

"We will be a software ashram"

Abhijit Bhattacharjee is the founder and product manager, myMobilePhone.in, a company that is into building valuable information services and applications for the Indian market, and making them accessible over the mobile phone.



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The success of a company is fuelled by many things. One of them is the CEO's dream. To commemorate our 17th anniversary, we approached 25 CEOs and asked them to share their dreams with us. The write-ups are spread across this issue...

As a child, my mother taught me to aspire high. My mother also simply stated that I could achieve anything if I only put my heart and mind into it, and if I really wished for it. From my father, I learnt integrity.

My life has been a multi-faceted one—a premier boarding school, then a 12-year stint in India's military services. It was a life filled with adventure, leadership at a young age, nature, fun, friends, books, music, arts, engineering and computers. A marriage in the middle. And then, my insistence on leaving the military to pursue my dreams, creativity, freedom and facing my

own invented challenges, head on. I was suddenly in the marketplace, quite penniless. It hasn't been overly pretty, but at brief moments, has been spectacular too. I learnt constantly—observing, noting, thinking, planning, talking, even writing. The self-belief stayed intact. Finally, as a 38-year-old, I feel I know what I need to know. And I am ready again.

My current project is to information-enable the millions of common people of India. The mobile phone is the opportunity because the number of people in our country who already use the mobile phone is a number that would have been impossible to conceive earlier. The mobile phone is also an information device and has numerous possibilities.

It is the rapidly growing information divide that is responsible for certain segments of our society sliding down very fast in the globalised competitive economy, which is driven primarily by information. The already poor are growing poorer and there is no way to arrest this, except to find innovative disruptive ways to enable them with timely information that they really need.

The conventional thinking is that the information needs of common people (say, a peasant in the countryside) are restricted to agricultural inputs, price of commodities at the mandi, etc. But, in reality, their needs encompass all aspects of life.


Today, peasants rely on the wisdom of the village elders for all their information needs, whether it is an input for a career in the

railways or to know whether the polio vaccine is really a birth control pill. Is there a way that peasants could get what they need - on demand. If we could make it easy for them, show them the way, and if the information was really valuable, they would use such a service very often indeed.

We have identified many valuable applications. The numerous services, applications and their usable implementations in the existing environment are an important IP (intellectual property) of our company.

We will also build a popular portal for mobile phone users in general. And we shall use the revenues we generate to cross-subsidise our more charitable aims of building information applications for the common people.

Our applications shall be in all Indian languages, will run on the Web, on the mobile phone and on the desktop. And they will be accessible from the phone over SMS, over GPRS (general packet radio service) or WAP (wireless application protocol), and also from any PC over the Internet. We are increasing the information payload of a standard SMS and making it easier to operate in all major Indian languages.

It is a large effort for which we need to be a large company one day. And we will stay focused on creating value for society. We will be a software ashram. 

As told to:

Vandana Sharma