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# Riding the digital wave

Sunny Balijepalli



FILE PHOTO

RENUKA PHADNIS

Serial entrepreneur Sunny Balijepalli saw a business idea when he noticed relations of a new baby sharing photographs and exulting over the new addition to the family. His next startup was based around that idea, of printing copies of digital photographs for competitive rates. In September 2007, Balijepalli announced the launch of his latest internet venture, 'ZoomIn', the country's first single source web site for online photos that enables consumers to store, share and print digital photos. ZoomIn is also the industry's first service catering to non-resident Indians and Indian-Americans in the US to send photos to friends and family in India.

The company has received seed investment from First Round Capital, an early stage venture fund led by Josh Kopelman, dedicated to helping talented entrepreneurs build companies.

The digital imaging market is worth Rs 3,500 crore in India. It is better than printing at home, which is expensive in the long run. Printing at home is expensive because while the printer is cheap, paper and consumables such as cartridges are expensive. The owner has to continually keep track of storing and archiving the photos. "A one-off print is fine but in the long term, it is expensive," he said.

People in India can order online from anywhere. If the person lives in a village, the dotcom uses India Post. People in metros get photo prints the following day. For a US shipment, the cost is pegged at \$2 and 49 cents or Rs 100 flat.

Indian youth is definitely at the same level as youth anywhere else on the globe, people of the same generation share the same tools for connecting and expressing themselves, he said. There is great opportunity in digital photography and print business in India, a highly competitive segment. Sunny has been part of several new ventures. He co-founded Half.com in July 1999, where he was chief technology officer. The company became one of the largest sellers of used books, movies and music in the world. Computerworld named Sunny a Premier 100 IT Leader in its annual ranking of Information Technology leaders.

In July 2000, eBay acquired Half.com for over \$350 million. After the acquisition, Sunny remained with eBay to integrate the two companies' technologies. Since leaving eBay in 2003, Sunny has been an active angel investor and advisor in a number of technology startups. He is a board member of Cuts.com, a video startup he co-founded.

Talking about net startups in 1990s and now, he said, "I built and launched companies that were bought at the height of the dotcom wave. Today, business is significantly different. Launching a business now is very different. Earlier, you could get together 20 engineers and start a business. Today, you put together and use services, such as Amazon's infrastructure and computing from Google.

"These services are the 'nuts, bolts and pipes' of business." Entrepreneurs have a lot of opportunity now. Two people with one great idea can launch with infrastructure that can be scaled, he said.