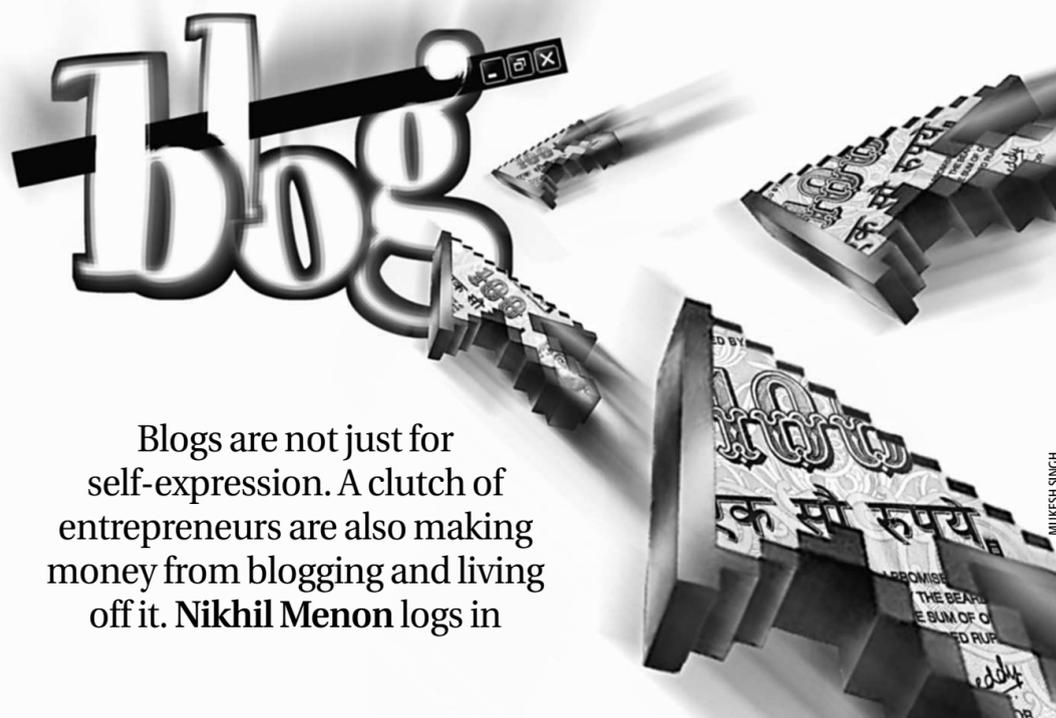


NEW KIDS ON THE



Blogs are not just for self-expression. A clutch of entrepreneurs are also making money from blogging and living off it. Nikhil Menon logs in

has become today, but for Kiruba, it was the only way to fully express himself. He subsequently created a basic web page on Angelfire.com and posted some of his technology stories on it. The attention these articles generated proved to be an eye-opener for Shankar. They also helped him get a job as senior executive-portal at Sify (then Satyam Infoway) in 1999. Shankar recalls, "Forget my resume, I didn't take a single piece of paper for the job interview. I merely asked my interviewees to read my work online and that impressed them so much, they welcomed me on board!" Today, Shankar says he makes anywhere between Rs 20,000 and Rs 40,000 a month from AdSense alone. He also earns between \$500 and \$800 on every regular advertisement on his blog, Kiruba.com and says that many of his work and teaching assignments have come to him from people who have read and followed his blog.

Jain became a full time blogger from 2005 onwards and today, operates three blogs, TechGazing.com, Kunzum.com and AjayJain.com. He is also an author of two books, a columnist, photographer and consultant. Most famous bloggers, in fact, make money through writing newspaper columns, teaching, etc. It is all part of the package. Jain feels that the slowdown could be a good period to partially augment one's income through a well-written blog. "One must appreciate that there is no shortcut to blogging Nirvana," he says, adding, "But you might as well utilise this 'slow period' to try your hand at

something new. And with a lot of people having spare time too, it might be easier to build your readership."

The first step to starting a blog is deciding what you want to write about—and if that's a challenge, here's help. As a long-time blogger and CEO of Business Blogging, a firm he had started to help corporations leverage social media, Kiruba Shankar knows about making money off blogs. He rattles off the basics, "Bollywood, cricket, gadgets and technology are some of the most widely-read subjects online so blogs on those subjects will find it easier to attract visitors." He adds, "Bloggers should remember that meta-tagging of the site is important if it is to get a better ranking on a search engine. Users must also update their blogs as regularly as possible."

Blogs also need some peer-to-peer promotion. Advises Jain, "Promote your blog on platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Orkut and even on other blogs. Mention your blog in your visiting cards, letterheads, email signatures and even make bumper stickers. Once the traffic comes, money will follow."

A blog is not a quick way to make money. Out of thousands of sites, only a handful become significantly rewarding. Most expert bloggers advise individuals to wait and watch the response the blog generates before jumping into blogging full-time. And hopefully, you'll have something worth writing about.

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“What you write has to be original as well as unique. Rehashing existing content is no good and will not attract readers. A blog can be monetised only if you have a strong pool of dedicated subscribers and visitors

Amit Agarwal
Labnol.org

Incense and Sensibility

Some of the choicest global perfume brands owe their sweet fragrance to this Mysore-based *agarbatti* maker



As you sit in the multi-hued room, the incense wafting through the air distracts at first, and then envelops you in an ambience of serenity and peace. This incense from the NR Group also changes moods in Peruvian cities, Brazilian carnivals and Venezuelan spas. Not just that, some of the key ingredients in a bottle of Christian Dior's Poison or a perfume from Calvin Klein also come from the same group.

The Mysore-based NR Group started small in 1948 and remained so for decades, making incense sticks under the 'Cycle' brand. "That was the time of my grandfather," recalls managing partner Arjun Ranga, under whom the company diversified and got into exports. He and his brothers modernised this low-tech, manpower-intensive industry and put it on the global map. NR Group now has a 40% global market share in tuberose (rajnigandha) extracts and a 30% share in jasmine extracts. "My grandfather had the foresight, in the '50s, to think about distinct branding for our incense sticks," says Ranga.

Ranga's father, RN Murthy studied the art of making fragrances in Paris and created a sales and distribution network. Under Ranga, it has morphed into a separate marketing department. "Our distribution network, channels and the talent we hire is quite like FMCG companies," says the 34-year-old Ranga, who's eldest among the three brothers running the firm. The company has developed a stronger sourcing base and priced its products competitively, breaking into the northern and eastern markets by creating customised fragrances. It has also created fragrances in-house for diverse markets in Asia and South America.

Bamboo for the sticks is sourced from forests in the North East and Shimoga in Karnataka. There are more than 5,000 synthetic and natural compounds used to create various fragrances. A paste of charcoal, wood powder and tree bark is mixed with these compounds, which is then hand rolled on to the stick. At the NR group, this hand rolling is done by around 20,000 women spread across the country, with whom the company interacts through NGOs.

In 2004 the company branched out to lifestyle fragrance products. Today, its line of products includes all forms of incense such as re-diffusers, scented candles and oil lamps. Their incense is used in bars of soaps as well as high-end deodorants and eau de toilette. Internationally, there are just 6-8 major players, called flavour and fragrance houses, controlling the over \$15-billion (Rs 64,500 crore) market for fragrances. It is to these players that NR Group sells its fragrance extracts. These large fragrance houses then create "blends" which are sold to the likes of Christian Dior, Calvin Klein and others.

To expand its range, NR Group launched Ripple Fragrances, which makes personal care products like the DNA range of perfumes and deodorants, lifestyle brands like Iris that sell to top hospitality players and high-end stores, and Lia which sells at upscale malls.

The next stage of growth for the company will come from electronics, says Ranga. This is expected to take the company past the Rs 1,000 crore market. The group diversified into the electronic medical equipments business after Ranga and his brother Kiran returned from the US with MBA degrees. The company started foraying into it, initially assembling motherboards for devices made by companies like L&T and a large US medical equipment maker. Now they deliver full machines, such as ultra-sound systems, to the company which has outsourced the work to them. This business is growing at 40% a year.

Coming back to fragrances, exports to South America, North America, Middle East and South East Asia now bring in 20% of the company's revenues. But exports have hit a plateau because of the recent slowdown, says Ranga. The efficient supply chain management means that the company can still expand due to upbeat domestic demand for its products, and it is doubling its sales force across the northern states. "We will consolidate now, and not focus on acquisitions," says Ranga as he prepares to leave for a vacation to the US, where rich people spray Dior for swanky parties, thanks to this company in Mysore.

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enterprise QUOTIENT



Mention your blog in your visiting cards, letterheads, email signatures and even make bumper stickers. Once the traffic comes, money will follow

Ajay Jain
TechGazing.com, Kunzum.com, AjayJain.com

An Idea for Change

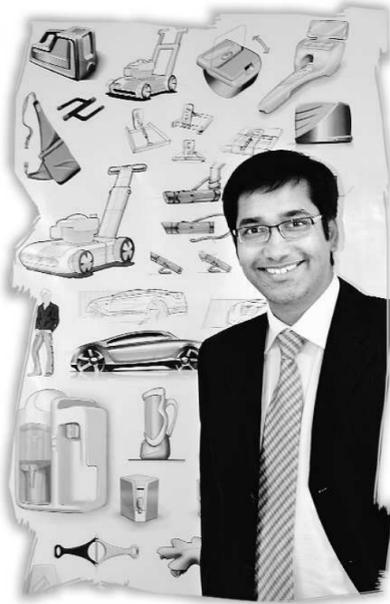
Ahmedabad-based Deval Shah's design hot-shop Idea is giving leading Indian and global consumer brands a leg-up in their marketing efforts

He could have joined his family's century old cotton business and spun profits from a thriving market for the commodity. But he had other plans—he wanted to start out on his own. After his graduation, Deval Shah joined a stock broking house in Ahmedabad and then chasing his dreams he set off for San Francisco to study MBA in international business. During the day, he would chip in as a data entry officer. And, from his office, he would gaze at the Bay Bridge marvelling at its design and wonder how he could dump the monotony of his job to start his own firm. One day, he walked into his boss's room with a business proposal. His boss was impressed. In three years, the two launched Idea Ltd, a design consultancy firm, in Ahmedabad.

Ironically, Shah's first big break in the design business came with a farm equipment—the prototype of an automated fertiliser sprayer he created for the Ahmedabad-based National Innovation Foundation, which nurtures grassroot startups. "The gadget can be tucked to the body, and works by the pendulum-like motion created by humans while they walk," he explains the product which is already fast replacing the conventional fertiliser sprayer.

Shah and his team aren't just designing ideas that cater to rural India. "We are also working on several design solutions for corporates, both within India and abroad," says Shah. With recession-hit companies looking to cut corners, new designs that help achieve pare costs are in vogue and Shah is lapping up the opportunity.

When biscuit maker Britannia was facing a problem of pilferage losses in the process of transportation, Shah's Idea changed the internal placing and packaging processes to significantly bring down the waste. Idea has also contributed to Eureka Forbes' long-lasting water purifiers and Godrej's new packaging solutions for its FMCG products that reduce damages. "Recently, we have designed a first-of-its-kind electrical bike for an auto major by incorporating proper battery-placements and tyre replacements that combines aerodynamic features," says Shah. When most design consultancy firms in India concentrate on just designs, Shah has aligned his work with marketing strategies of his clients to offer them solutions at lower costs. Three years into the business, Shah has roped in clients such as Fine Care Bio-Medical, Godrej, Electrotherm, Britannia, GSK Pharma, Amul, Eureka Forbes, and Videocon in India and Sony, Shell, BMW and Michelin overseas, and boasts



of over 250 products in his portfolio. Idea, which kick-started with an initial capital of Rs 1 lakh from Shah's own home with an assistant, has grown into a Rs 15-crore entity. And he expects to cross the Rs 25-crore revenue figure by 2010-11. Plans are also afoot to raise funds in the coming months for a global expansion. Idea is already a team of 102—mostly from IITs and NID.

"I really learned the tricks of the trade during my stint with US-based Inventor Publishing & Research llc, where I met Ajay Gupta, who is now a co-founder at Idea," says Shah. Impressed by his business plan, Gupta had made him the head of a team of 27 people handling several verticals like administration, marketing and HR. "That egged me on. I thought I should do something novel. I decided to go back to India," he reminisces.

When he was all set to return to India in December 2005, Shah was asked to start a patent business back home. The venture failed. Gupta and he met for a coffee to discuss what went wrong, but finally ended up discussing a new business idea. And that's how Idea was born.

As he works up new deals with corporates around the country, he is also hoping his designs will help change the world. From his fourth-floor office in Ahmedabad, he can see a city in motion. "There's an opportunity in everything around us. You should know how to join the dots," he adds.

TAPASH TALUKDAR
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CONTOURS

I learned the tricks of the trade during my stint with a US firm where I got to work across verticals like administration, marketing and HR

Deval Shah
Founder, Idea Pvt Ltd

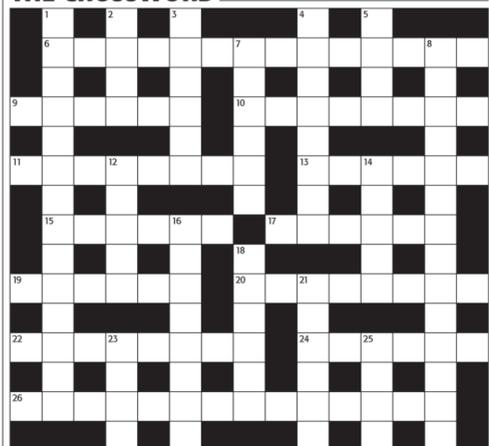
DILBERT

by S Adams



THE CROSSWORD

3646



ACROSS
6 Fuzz of squaddies (8,6)
9 Canter around in an abstracted state (6)
10 Music Leo arranged for a show place (8)
11 One disposed of stewed tea inside on one's own (8)
13 Soldier portrayed on back cover with khaki cut short (6)
15 Suffers ruin when the civil service is involved (6)

17 Come down on a superior carriage (6)
19 Like dwarves expressing themselves pithily? (6)
20 Go in for reform in genuine relation to the area (8)
22 Burst out in a month to hold up progress (8)
24 Another showing for the salesman to take in (6)
26 Agent here at one always coming back outside (14)

DOWN
1 In simple robe as prepared for reception (14)
2 Family from some barbaric land (4)
3 Give evidence at trial (6)
4 A game gives soldier a defence (8)
5 Something added to city get-up range (4)
7 Give up again and go back (6)
8 Surprised to be taken by girl with things to sell (6,8)
12 Substitute an expression of uncertainty after an officer turns up (5)
14 In the wrong road one may have an entertaining air (5)
16 Way out for engineers at the races (8)
18 Born to worry about it being one of us (6)
21 Not one of us can be found in the larger Manchester region (6)
23 Volunteer to join the navy where there's water (4)
25 Suffering one to enter sleep the wrong way (4)

Solution to 3645
ACROSS: 1 Missing links. 8 Ignoble. 9 Organic. 11 Price lists. 12 Plan. 14 Punished. 16 Holder. 17 Dip. 19 Thrive. 21 Gestured. 24 Mope. 25 Historic. 27 Student. 28 Educate. 29 Helplessness.
DOWN: 1 Mention. 2 Subversive. 3 Itemised. 4 Grotto. 5 Iago. 6 Kindled. 7 Hippopotamus. 10 Contradicted. 13 Contribute. 15 Dig. 18 Pertness. 20 Rapture. 22 Rentals. 23 Little. 26 Peep.