

FAST TRACK

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SAURABH JAIN, CEO, thinvent Technologies, has made brave strides in the rural and government segments of India to create a mark for himself and his company.



By **Pooja Gautam**
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AS HE was born into a family where management of computers was avidly discussed, even at meal time, computers were more than a mere topic of conversation for Saurabh Jain (28), CEO of thinvent Technologies. Computers became a passion for Jain and later became a part of his professional identity.

Jain's mother, who owned computer centers at Delhi and Bhopal, introduced him to the All India Society for Electronic Computers and Technology (AISECT), a society that provided computers in rural areas when he was in 12th standard. His concern for the poor of his country and his passion to work in the IT sector led him to think deeply on what he wanted to do with his life. Jain went on to get his engineering degree from IIT Chennai in 2003. He worked with Samsung and other companies, without losing sight of his dream. In December 2007, the dream took shape and thinvent was born. An active player in the IT market that provides IT solutions, thinvent has given Jain a platform to work for the underprivileged and make a difference in their lives.

"I have worked with NGOs such as ASHA, and organizations such as Lead India and Rotary Clubs. My aim is to do something that fulfils me rather than just make money. Money is very important, but so are the people of our country. As a company, thinvent is interested in listening to the problems of customers and solving them with need-based IT products and solutions, rather than just pushing solutions and products," says Jain.

Dream Merchant

Thinvent is just nine months old but has made giant strides in business. The customers it caters to are

HUMANIST to the CORE

Not many entrepreneurs choose to trudge through India's villages. And even fewer venture on the road that leads to government offices. Saurabh Jain, however, dared to chase his dreams in these areas.

mostly government offices and NGOs working in rural India. It provides customized software, which serve very specific needs of its customers, and power-efficient computers.

Describing the rural market, Jain says it may be a new market but it is growing at a clip. "Many big NGOs have set up offices in rural areas. They need computers to store, manage and update their data. A regular PC cannot work in these places as uninterrupted power supply is not guaranteed. Yet, the NGOs need their computers to run round the clock. Thinvent has created computers that last a whole day, not on giant batteries but on car batteries. We provide our customers with computers that last long, consume less power and are durable, as well as hassle-free. We should remember that NGOs cannot keep carting their PCs to an urban center whenever they experience downtime," explains Jain.

"Computers in rural India address the needs of education and dissemination of information. There is so much information available today. The challenge is to be able to access it at the required time. If a person wants to know how to get a license for his business, the information is available online. A computer works more like an online newspaper in rural areas."

"Video conferencing is also a great way to educate and empower people, especially in rural India. Consider this scenario. A laborer goes to collect his wages. He touches the computer screen with his thumb and after receiving his thumb impression, the computer actually prompts him that he must be paid a minimum wages of Rs 60 a day instead of Rs 40. IT has tremendous scope for education and empowerment," explains Jain.

He says thinvent is in talks with the Department of Health in Chattisgarh, agriculture universities in Kolkata and the Government of Maharashtra in connection with a number of rural projects.

Customization is Key

"In a diverse country like India, every company has specific needs, so we need to customize software. For example, we cannot get an ERP from London and expect it work perfectly with systems in India. Different geographies with distinct cultures have discrete needs. We have to devise products keeping in mind the environment in which these products are going to be used. I see government as a growing market. We, as a company, would like to work with government."

Thinvent is a part of huge projects undertaken by the Center for Railway Information Systems (CRIS), such as Crew Management System, Unreserved Ticketing System, Automatic Ticket Vending Machine, Passenger Reservation System and Parcel Management System.

According to Jain, crew attendance is a key area for the Railways. There are over 1 lakh drivers and guards who are on rotation duty round the clock. Most of them get their schedules on the go. The crew management system helps drivers and guards keep to the schedules without wasting time or effort. All they need to do after reaching Point A is log on to a computer to check their next destination. The crew management system also helps the Railways track crew movement. Nearly 200 computers have been used in this project. These thin client machines are housed in kiosks. "Our job is to make sure they keep running smoothly. The kiosks have a biometric device that prevents issues such as proxy attendance," Jain explains.

"Another area of interest to us is unreserved ticketing. The Railways serve close to 16 million passengers every day. To cope with such a huge demand, we have systems that help in issuing tickets even if the network connection goes down. When the network come up, the data about how many tickets have been sold gets updated on its own," says Jain.

54

percent of thinvent's projects come from the government segment

SNAPSHOT



COMPANY NAME: THINVENT TECHNOLOGIES

FOUNDED: December, 2007

HEADQUARTERS: Delhi

TOP EXECUTIVES: Saurabh Jain, CEO and SBI Sarin, CTO

CUSTOMERS: Indian Railways (CRIS), Coral Telecom, Laqshya

KEY BUSINESS ACTIVITIES: Customized firmware for kiosks, thin clients and educational computers. Technology and consulting for e-governance and rural IT projects. Embedded development services for telecom equipment.

SERVICES PROVIDED: Produce robust client devices for use in e-governance and education projects. Also provide embedded Linux development services.

WEBSITE: www.thinvent.in

Going with Government

Earlier, the thought of dealing with the government sent shivers down many a businessman's spine. The common fear was that governments don't pay for the services they hire. People dismissed the thought of approaching governments for business because they assumed they would need to pull strings and wield 'influence'.

But Jain is quick to dispel such myths. "I agree that initially there will be no profits from this vertical. What can be even more daunting is to explore this segment when you are a new company. But we have done quite well in the past nine months. We can proudly say that although it's a tough job to operate in this market, it's not an impossible task."

What was the magic potion then? "No magic potion," he says with a laugh. "One of the ways we went about business was to deal with system integrators rather than with the

government directly. We mostly deal with big SIs and sell our products to them, and they, in turn, use the products for a government project. Our work has been our best advertisement," Jain explains.

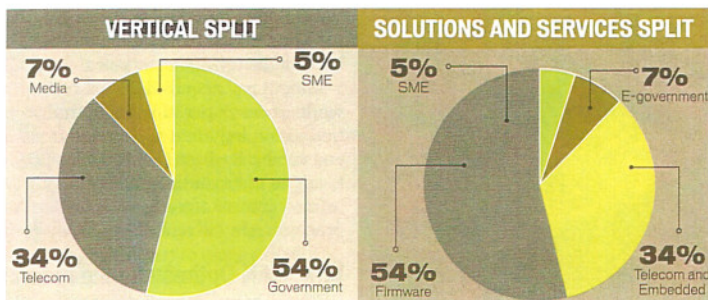
"People in the government are highly educated and articulate. They know their IT needs. They describe their specific needs after which I make a prototype which, more often than not, meets their needs. Bureaucrats are willing to look at Indian IT companies for IT solutions because they know that we understand their needs and deliver suitably", he says.

Exploring New Horizons

Jain wants to build upon his business dream by using open standards and open source software. Discussing the scope of open source software, Jain thinks this will be the only way forward in the coming years, since open standards and open source software are fast becoming the norms of the industry. "Services that are needed to support open standards and software will be the driving force of the IT industry. Service providers who ignore this fact today are sure to meet a roadblock in the future," he warns.

Jain plans to expand his business not just in India, but in a few developing countries as well. "Countries such as Africa, Latin America and parts of South-East Asia have a lot of scope for IT development, especially in their rural areas. Someday, we would like to tap that market. In India, we don't have a choice but to expand. Since we provide solutions that are customer-centric in nature, we need to be physically present at a location to understand a customer's needs. We need to grow our manpower and set up more branches in the near future," he adds.

With a determined man like Jain, dreams have an uncanny way of turning into reality. ▀



SOURCE: THINVENT TECHNOLOGIES.

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