, and Agarwal Packers & Movers to streamline their financial workflows.

Decentro has since come a long way with the perseverance of the entire team, and has grown their customer base by 10X in 2021, to touch 110+

Decentro has since come a long way with the perseverance of the entire team, and has grown their customer base by 10X in 2021, to touch 110+

6 of the top private banks in the country as its key partners, including the likes of Yes Bank, ICICI, Axis and more, along with multiple financial institutions on the backend.

**Customized business banking APIs**

Decentro’s partnership with ICICI bank allowed it to offer customized business banking APIs to fintech, startups, and corporates alike. The platform integrated ICICI Bank’s seven business banking APIs from diverse categories like accounts, payments, and collections. Additionally, The company’s Co-branded Cards & Wallets have Yes Bank as their first official bank partner to help businesses to spend wisely and open additional revenue streams.

We have some of the best banks in the country, such as Yes Bank and ICICI Bank as our official banking partners, with more partners going live as we speak, that’s helped

by December. It is serving different categories spanning B2B Commerce, Lending Companies, B2C Neobanks, SME Aggregator & Marketplaces, NBFCs, supply chain, logistics, and more. The company recently achieved a monthly break-even witnessing close to 2Mn API-based transactions on a monthly basis.

**Synergising for growth**

We are witnessing tremendous growth, have also deepened our partnership with several SME-focused fintech companies like Pagarkbook, Simpel, SuperZop & Minko. With our integration, these new-age platforms can leverage business banking API to enable their MSME customers digitize operations and adopt a tech-driven approach to scale further. $2.5 billion worth of money flow (GTV) is now happening through Decentro’s system/APIs on an annualized basis within 18 months of launch. It is a reflection of the meteoric rise in the demand for business applications in financial services with the boom in the Fintech sector. Further, the growing role of Banking as a Service Platform (BaaS) has unlocked new opportunities for API Banking.

Decentro is now deepening its presence across the above categories and also looking to empower the next set of SME facing platforms and marketplaces as well, with its embedded banking modules. Some key solutions and examples include enabling Kirana store owners with simplified QR/UPI payments, instant settlements and lending workflows for suppliers & agents, and most notably opening and linking individual or business bank accounts directly via APIs.

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**About Rohit Taneja**

Rohit is quite passionate about banking, blockchain and products and digital payments. At Decentro, Rohit seeks to revamp the way banks launch and offer their services to people. He offers his 6+ years of experience in FinTech to lead business development, business strategy, and growth initiatives.

Rohit laid down the foundation of Decentro amidst the pandemic, in April 2020. Decentro was incubated by YCombinator in the same year. He is an IIT, Delhi alumnus and holds a degree in engineering. He has been a fintech serial entrepreneur and has invested in other ventures. He co-founded Mypoolin in 2015, and it was the country’s first social payments platform. Mypoolin was acquired by a California-based global payments player Wibmo in 2017 following two rounds of funding. It was later acquired by Naspers-backed PayU in 2019.
Having Industry Intelligence at your fingertip is a Real Challenge.

Understanding important business relationships is a critical but challenging exercise every company faces. Many unknown but existing relationships are relevant to us that we don't know we should be searching for.

Have you ever tried manually mapping interconnections among people companies? How many times have you discovered meaningful relationships by chance and luck?

People, companies, and institutions are linked to each other through countless connections. And new ones are coming up every day at a rapid speed. So constantly staying on top of all the data is crucial and remains a key challenge. Unfortunately, organizations often struggle to fully grasp this complex and ever-growing global relationship network and keep using slow, ad-hoc and incomplete methods for network research.

The result is that they keep missing out on several opportunities while also wasting valuable time and money.

How AI and machine learning can help in leveraging Industry Intelligence

Many publicly available data sources like news portals, company websites, company registration portals, lists of shareholders, annual financial statements, social media, etc., had valuable information. But this rich information is scattered, complex, not intelligently linked, and easily retrievable. This data is massive and generates at an unprecedented rate. People struggle to make sense of this data and decipher the connections and relations.

Mitibase mines and aggregates all this data using AI and machine learning. Intelligent AI algorithms compute a lot of data and reverse engineer interrelation between people, companies, and institutions to extract insight and intelligence.

How you can put this Industry Intelligence in Action

You can unlock competitors, supply chains, M&A, and industry intelligence. The following are a few critical use cases:

- Uncover the technologies, products, and startups your competitors are currently focusing on.
- Visualize the moves industry leaders are making to understand your competitive landscape better.
- Assess emerging trends and industry consolidation. Use clusters of business relationships around a new technology or business model to reveal trends worth paying attention to.
- Analyze indirect relations, complex structures, cross-connections among people and companies.

People have a lot of data with them. But unfortunately, it's incredibly challenging for them to track and analyze this information manually. And it's easy to lose track of valuable intelligence. So instead, they need a smart platform powered by AI and machine learning technologies to support them. An automated AI technology would enable them to easily track and monitor industry intelligence. For business leaders, this would be a tremendous sustainable competitive advantage.
Micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) are the backbone and the key drivers of the Indian economy. They are considered as the growth engine of the nation, with more than 6.3 crore MSMEs contributing almost 29 percent to the nation’s GDP.

But many of them find that filing GST returns can be taxing (pun intended). Whether they are issues related to registration, input tax credit, or time limits, MSMEs find themselves in the need of support to observe GST compliance.

Clear – Archit Gupta, Founder and CEO

ClearGST is an all-in-one cloud-based GST toolkit that simplifies GST return filing experience with error-free automated ingestion to smart reporting. The platform uses APIs to upload and perform filing workflows seamlessly from the ERP systems. It uses secure file transfer methods to place documents in servers and get auto-scheduled uploads. The platform can also import data with connectors or custom excel based templates. Ola, Saavn, and Ecom Express are among the startups that adopted Clear GST for GST filing.

Ajva Fintech

AJVA Fintech provides a one-stop solution for aiding financial, taxation, and compliance requirements. It boasts a diversified workforce striving continuously to fill the gaps between solving complex problems and offering the ideal solution. With a mission to make MSMEs more bankable, credible and encourage their digital adoption, AJVA Fintech takes pride in being one of India’s leading futuristic end-to-end solutions providers.

On the back of its unique business model, AJVA Fintech provides MSMEs product and price discovery platforms that are predictable and measurable in nature. Its extensive services, including Accounting, Compliances, Taxation, and more, are highly regarded in the market and promise to give its customers an edge. Being India’s unique platform on Government Scheme Discovery, AJVA Fintech hosts an integrated enterprise ecosystem with a blend of futuristic technology, making it an ideal choice over its competitors like India Filings, Clear Tax, Easy Gov, Tax 2 Win, Khatabook, and more.

myBillBook

myBillBook is a billing software that helps businesses create professional bills & share them with the customers on WhatsApp within a few seconds. myBillBook allows customers to do easy GST billing. They can make customised GST bills & print them using regular and thermal printers. There are 10+ GST bill or GST invoice formats available to choose from. With this billing software, businesses can track their sales & purchases accurately.

Treflo – Rahul Meena, Founder and CEO

Treflo founded in 2019, is a Mobile friendly SaaS platform aimed as a productivity suite for Indian SMBs that ties into the Businesses' current workflow, making the current processes 100 times more efficient, with automated workflows for GST Billing, Payments, one click Compliance, Managing Staff, Customers & Cashflow Management with Growth Insights, etc. aimed to empower SMBs with tools available to only large enterprises until now. A single platform where you can manage your multi-city warehouse, inventory and get proper insight of what you have and where you have.

There is no need to worry about missing GST filing and penalty. It is hassle free GST and tax filing with auto reminders.
The renewable industry has a highly growing and flourishing future in India. The undeniable reason is that there is no such work that can be carried out without energy. Almost everything nowadays requires the use of energy. With pollution on the rise, more focus is being laid on the creation of those energy sources which create less pollution and conserve nature. More and more energy sources are coming up that are eco-friendly and do not compromise performance. Moreover, the government is also supporting the concept of eco-friendly energy sources and encouraging people to adopt them by making them aware of these energy sources’ advantages. By launching policies and giving subsidies on renewable energy sources, the government is doing its part in encouraging people to shift to renewable energy sources.
Considering all these facts, we can say that the future of renewable energy in India is very bright and is expected to witness substantial growth in the coming times.

Who are the stakeholders in the renewable ecosystem?

Almost everyone contributes as a stakeholder, including some prominent personalities like Ratan Tata, Mukesh Ambani, Adani, etc. TATA and Reliance are doing exceptionally well in terms of renewable energy sources. The bottom line is that the big business houses and eminent personalities are making every effort to shift to renewable energy sources.

What innovative products are you working on, and what success have you achieved so far?

Talking about our products, we focus on making them more user-friendly and unique. Our products can be easily found in the market. The most notable part about our products is that some of them use hydrogen, which is known to be highly eco-friendly. Our focus is on using hydrogen in energy sources and launching hydrogen-based products.

What is your best product in every sense, and why?

Mini ventilator, inverter, and AC are our hero products which have been doing exceptionally well in the market and are very consumer-friendly.

What kind of competition and challenges from the corporate do you face, and how do you overcome these?

After being incubated with IIT Kanpur, we are working on getting patents for some new ideas. We have already patented some of our creations to prevent competition. We believe in constantly innovating so that even if something gets copied, you can bring a better version of it.

What is the USP of your products?

Speaking about our USP, what makes us unique is that our products are innovative and within reach of an ordinary man. Our products are affordable so that even a commoner can use our eco-friendly, innovative products to make their life convenient.

Explain clean energy products in agriculture being developed by Exalta India.

We use Parali to make a pallet and generate heat via that. This device of ours can be used to perform essential activities like cooking and charging phones.

Comment on the cost-effectiveness of your products.

Our primary focus is to encourage Made in India products. We feel there is no need to build everything from scratch if we already have the required products from someone else in the market. We instead save our cost and time in creating the small parts from scratch and use the available products to encourage Indian manufacturing. The idea should be to replace things which are being majorly imported and use products made in India.
A number of businesses, as a matter of fact, stood firmly despite the challenge and bolstered their infrastructure to ensure that not even one customer was gone. Also, customers today want to do it all by themselves, hence prefer DIY tools and consistent experience across channels. With thoughtful integrations of new-age contact centre solutions, businesses ensured element of interactivity to make the communication a two-way street. From live phone calls, chats to emails and social media, the customers have been made in charge of the action, and such practice is yielding favourable results. In a bid to resolve their issues themselves, the customers prefer proactive resources and information, which is intrinsic to their experience.

Reaching out

The rapidly evolving ecosystem makes it a prerequisite for businesses to first of all ensure that customers can reach out to them at any stage as per their time, preferred platform and comfort. Therefore, taking an omni-channel approach is sacrosanct for any business that looks at scalability. To enable businesses avail a one-stop solution for this purpose, we introduced CXInfinity, which puts at the fingertips of customers different routes to connect, such as phone, chat, e-mail, text, social media or any other communication channel.

It further allows businesses to give support to the customers from first interaction till the end of the whole customer lifecycle. They can connect all their data sources and
When a business adheres to automated workflows and integrated workflows, it helps in reduction of cost while simultaneously ensuring seamless operation. That said, another significant yet often skipped element of customer engagement is self service.

Another way in which we have been helping businesses thrive and grow in the hypercompetitive market are AI chatbot solutions, that offer human-like assistance in real-time on a 24x7 basis, drive more leads and eventually increase sales. One can start instantly with pre-built bot made specifically for their enterprise. The business-optimized bots with predefined intents and in-built integrations ensure productivity, right from the word go.

Considering that the cost of acquiring new customer is continually on a rise and so is the attrition rate, the idea should be to ensure long-term customer retention through tailored as well as personalized assistance across channels. Also, there has to be a need-based mix of both bot and agent, as per the query or requirement of the customers.

When a business adheres to automated workflows and integrated workflows, it helps in reduction of cost while simultaneously ensuring seamless operation. That said, another significant yet often skipped element of customer engagement is self service. At NovelVox, our complete product portfolio banks on the principle of self service, as it makes the customers feel empowered.

Seamless integration

But where really does the personalization start? It starts with seamless integrations, for it gives customers a better experience. Through third party integrations, systems can be brought together while leaving agents with the scope and time of engaging in conversations with customers. With us, businesses can integrate and unify the experience of their existing contact centre platform such as Genesys, CISCO, AVAYA etc.

About Amit Kumar Gandhi

Amit Kumar Gandhi is a young and an enthusiastic entrepreneur who is a tech-savvy individual with business acumen. A stalwart in the domain, Gandhi has experience of over 21 years in software applications development, of which nearly 16 years were in Contact Center Software Applications and integrations. He embarked on an entrepreneurial journey with NovelVox over a decade ago and thanks to his penchant for technology and innovation, he continues to play an instrumental role in the technical design and architecture of the company’s product line.

Total 74,415 new Micro Enterprises set up in FY21 under PMEGP: MoS MSME

As many as 74,415 new micro enterprises were set up in fiscal year 2020-21 under the Prime Minister’s Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP), said Minister of State for MSME Bhanu Pratap Singh Verma.

It is estimated that through these new enterprises 5,95,320 employment has been generated in the same year, informed Verma in a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha.

When compared with the previous financial year, the new enterprises established in FY21 were 11 per cent more than 66,653 new units set up in FY20 and marginally up by 1.34 per cent from 73,427 units set up in FY19, said the official data released by the Ministry of MSME.

Similarly, there was a notable increase in the employment generated under PMEGP in FY21 in comparison to 5,33,224 jobs generated in FY20 and 5,87,416 in FY19.

PMEGP is a central government scheme which promotes entrepreneurship and generate employment through financial assistance to individuals and is implemented by the Khadi & Village Industries Commission (KVIC).

It offers maximum assistance of Rs 25 lakh for setting up new manufacturing units and Rs 10 lakh for new service units and it allows any individual, above 18 years of age and at least VIII grade pass, to apply for assistance. (KNN)
In a few countries, we have started seeing semi-autonomous and autonomous trucks on roads. The logistics sector is now ready for disruption and with it, a lot of companies will come. This ongoing transformation is perhaps the best for our logistics sector, which was earlier infamous for complicated processes, bottlenecks, and a near-absolute opacity.

Founded in 2019, Trucknetic is a tech-first logistics company that connects shippers with carriers and establishes a marketplace which is a central portal for both front loads and backloads by using machine learning, automation, and other software services.

**The Logistics market scenario and how it is set to change given changing technology.**

Undoubtedly, freight forwarders are the head honcho of the logistics and supply chains industry. When the term ‘digitization of logistics industry’ became headline news - a catalyst of change paving ways to automate and reconstruct the familiar processes.

The logistics sector has traveled a long way – from keeping manual records and fax machines to providing instant quotations and real-time updates. A fast data transfer is a result of information technology in supply chain management resulting in increased cooperation. Information Technology helps to restructure the entire distribution set up to achieve higher service levels and lower inventory and lower supply chain costs.

In the logistics market, information, communication and automation technologies have substantially increased speed of identification, data gathering, processing, analysis and transmission, with high levels of accuracy and reliability. Technology is a means to enhance business competitiveness and performance.

**The role of Trucknetic in enriching the logistics in India.**

Trucknetic is a tech-first logistics company that is redefining the digital freight industry by establishing a market place for both shippers and carriers.

It will have two different applications one for the carriers (small fleet owners) where they are accessing the full truckload across India where loads are democratized irrespective of fleet size and historical records and the other for the shippers (traders, small medium enterprise and corporate) where there are booking unlimited trucks as per their requirement of truck type, lane, commodity, weight etc in real-time. The company helps to reduce the wastage of miles without freight and increase the revenue of fleet owners per day/per truck and on the other
hand, reduce the cost for the shipper and ultimately aligning itself and moving towards the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that is Net-zero by 2070.

With more than 63 million registered MSMEs in India, there exists a huge market opportunity for any logistics player to tap into this segment.

With years of expertise in the MSME sector and highly experienced founding team from the logistics sector, Trucknetic has the right force to successfully ace the logistics market. It has developed a database mapping a large number of MSME goods movement with the truck type, commodity and lanes.

The company has more than 50000+ downloads on Trucknetic Carrier application and 15000+ downloads on Trucknetic Shipper application and has moved close to 100,000 metric tonnes of goods. Trucknetic has a network of close to 200,000 fleet owners and 50,000 transporters which roughly translates to over 1 million trucks in our network.

We also have a potential monthly order book of the north of 50,000 MT, which we will be able to achieve from Mar’22.

**USP of Trucknetic**

Trucknetic is a AI-enabled platform offers freedom of choice regarding the marketplace and the security & convenience of a digital freight forwarder.

It comes with a solution of a cost-effective package for shippers and increases earnings for the fleet owners by reducing the wastage of miles without freight and adding to the asset utilization of trucks, thus reducing the carbon footprint in the country which ultimately brings down the cost of logistics substantially.

The tech-first logistics platform is highly diversified across commodities, truck types and lanes. The Company has moved diverse commodities such as coal, chemicals, edible oils, glass, plywood, etc. across the country for long, short and medium haulage.

The company has a host of prestigious brands as its clients including such as Patanjali, Action Tesa, Nuvoco, Gulshan Chemicals, etc. and has received several awards and opportunities for its hard work and passionate vision, including the 10 most trusted logistics & supply chain brands 2021, top placer logistics 2021, best shippers, and carriers marketplace platform (APAC).

Trucknetic is one of the chosen startups in the Microsoft AI innovation - manufacturing and logistics cohort, in which Microsoft is helping Trucknetic to build a proof of concept on solving the return load problem and demand forecasting using Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning.

**Roadmap for Trucknetic**

Putting more stars to its sky, Trucknetic has proven its mettle in a highly competitive industry. Just within two years of its journey, the company has been acknowledged and appreciated globally.

The company have clocked a revenue of ~ USD 3 million till Jan’22 from Dec’19. We have moved close to 100,000 metric tonnes of goods. We have a network of close to 200,000 fleet owners and 50,000 transporters which roughly translates to over 1 million trucks in our network.

**We have set few targets for us for the upcoming months:**

- We will onboard close 2 million Trucks in our network which is 1/6 of the entire trucks in the country
- We are gamifying the entire platform both of our applications which will create immense stickiness on to our portal.
- We will provide a feature using Artificial Intelligence/ Machine Learning which will be voice-enabled platform where both carriers and shippers can get loads and trucks respectively by speaking in their vernacular languages.
- We will have close to 1 million+ downloads on our Trucknetic Carrier App and 500,000+ downloads on our Trucknetic Shipper App.
- We are working on our supply massivly which will become the first platform in the world to provide any kind of truck for any kind of commodity from anywhere in the country.
- Lastly, we will reduce the wastage of miles without freight, increase the asset utilization of trucks which will help to increase the revenue earned per day per truck and reduce the cost to shipper in terms of freight.

**About Arham**

Arham has been a serial entrepreneur, integrating technology in the conventional worlds of logistics, commerce and energy. He strongly believes that India is an amazing story which hasn’t been written yet.

Arham is a mechanical engineer turned social entrepreneur turned investment banker. He was the Managing Director of Apeejay Overseas Limited. He has been selected for prestigious fellowships such as Indo-German YLF, Indo-Swiss FLF, IDEX Global, World Merit, ALS (University of Chicago). He has done Entrepreneurship - Leading change through innovation courses from Stanford University. He has been awarded Entrepreneur of the Year Award by IAF in 2020.
The world of work is changing - Rapidly. Post the COVID-19 pandemic, remote work, hybrid work, and 'location independent' work are the 'New Normal'. The established conventions of hiring are changing at a fast pace and the continuous need for optimal recruitment is forcing talent acquisition managers to think out-of-the-box and adopt a more forward-looking approach to hiring today.

This shift is a response to the challenges of high attrition and low employee morale, impacted by Covid-19 as well, which in turn have an adverse effect on costs (of hiring), and lack of productivity. Companies and enterprises are now looking towards technology to find solutions to these Human Resource challenges. There are numerous ways in which modern technology and more specifically the smart use of Video Technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI) can solve what appear to be major challenges in the recruitment process.

With a greater willingness to switch industries and roles and the increased ease of applying for jobs through the Internet, the contemporary workforce is deluging recruiters with applications and resumes, many of the candidates being marginally qualified and at times with inappropriate skillsets. The exponentially increased load of screening all these applicants is exhausting talent acquisition professionals globally and they are looking to shift to evolving technology solutions to manage this problem. According to McKinsey, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation will make this shift as significant as the mechanization of agriculture and manufacturing in the past. We are poised to see technology enabled screening of job applications, evaluation of candidates, employee onboarding, and even talent management.

Revolutionizing recruitment

Chief Human Resource Officers (CHROs) have to change the norms and the pre-COVID SOPs. The last time HR processes saw a change was probably two decades back when online job sites took off. With the advent of newer career opportunities, changes in the way we work, and our work...
environment, recruiting the right candidate assumes a different meaning.

However, one big challenge that has existed for recruiters since the initiation of the HR process is finding the right talent – and this challenge stays even today. Recruitment teams still spend time on tasks that can be partially automated such as resume screening, interview scheduling, and interviewing.

At times, companies have to settle for candidates that are not the best fit for the job on offer. While this can happen for numerous reasons but suffice to say that companies eventually struggle with high attrition. In a way, this highlights the fallibilities in the existing recruitment processes. The one-size-fits-all approach towards recruitment is passe but then not all companies can be clubbed into the same bucket.

Forward-thinking, future-ready organizations are leveraging CPaaS (Communication Platform-as-a-Service) solutions to power their recruitment. Features like live video embed and AI-enabled recruitment chatbots can significantly streamline the application process and enhance the talent search, and identification process.

Following are some examples of how live video built on CPaaS together with AI can elevate present-day recruitment.

### Self-recorded video applications

Call it the TikTok approach to seeking your desired job. To validate a submitted resume, candidates can self-introduce by responding to pre-fed introductory questions on video. Overlaid with machine learning and behavioral analysis, the platform can track key indicators such as the candidate’s eye contact, voice, and even body language. This helps catch any red flags that suggest the candidate was consulting a friend or doing an on-the-spot online search for answers to the interview questions. Additionally sentiment and language analysis applied to the recording will produce a first-cut report with recommendations for the recruiter. This significantly cuts down on the time and energy required to review each candidate's submission.

### Two-way video interview

Recruiters can validate their shortlisted candidates via video calls. These video calls enable them to efficiently connect and shortlist potential candidates before the profiles reach the hiring managers. Recorded interviews of candidates moving through the process can allow multiple people to review the interview and accurately pick candidates to move forward, saving time and effort.

### Video-enabled recruitment chatbot

Chatbots could also be implemented on the company’s job website. Once a candidate applies for a position, the chatbot can initiate a conversation by asking questions where the candidate will be video recorded. On completion of the conversation, the chatbots can evaluate the suitability of the candidate for the listed position based on the answers and the candidates’ voice, body language, and facial sentiment analysis.

### Creating awesome experiences

Automated online screening and video interviews can not only help effectively manage remote hiring but also saves candidates from taking time off and traveling for a preliminary screening interview. In addition, live video capabilities can work alongside a chatbot, within the recruitment platform, to bring the candidate “face-to-face” with recruiters. This helps recruiters build a positive and personal relationship with candidates early in the selection process.

### Promote employer brand

Videos are perfect for promoting an employer brand. You can use videos to tell a story about your company, highlight your company values and present your employee value proposition. You can also showcase your company culture and workplace to give potential candidates a glimpse of everyday life at the office.

### To sum-up

AI has already brought a wave of innovation to the recruitment ecosystem but the integration of AI with powerful video communication technology through the use of CPaaS platforms is the next frontier. By marrying these two capabilities, organizations can remove huge administrative burdens of recruitment and be empowered to make smart hiring decisions in an increasingly challenging talent marketplace.

Technology has altered the recruitment process forever, and it won't be possible to go back to the old ways. AI-powered video solutions are a tool that smart HR personnel can use to their advantage. They can find the best-suited talent that grows with the company and adds value in the long run because that’s what makes conglomerates out of companies.
Pulkit Ahuja is a serial entrepreneur, author and inventor comes with experience in founding and successfully running disruptive technology startups in mobility, transportation, ad-tech and education domains. Companies Pulkit has founded include Proxgy, Cabsguru, Unlockar, Yeshlé, RollingSlate, SchoolCampus Tech among others.

He is the author of Bestselling financial fiction 'Googled by God'. Pulkit co-authored his first book 'Risk Management in Basel' while pursuing his MBA. Apart from books, Pulkit has also authored several scholarly papers in the fields of finance and technology (neural networks, price movements, etc.) which have been published and cited by several National and International publications. He is an MBA Gold Medalist in Finance with a Computer Science background.
Pulkit Ahuja in an email interaction with SME WORLD.

**Explain the concept of visual commerce.**

In the past few years, we have seen ecommerce grow in India, and shoppers now demand augmented content for making informed shopping decision. Visual commerce enables user to have near life immersive experience using 360° Videos/photos, 3D images and more. Proxgy enables brands to provide immersive, real time, authentic and reliable shopping content to shoppers for making informed purchase decisions.

**How is it relevant to a growing economy like India?**

As it's a growing economy and people do not have much time to visit so many places at the same time and with the onset of the pandemic there is a growing need of people to travel and explore virtually. The lockdowns just accelerated this need of the users. Proxgy enables user to shop, visit different places virtually while giving the most engaging yet entertaining experience. For example, if a person wants to buy a property in Pune and is in Delhi because of some uncertainty was not able to make it to Pune but with the help of Proxgy's smart device they can virtually visit and explore the property at their own comfort.

**How important is visual commerce in India? Give reasons.**

If we see the current ratio e-commerce sales have been constantly growing and because of the pandemic people are still hesitant to go out shopping when there is a digital alternative available at the comfort of their home. Proxgy provides mixed reality where customers can visit any location, store, mall or a property at their own comfort. Proxgy provides technology that enables discovery, Live visits and payment through a single plug in. Retail Brands can use our platform and hardware devices that can be easily plugged in to their existing ecommerce solutions to offer live visit to their offline stores.

**What is Proxgy's business model and its offerings?**

We ran visual commerce as a pilot in few of local markets in Delhi like Sarojini Nagar, Janpath where we placed our Proxgies equipped with our patented hardware. Proxgies assisted users coming in from the Proxgy app to live shop in these markets. Seeing the response and organic growth of the traffic coming in we started approaching brands to offer Proxgy as a solution for their visual commerce needs. We are now selling Proxgy as a B2B solution to brands.

**What is the growth trajectory for Proxgy?**

From starting as a dorm room service to an industrial IoT provider, Proxgy has experienced multi fold growth in the past 2 years. We have gained multiple patents for our hardware and technology in the last 2 years and have experienced multi fold growth. From running a pilot in few local markets and shopping malls in Delhi to building an order book of over 1,20,000 devices through our B2B channels.

**How do you visualise Proxgy is the next 5 years?**

We want to be the leaders in Industrial IoT domain globally for which we will keep innovating and developing better solutions for problems faced by Industries. The funds majorly would be allocated to innovation and product deliveries.

**How was your journey in Shark Tank India? Any tips for upcoming entrepreneurs?**

Well, the entire journey was an enriching and a learning experience. Right from the initial application to the final pitch in the tank, the pressure of making it and getting a deal kept piling up. But when you go through each phase and meet fellow entrepreneurs sailing the same boat there is a lot to learn throughout the journey.

The application process had 5 rounds. The first round was a written form filling round wherein the very basic details of the idea were asked. There were around 60,000 companies that had applied in the 1st round.

The shortlisted companies in the first round made way to the second round. This took around 2 months' time. In the second round we were asked the granular details of the business model along with the key metrics, IPR etc. After around a month's time, shortlisted companies of the second round were informed and we were asked to make a 3-minute video shot by company's founders detailing the business, showcasing the product and including the elevator pitch. This round was basically to test the screen presence, confidence and communication skills.

After almost 2 months the shortlists of 4th round were announced wherein, we were required to go and do a demo pitch to the Shark Tank VC team at the Welcome Hotel, Dwarka. The demo pitch being recorded and lasted for almost an hour.

From the initial 60,000 companies, only 198 companies were shortlisted for the final 5th round which took place in Goregaon Film City, Mumbai.

These 198 companies got to present their startups in front of the Sharks and out of which 67 companies got funded. Proxgy was one of the highest funded companies of these 67 companies.

Persistence is the key. As an wannapreneur, you are bound to face a lot of rejections but the entrepreneurial way of life would require you to keep moving forward and stick to your goals even if no one else believes in them. Sooner or later, if you are persistent enough, you could get your fair chance to prove to the World that you were right and the struggles were worth it.
Natural Battery Technologies Develops Long Range Batteries

Natural Battery Technologies, a leading Lithium-Ion Battery manufacturers in India, located out of Rajasthan, is actively developing high performance batteries with increased safety parameters. The Battery packs are Weather proof and made of strong external closures. The battery is built with shock proof material to withstand strong impacts at high speeds.

Puneet Jain, CEO of Natural Battery Technologies said, “It has been our constant endeavour to provide the best for the market and develop technology for future. Batteries are going to be the future power source for a lot of appliances, especially vehicles. Green batteries that has bigger and better capacity will provide more mileage and efficiency to the electric vehicles.”

“Battery is going to be one of the most important OEMs for electric vehicles. And Natural Battery aims to be at the forefront of the supply chain. The high performance, long range batteries are one of the offerings that we are currently launching in the market,” he added.

**Bigger capacity**

The battery packs designed in such a fashion so that they can be fitted into compact space and that allows for bigger capacity. Not only the interiors will be more fashionably designed with smaller battery packs, but will offer more mileage and efficiency. The battery packs will be endowed with smart features that will enable tracking for fleet operators. Additionally, this tracking system will also help the manufacturers to monitor the health of the long range batteries and the customers will also be able to understand the condition of the battery before any travel.

**Compatibility**

“The battery swapping policy, as announced by the Finance Minister during Budget 2022 speech has opened up the possibilities further. Till date, OEMs were differentiating between batteries through different shapes, sizes and capacity that are being fitted in each of the electric cars. But swapping will mean there will be guidelines on the shape and size of the battery which can ensure interoperability. All the battery brands will become compatible to electric cars—very much like cooking gas cylinders that we use at home, which has a standard size and weight. The battery swapping policy, once it comes in the market will open up a huge possibility,” Puneet added.

The batteries will be swappable within e-bikes and e-scooters to boost the much lacking charging infrastructure currently. Swapping infrastructure will need good battery backups for each vehicle that will make a stop to get recharged batteries. Quality and performance of these long ranged batteries will ensure both demand and competitiveness in such a market.

The company with the long range batteries can enable mileage of two wheelers with more than 250km as compared to average scooter batteries which is 75-150Kms.

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**Tratits of the successful startups**

The successful startups were those who emulated the explorers of previous centuries. They ventured into the unknown with little information and made prototypes to test their business models. As 13th century Sufi poet Rumi said, “As you start to walk out on the way; the way appears.”

Successful startups accept that the business environment is getting to increase uncertain, and the trends favours those who understand that knowledge is the principal capital and change is the only constant.

This book should be read by those venturing out into the known world of disruptive businesses as well as those who are still struggling to make it a success. The book has been endorsed by leading futurist Prof Bob Johansen, besides several international global thinkers, which strengthens this research based text.
Indian startups aren't rare occurrences anymore. Thus, a venture or two popping up in the startup ecosystem don't intrigue us much unless they are worth the watch. Along with the rest of the world we see many Indian startups unfolding in the wave of digital transformation we're experiencing pre, during and post-pandemic. From networking and gaming to education, nutrition, finance and medicine, we're seeing digital startup platforms offering convenient smart solutions like never before.

Here we’ve put together a few tech-backed Startups which are charging ahead in their niche; ventures which are worth noticing for not just what they do but also for the promises they hold in bettering life for the collective.

1. Koppr
Koppr is all about helping young adults attain financial freedom. A platform that provides personalized financial service and sound advice, Koppr is an expert-led community where users are given guidance so as to enable them to make smart financial decisions. Koppr especially centers around tailoring personalized solutions to financial woes faced by millennials and young adults in the country. With a mission to help young adults gain financial independence for realizing their dreams and ambitions, Koppr also understands the prevalence of unique financial issues as per an individual and thus provides unique offerings based on the requirement.

Koppr strives to offer comprehensive solutions all along a young adult's financial journey. Koppr provides expert insight and guidance on a range of financial matters faced by millennials and empowers them to borrow, invest, spend and protect their finances in the smartest way possible.

2. Tummoc
The first-ever de-in-India transit app, Tummoc provides real-time, data-driven multi-modal public transportation information for a hassle-free commute. With a vision to enhance the desirability and accessibility of public transportation, Tummoc houses an all-in-one transit solution. Integrating both private and public MaaS (Mobility as a Service) under its roof, the app provides various actionable information for public transportation such as timing, availability, contactless adaptable ticketing options, first and last-mile information, etc., all the while providing employment opportunities for last-mile partners.

Tummoc comes as a right fit for a place like India with its extensive and intricate public transport network which are priced reasonably well but not the most desirable in terms of convenience and accessibility. Tummo aims to bring a shift in the way people access public transit by becoming a pioneer in enabling smart commuting in the country. It also encourages stakeholders in gearing towards a greener transportation by implementing carbon emission tracking and driving tree-planting among other initiatives.

3. PhytHealth
PhytHealth is India's foremost AI technology-driven digital physiotherapy. A digital telerehabilitation platform, PhytHealth helps in pain management, stabilization, strengthening, providing proper treatment at every stage of recovery - all at the comfort of your home. PhytHealth addresses an extensive range of ailments right from prevention to various chronic pain management and post-surgical recovery. Digital physiotherapy offers treatment plans for all musculoskeletal and muscular issues, which are not only clinically proven solutions but also designed for optimum convenience which patients can access via their smartphones.

PhytHealth applies computer technology to engage patients with the right physio care including per Musculoskeletal Medicine (MSK) and effective therapy practices. It also helps in maintaining ergonomic postures along with providing assistance in assessing and modifying routine activities to prevent pain aggravation.

4. Branch
A personal finance startup, Branch offers AI-enabled customization of financial services and is already among the top leaders around the globe. What sets this financial platform apart from the crowd is the simplicity and swiftness in providing loans. Branch has done away with the chivvies and hassles found in traditional financial institutes where borrowers usually find themselves being drowned in long drawn loan processes. At Branch, borrowers can obtain loans in as little as under two hours. The application process is a matter of seconds but that's not all. The best thing about this AI-backed platform is that borrowers don't have to stress about collaterals and credit scores which are often checkpoints that a lot of people fail to cross in a traditional lending scene.

With machine learning, Branch uses an algorithmic approach to ascertain the creditworthiness of an applicant. And customers won't have to step an inch out of their comfy shack because all the loan processes are done over their smartphones.
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