

THE IDEA MAKERS

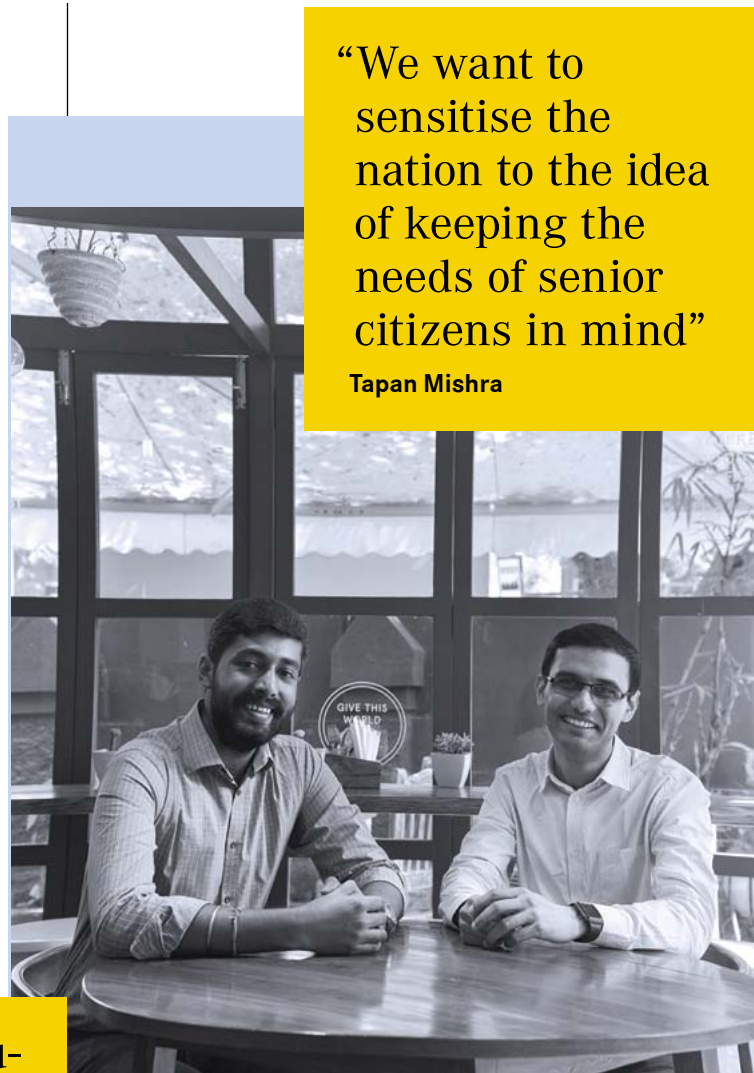
A unicorn is no longer a mythical animal. It's a synonym for success. In today's world of innovation-powered start-ups, unicorn is an idea that has achieved the million-dollar dream! While there are thousands who are chasing that one brilliant idea, which can change the world, a few have struck gold. Here are the struggles and success stories of a few Indian innovators.

TEXT: PRATEEK THAKKER

Ayush Agrawal & Tapan Mishra- Seniority

As much as we believe that our country today has the highest number of youngsters, we often forget that there is a sizeable population that above 60 years of age and requires support, assistance and various other services. This is where Seniority.in, one of the country's largest retail and e-commerce portal dedicated to seniors, came into being in 2017. Seniority was started with the idea of becoming India's largest shopping destination for senior citizens to address their medical and lifestyle needs.

The founders, Ayush Agrawal and Tapan Mishra, have raised USD 5 million to fund their goal to make Seniority the one-stop shop for all senior citizen health and lifestyle needs, but the going was never easy, especially during the initial days. "We had the idea but to build the team that would help us turn the idea into reality was a struggle. It was tough to build the team in the early days. Our employees are one of the strongest pillars of growth for us, so we are quite particular about the talent we attract. This means that certain key roles take a lot longer to hire, and that adds a lot of pressure on everyone else," Agrawal says. What also surrounds them is a lot



"We want to sensitise the nation to the idea of keeping the needs of senior citizens in mind"

Tapan Mishra

"A market opportunity of around USD\$ 2 billion was extremely encouraging to start off in this field"

Ayush Agrawal

of self-doubt around their strategies and striking a balance between stabilising existing processes and introducing new ones to keep up with the dynamic work environment. The aim, though, is clear. "We want to build a strong senior citizens' community in India living independently and constantly interacting with each other. This probably happens by default in western countries, but it is a novel idea in India," says Mishra, adding, "I see the country as a whole being sensitised to the idea of including senior citizens, and keeping their needs in mind while planning or designing anything."



"I wanted to offer women hygienic and toxin-free undergarments that are also fashionable."

Neerja Lakhani

Neerja Lakhani- Inner Sense

Offering women's undergarments that are not just stylish but also suitable to India's tropical climate was the idea behind Inner Sense. Started by Neerja Lakhani, Inner Sense claims to be India's first premium organic antimicrobial lingerie product. Lakhani, a garment designer, was helped by and Abhishek Lodha, a graduate in textile chemistry. Lakhani says she had observed that India's humid climate makes women more vulnerable to unhygienic conditions, which are further compounded by unavailability of healthy and quality innerwear in the market. Inner Sense was born to fill the gap, with undergarments that is fashionable, eco-friendly, and most importantly, healthy. Selling on all major e-commerce portals, the brand is also available in the US, UK, and Malaysia. "For women, lingerie is an inseparable part of our lives and is a major influence on how we feel about ourselves. How

many times do women wonder if the lingerie they wear is made of healthy fabric and is toxin free? That was the seed behind starting off," says Lakhani.

Quiz her on the battle and she says, "the biggest one is always about taking the plunge and the fear of failing." Being boot-strapped for a few years is how Inner Sense started off, and despite being profitable from day one, the two took a while to raise funds externally. But, once the brand was launched, it went on to become a success and the funds poured in. They says: "Our entire inventory sold out in just six months and we had to replenish stock faster than we had imagined!" Probably which is why, as an innovator, one is always striving to fill a gap rather than create one in the market!

Sushil Chowdhary- Picture Time

India is home to a multi-million dollar film industry. It is the world's largest producer of films, ahead of Hollywood and even China's movie makers. Yet, the country does not make as much money as the Americans or Chinese do out of their movies. Scarcity of theatres to watch movies in the smallest and remotest towns and villages of the country is the primary reason behind this. This is where Sushil Chowdhary, the man behind one of India's most innovative start-ups, comes into the picture. Literally!

PictureTime Digiplex is India's first Mobile Digital Movie Theatre. Established in October 2015, PictureTime introduced mobile movie halls in an effort to ensure people in far-flung areas have access to good quality entertainment at affordable prices. He says, "My vision is to create entertainment zones centered on the mobile movie theatre where people can come and watch films and just hang out, taking advantage of the wi-fi spots on offer." The company takes inflatable theatres on trucks to remote parts of the country to offer the audience a world-class movie-going experience at INR 30 to 50 per ticket. These all-weather theatres are fire-resistant and have features like HD interactive screens, live chat function, and 5.1 Dolby surround sound. One theatre can seat 120-150 people at a time.



"I plan to set up 3,000 theatres soon and be the disruptor in the cinema exhibition industry and multiply theatrical revenue."

Sushil Chowdhary

Chowdhary says that the biggest battles before starting up are fought in the mind. "Clarity of thought helps one fight all the initial hiccups and obstacles," he emphasises. Probably why, even though he was building a complex product, he focussed on strict budget management and accuracy to deliver the right experience.

"We want to make migration to a new city as painless as possible."

Nikhil Sikri

Nikhil Sikri, Zolo

Founded in 2015 with the aim to redefine the living experience in India, Zolo provides fully managed and affordable living options with a warm and homely environment. The founder duo, Nikhil Sikri and Akhil Sikri, recognised the gap in the managed affordable living space and the pain-points of people migrating to bigger cities for better opportunities. Zolo offers trusted and comfortable living solutions through ready-to-move-in rented rooms or beds that offer convenient amenities at affordable prices via an integrated app-based technology platform.

"Co-living is an extremely niche market and the paying guest genre is extremely disorganised. We wanted to bridge this gap," says Nikhil, a medical practitioner by profession. They have been inspired by Jeff Bezos, for his ability to build an organisation and a culture that can replicate its original success repeatedly. With various choices of residential options and services, the brand offers comfortable living options to people of various age groups.

On the challenges they faced while starting up, Nikhil says, "The biggest challenge is manoeuvring change in such a large organisation and bringing about mentality shift." Having raised more than USD 4 million, today the founders are in a more comfortable space but the work never stops. "Bringing an idea to life is a 30 hours-a-day job. You can never put it on the back-seat. My co-founder and I gave beyond our 100 per cent to create this enterprise that aims at impacting and improving as many lives as possible," he says. And their goal, to build a community that has a place for everyone, doesn't seem so far.



The platform is working on customer acquisition on multiple levels, including partnerships with various travel-related brands.



Vineet and Deepak Rajan- ScoutMyTrip

Don't we all love a well-planned trip with an efficient itinerary? ScoutMyTrip claims to give you just that. The platform allows one to plan a trip along with interacting and hiring travel experts (called scouts) to help them fine-tune the plan and services. One is saved the hassles of browsing multiple websites. It is also a platform where like-minded travellers can meet and talk about their past journeys and help others plan on the basis of their experiences.

The founders, Vineet and Deepak Ranjan, after having traversed over 6,00,000 km across the globe by road, saw the opportunity in this space and got together to build ScoutMyTrip. They say, "During our travels, we would be hard-pressed to plan a trip because of the sheer volume of information or the sheer lack of it! We had to search through blogs, articles, listicles, destination websites, ask friends and family and then pray that we had done enough." According to their research, they say that spend close to 900 million hours only on planning trips.

Starting up isn't easy, they add. From taking things like an office space to the infrastructure for running a company, to getting simple, mundane tasks done had to be divided and done by both. They learnt it the hard way and would want aspiring entrepreneurs to get that

"The platform is so user-friendly that even a first-time road tripper will face no hiccup."

Vineet and Deepak Rajan

right. "As road trippers and bikers, we find a lot of peace in hitting the road. There are times when we want to just clear our heads and come up with new ideas. These are times, when we take our vehicles out and travel solo for a few days. These moments of solace have been our biggest mentors during this time," they say. Planning to go global soon, the founders say, "A road trip is not just about routes and distances. It's about every small thing that may be required. And we provide those."



"There are many people with brilliant ideas but only those who focus and work hard, succeed."

Bhupendra Kamal

Bhupendra Kamal- Dogsee Chew

Don't we love it when our dogs have great shiny coats, healthy teeth, and are energetic and happy overall? But do we think about the harmful levels of chemicals the processed food we feed them has?

Bhupendra Kamal, a dog lover while on a trek in Illam, a small district in Nepal, found stray dogs with shiny fur, perfect teeth and a great amount of energy. Interaction with the villagers led to the discovery that the dogs often chewed on *churpi* (hardened milk cheese) that people discarded. "This came as a surprise to me as I have never thought of *churpi* as dog food. A little more research later, Dogsee Chew was born fulfilling my dream of doing something significant in the pet food industry," he shares enthusiastically.

Dogsee Chew was born in 2016 with the sole aim of bringing the best natural food to dogs. Since then, Dogsee Chew has been

transforming the lives of pet dogs for the better. With a presence in 17 countries around the world such as India, France, Germany, Netherlands, Canada, USA, Italy, Sweden, and Norway, the start-up works with over 7,000 farmers from 150 hand-picked villages to service their needs.

Kamal believes that turning an idea into a successful business is tough and several challenges arrive but one can't give up. He says, "There are plenty of entrepreneurs with ideas. What matters is how focused you are on your goal, how do you plan to achieve that goal and the hard work you put into it."

The company plans to expand further by enlarging their product portfolio that is suitable for cats and fish. Their goal is to become synonymous as a 100 per cent natural pet treat company in the world.