



The best in social networking is yet to be seen according to **Rakesh Barnwal**, the co-founder of social network site **SirfDosti** and **Vyom Technosoft**, an IT company.

*Startups.Insider* Himanshu Sheth finds out more about **SirfDosti.com** and the entrepreneurial thoughts of its founder in this interview.

### **1. Can you tell something about Vyom Technosoft Pvt. Ltd.?**

Vyom Technosoft Pvt. Ltd. is an ISO 9001:2000 Certified Software Development company established on 18th May, 2005 by the ex-employees of Infosys and TCS. The company currently has 50 employees on its payroll. Major strengths of the company are - Process Deployment Software & Portal Development as well as developing Web 2.0 Applications. Vyom Technosoft got ISO Certification in the least time period taken for any IT Company in India - within 8 months of its inception.

### **2. What does the word "Vyom" in Vyom Technosoft mean?**

It means both Sky - Horizon & "Shunya" - nothing. This signifies the limitless potential and capabilities that makes our company - VYOM, which started out of nothing except a sense of pride and satisfaction of creating something worth doing. This also underlines our commitment towards all our stakeholders as in our tagline - "Let's touch the sky together!".

### **3. Can you tell us more about its founders?**

The company was founded by Mr. Rakesh Barnwal & Mr. Amit Mathur on 18th May (Vyom Foundation Day), 2005. The founders have worked in IT Companies like Infosys & TCS and are amongst the youngest Entrepreneurs in India.

### **4. So when did an ex-TCS and Ex-Infosys employee think of starting their own companies?**

The founders were a part of at least three startups during their engineering graduation period. It was more a matter of fun, learning process and doing something over and above those Computer Networking and AI courses.

The most prominent of them was the one started on 16th Dec. 2001, by the name of Vyom. Albeit, not a legal entity, Vyom was used as a platform to support all the pertinent stakeholders and thus, a website [www.vyomworld.com](http://www.vyomworld.com) was launched, which helped tens of thousands of graduates in getting a good career.

While working in their respective companies, we again had a feeling of not creating enough good things due to performing very project-limited responsibilities. Moreover, adding a value to the society at large was more important to us than just developing few modules where end-to-end development is normally not possible.

**5.Can you brief us about some of the businesses which Vyom is currently into?**

Vyom Technosoft is mainly into three business domains –

- o Process Deployment Softwares like ERP, CRM, CMS, Intranet, Process Management Softwares, etc.

- o Web Portal Development, Design and Hosting - We have six servers in US and one in Canada.

- o Web 2.0 Applications like SirfDosti.com, AJAX based applications, IP2City locator services, etc.

We are also in the following verticals:

- o ODC - Offshore Development Center - For few clients in US.

- o Process Deployments for SMEs in Domains like Pharma, Agro Products / Pesticides, Cement, Interiors, etc.

**6. How has Vyom Technosoft grown over a period of years since the time it was founded and till to date?**

We have achieved above 900% growth in absolute terms since inception and our annual growth rate is above 250%. We are looking for an annual growth rate of above 100% for the next 3-5 years.

**7. What was the biggest hurdle when you started your venture?**

Lack of any support system to rely upon and leaving a decent good paying job were the biggest.

**8.Can you tell us something about SirfDosti? When was it launched and how is the response since its been launched?**

SirfDosti is a unique Social Networking site. It is currently targeted towards Indian Members and gives them the ability to Scrap in their regional language. Besides this, it also lets the users create their own Blogs.

The site was launched on 1st Feb. 2007, and since then, the site has received tremendous response and acceptance from the users. Some of the users have more than 4,000 scrap entries. In the first month of its launch, the site had 25,000 members, over 200,000 Scraps, over 75,000 Personal Messages, and over 28,000 image files uploaded by the users.

We feel it's a decent start.

**9. What do you feel about the fast growing field of "Social Networking"?**

As per our view, Social Networking is not growing fast at all! Its just getting replaced

and re-innovated. Its just replacing our existing real life network of social colleagues, friends and relatives to a virtual connectivity, which is again based on the same two factors of Feeling Important and Making others feel important. Those networking sites which will provide features that are close to the real life interaction needs of people will survive in long run.

One of the most important phenomenon happening in the current net-savvy generation is to outsource or unload the maximum possible efforts needed for tracking and maintaining small but vital things which give meaning to our lives - like birthdays of our friends.

**10. Since SirfDosti.com is targeted at Indian audience, who are some of its major competitors (in the Indian context)?**

SirfDosti.com is unique in its own aspects. Most of its features are unique and distinctive. Scraps in Indian Languages (Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Gujarati, Bengali).

Pinching the user, File & Media Sharing, Detailed Recent Visitor History, Event posting, Unlimited Photo uploads in albums are just to name a few. The site has its own domain space - but some of the close competitors can be Fropper.com and Orkut.com.

**11. What is the revenue model of SirfDosti?**

Currently, the site is supported by non-intrusive advertising. In future, we plan to add different revenue streams by SMS Contests, Mobile Application Downloads and Online games that interest our members.

**12. What is your idea of so called Web 2.0 sites?**

One of the key feature of all Web 2.0 applications is that they provide solutions to one or more of our abstract problems which have vital impact on our practical life. Ability to express ourselves is one such need. Kicking your boss out may be the other, very tempting one.

We chose Web 2.0 model for our applications. One of the major reasons being our philosophy of "let us touch the sky, together". We want to be at a business where all stakeholders get benefited in one way or the other instead of playing a zero-sum game (where a winners' win is always losers' loss).

**13. How are you trying to market SirfDosti so as to reach to a wider audience?**

Most of the growth of SirfDosti.com is expected to be by invites through satisfied members to their friends and relatives. This (Word-of-Mouth) is the best form of marketing, online or offline.

In a country, where 40% of the people are illiterate, less than 60% of people have access to Television, less than 30% of people use Internet.

As you probably know within 5 hours, every distant villager of India knew about Ganesha drinking milk, just a few years back. That's the power of word-of-mouth advertising. Besides this, we are using our own base of millions of website users to other domains. We have also used Google AdSense to some extent to drive interested people to our portal.

#### **14. What are some of the unique features in SirfDosti that are not available in other Indian social networking sites?**

SirfDosti.com is unique in its own aspects. Most of its features are unique and distinctive. To name a few:

- o Scraps in Indian Languages (Hindi, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Gujarati, Bengali)
- o Pinching a user - when you do not want to communicate, rather just want to draw attention of the user
- o File Sharing - upload unlimited files and share it with your friends.
- o Media Sharing - Upload your favorite music and share other member's media files.
- o Unlimited Photo Uploads in Photo Album - No space limit.
- o Online Friend indicator - You'll see which all of your friends are online at this moment.
- o Featured Photo Gallery, Featured Member Profiles and Featured Communities to give proper recognition to the deserving ones.
- o Personalized Birthday greetings to the members
- o Concept of site moderators - Some responsible members are assigned Moderator Permission for the whole site who can remove offensive content from the site and keep it family safe.

#### **15. With so many social networking sites emerging day after day, what according to you is the future of Social Networking?**

The future of web is user generated content. There was a time when most of the websites were read-only, where one webmaster posted the content and all others accessed it.

Things have changed since then and we are now moving more and more towards user generated content like Blogs, Community Sites, Social Networking. Right now, very few people have access to Internet.

As the penetration of Internet increases, more and more people will move to making/meeting friends online and that's where Social Networking comes into picture. The best day for Social Networking is yet to arrive!

#### **16. What is your advice to some of the young aspiring entrepreneurs?**

Pursue your dream with full dedication, sincerity and honesty. Do not re-invent the wheel - look out for help wherever possible. Increase your network and meet more people to get more diverse ideas. And yes, think laterally!

**17. Can you let us know one mistake which you have committed during your Entrepreneurial career that others should watch out in their ventures?**

We did everything by ourselves which consumed lot of our crucial and useful time and resources. Normally, new Entrepreneurs should re-use as much resource/support available in their network. Save your breath till the last fight.

**18. Any general comment from you side before we let you go?**

For any real Entrepreneur, money is never the main goal but the by-product while the main focus has to always be in something more subjective, elegant and valuable. It is for the brave-hearted and not those faint at heart.

Succeeding as an Entrepreneur gives enormous pleasure, pride and satisfaction, but even failing as per-se will also give at least the same level of satisfaction.

**Are you brave hearted enough to startup? :)**