

Google India's Business focus and Organization Strengths

An Interview with Abhishek Awadhiya (Head-Sales, Operations and Strategy- Google India

(Special thanks to Ms. Padmavathi Krishnamurthy for conducting the interview!)

Google, India

In 2006, Google was added as a verb to the Oxford and Merriam Webster Dictionaries. In the last few years the corporation Google has held around two-thirds of the global search engine market share and generated revenues of sixty plus billions of dollars, six times the revenue of its nearest competitor.

Its product portfolio includes (and is definitely not limited to) its flagship search tool-Google Search which serves three billion queries every day. Google Apps, Bookmarks, Google Calendar, Google Docs, Drive, Hangouts, You Tube, Picasa, Gmail, Google Earth, Google Maps and the browser Google Chrome. It also owns two operating systems – Android and Chrome OS. In the hardware space Google offers the Nexus phone and the prized Google glass, Google T.V. and Google driverless car. Well known for its products, Google is also a provider of services like Google Ideas, Google Crisis Response and Person Finder. In short Google caters to every information-organizing need a person may have irrespective of profession or passion.

So what is this fifty thousand or so strong organization up to these days in the most diverse country of the world? Mr. Abhishek Awadhiya, Head-Sales, Operations and Strategy at the India Office tells us about some amazing initiatives taken by the company to foster growth and development of rural India, the organization culture in the Indian context and Google's growing businesses.

Abhishek Awadhiya

Head-Sales, Operations and Strategy

Google India

If one thing is evident while talking to Abhishek- it's his passion for technology. After doing his bachelors in electronics and communications from IIT Madras, he worked in Reliance Telecommunications as an R & D engineer for two years. There he felt the drive to expand beyond research. He did his M.B.A from ISB and immediately thereafter joined McKinsey where he worked for six years. Always energized while meeting customers, Abhishek aimed to be a technology entrepreneur and loved the exposure he got at McKinsey especially in turning around sick businesses, product development and increasing customer reach. He decided to immerse himself full time into technology and joined Google in 2013.

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Via Google Hangouts

Tejas: Impact of technology is really great. What was once such a huge thing has now become almost ubiquitous. We are all excited about Android One, Project Ara, self-driving car and Project Loon. What is the next big disruptive technology which Google is working on in India?

Abhishek: India is at the center of Google's priorities, the way it is right now, we are aware of the kind of potential the market holds. There are some interesting things which we are doing in India.

If you really scratch the surface, out of the 240 million internet users we have in the country, a total of 30 % are women, which is not a very healthy distribution. Google is very passionate about the underlying eco-system for internet and one such example is working closely with the Government of India to help women get online. We have this initiative under the banner of 'Helping women get online'.

Secondly, we are working very closely with state governments in terms of educating them about advantages of internet and how can they leverage that to change their lives. Google helps the Government digitize its operations. We believe that technology can be the backbone for effective decision making and transparency. We are working very closely with the Prime Minister's Office on this.

Thirdly, we are focusing a lot on connectivity. Given the length and breadth of our country, offering reliable high quality broadband is very critical. With the government's support, we are reaching out to villages and sponsoring many of these connectivity issues.

Fourthly, a very big area – education, we are trying to achieve technology supported education for all. How can you leverage policy to bring good quality education? There is a Google for Classroom initiative. We are not only providing connectivity, we are also providing tablets. In these tablets we have several modules, training teachers to leverage technology.

These are few things which get very less air time. These things which we are doing can really touch lives and can help people improve their living.

Tejas: Currently Google India's app based businesses is lower compared to global levels, how do you stimulate that /solve this problem?

Abhishek: That's a great question! You know currently we are working towards NASSCOM 10,000 startups and this is a very real problem. We can have far more number of start-ups and developers in the country. There are multiple reasons why we have not reached our potential.

There is no dearth of talent by the way, the primary problem is infrastructure. We do not have start up atmosphere like in Silicon Valley. Start-ups can actually work closely with mentors and those who give guidance. Funding is also a big challenge although you see billions of dollars being funded in large companies like Flipkart, Snapdeal etc. but there are many smaller start-ups which have cool ideas but struggle from a funding stand point. Thus there is a need for creating a supportive ecosystem.

NASSCOM and Google are working very closely to create a start-up ecosystem. Our aim is to create 10,000 start ups in the country. We have started providing office infrastructure, where developers can actually come and work.

On the mobile front there is a separate effort, we are working with a bunch of telecom developers to stimulate the Android development in the country and we aspire to 10 x the number of app developers, in the next 3 years. We want that 10% of Indian applications figure in the top 100 apps on the Google Play Store. We can't press enough about how important mobile market is. There is a lot which needs to be done.

Tejas: So the numbers are pretty interesting, 10 times revenue from the app business is a drastic increase, being at the forefront-it must be a good experience for you. The focus seems to be on simplifying. It is really nice the way you have simplified the whole interface and made it so easy, the

other thing which we wanted to ask you was on infra-development and you work closely with the government on this. We wanted to ask about government support in these roles, is it able to successfully support you in this capacity or do you face regulations issues and issues with respect to data privacy, red tape etc.

Abhishek: Well I think every government has its own set of challenges. The current prime minister is really tech savvy when it comes to moving forward. He does not need any proposition to accept importance of technology. At times government is moving faster than private sector companies!

Tejas: That's great to know, the environment is really encouraging. Moving on to some organization specific questions Abhishek, you have been at Google for a good time now, how do you feel about the work culture at Google? How does Google evaluate its engineers and what's the induction process for young engineers at Google?

Abhishek: Ok so three questions, first culture- well it is about freedom of expression and entrepreneurship, it's not like an assembly line where you go through a process in a stark contrast to other companies. It gives the individual the area to work which he/she is really passionate about. It gives the chance to shine on their strengths. This to me is the most important aspect.

Around this there are several good things, everybody is free. There are absolutely no hierarchical boundaries, even Larry Page can be challenged by the most junior engineer and it has happened, it's a point which is factually correct. Democracy and freedom of expression are really important.

From a cultural stand point, great place, democratic place, entrepreneurial. Nobody will sit and tell an engineer what he/she should become. Freedom to think about priorities and work on them is the way we go about it.

The place is about entrepreneurship, this is not a place for those who need a lot of push, everybody has broad deliverable here but nobody micro manages people on a day to day basis. As you go senior up you are expected to be entrepreneurial, but people even at junior level are expected to be entrepreneurial at Google.

Tejas: Any innovative HR practices being followed at Google recently?

Abhishek: Yes we do have actually, Google is trying to ensure employees reach career goals and have successful career path. Given the size of the organization, we are 55,000 people global organization and it is pretty easy to get lost, so we have senior people who coach and mentor junior people, help them address questions like what kind of skill set should they be developing for a certain career path going forward. HR gets Googlers from various walks of life to come and speak and share their experiences. HR team has thus created various forums for experts, mentors and colleagues to come here and help employees answer some tough questions like how can they upscale themselves and so on.

Tejas: You moved from a research side -IIT Madras, now in Google, you are in Sales, Operations and Strategy. What is your next step, maybe start a new company or towards research?

Abhishek: I have an undying passion in technology and I keep myself abreast of technology. My real calling is towards leading technology companies and that is what I would like to work towards. So it is not about doing, it is about leading companies,

Tejas: As a mentor in the field of technology, what advice would you give to students? What should we focus on?

An employer really values clarity of thought and passion. You need to build your own story. What you want to do, how you have been consistent, and how would your job help you achieve your whole aspiration. Companies look at whether you are trying to do a short term optimization or you really have clarity, have a point of view.

Answer questions like-If someone wants to pick me up for a general manager role in a b2c how can technology be a channel for driving customer engagement for new product launches, how can technology be a channel for gathering customer feedback, customer behavior, how can you leverage that, have a sales channel, have a point of view on all of these.