

BT-Nasscom Roundtable with Application Developers

Dearton Thomas Hector September 27, 2011

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Innovation seemed to be the mantra at the NASSCOM-Business Today roundtable with the seven winners of the AppFame contest, a **Nasscom** initiative, which awards innovative application developers in India. The roundtable also had Amit Somani, Chief Products Officer of Makemytrip, who was one of the contest's jury members and **Som Mittal**, President of Nasscom. *BT*'s Sunny Sen moderated it.

Want to make your workout more fun? Need to get a roundup of all your favourite newspapers and portals in the morning? Want to know which mobile prepaid plan might suit you? Don't want the hassle of bargaining with auto rickshaw drivers?

The solutions to these vexing problems might lie with the seven young designers who won the AppFame contest at the Nasscom Emerge Out Conclave held in New Delhi. They sat down with *BT*'s Sunny Sen to talk about what goes into building a successful application and what difficulties they face in the market place.

With mobility devices and smartphones making inroads into the lives of the millennial population, applications are becoming more and more critical. "The real opportunity is when people [come] out with solutions which change their livelihood or add to their well being," says Mittal. He added that the country is witnessing a huge jump in the penetration of mobile phones in the rural sector as well.

Most of the contest winners are in their mid to late twenties. During the roundtable most of them kept fiddling with their smartphones, an unusual obsession among the new generation - which might be why they can figure out what mobile users need.

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"When TV was replaced by radio, [anchors] would get on TV and read like for radio. [That's how] most companies take a web app and put it in mobile. But these apps should be mobile specific as the mobile is very close to the user, like a spouse," said Makemytrip's Soman.

Cheeni Labs designed Plan Hound, an application that performs two functions: it keeps track of a phone owner's usage - the minutes they talk, sms they send etc., automatically classifies it into local/std, calls to mobile, landlines and secondly - and in one click the app also recommends the right plan+topup+rate cutter to save that user some money. Why did the Cheeni design such an app?

"A professor from Kellogg once said that to understand some of the mobile plans in India, one needs a PhD," said designer Jigar Doshi.

"If you are an app developer in India, one of the barriers is that people expect a sms plan in it. It is believed that otherwise, it won't sell," says Christian Emmanuel George, Co-Founder and CEO of Mindhelix Technologies, which created the Tuk Tuk meter. The Tuk Tuk Meter is a GPS-based multi-platform auto fare calculator that can be started on getting into an autorickshaw and will display the fare and distance travelled in real time. Google maps has also been integrated into the app.

Historically, the biggest problem the app developers faced was piracy. But that trend has started to turn around. "Nowadays more and more people are going for the real version because they want warranty," says U. Seema Nayak of 99 Games. The company introduced the Jim & Frank Mysteries - The Blood River Files - for which they won the contest. The game is a Puzzle-Adventure game that weaves puzzles around an intriguing storyline. The game is available on the iPhone, iPad and Mac platforms.

What if you get bored of exercising? Nirdesh Chahal of Media Agility has designed iFitnessPedia, a fitness application which helps users set preferred virtual tracks while working out.

"Our product is aimed at people at the higher end who have smartphones like BlackBerrys and so on. This is for people who want to have fun workouts," said Nirdesh Chahal of Media Agility, which invented iFitnessPedia. This app can be used on a smartphone and allows a user to virtually tour the prominent places across the planet while working out on treadmill. Users can choose a role model as a fitness avatar and perform a myriad of physical activities, like mountaineering, swimming, running, weight-lifting etc.

For someone who would like to use his phone or a tablet to read news while he is on the move, News Hunt has designed an app that trawls 50 newspapers and news portals in nine different languages.

"The first part of the problems we face is the revenue share, and second is the willingness of the telcos to promote the service," says Chandu Sohoni of Eterno Infotech, who developed NewsHunt.

But as the market grows users will demand programs designed for the inch and a half screen in their hands. More and more people are taking to surfing the net through their mobile phones and technology



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experts say that there is a whole new generation which will start surfing the internet for the first time from their mobile phone.

"The number of people who use internet on mobile is increasing rapidly. Our app can be used in a basic 2000 rupees phone," says S Prasanth, CEO of Akmin Technologies, whose app mobiSiteGalore is a Do-It-Yourself online mobile website building tool that allows anyone to easily build, publish & share full-fledged mobile websites just by using a basic mobile phone connected to the Internet.

As we go on talking about mobility we often miss that in a country like India, the sales and distribution team in the field will always have to come back to the office and feed in the information of sales for the day. So M Balasubramaniyam of Syndeon Technologies decided to build an application that could help managing field sales or service teams over the mobile.

"Our unique selling proposition is the low cost associated with the app," says Balasubramaniyam.

According to studies conducted by Gartner, Juniper Research and Markets & Markets, 81 per cent downloads in 2011 will be free. Net revenue from app downloads in 2010 was \$5.2 billion and the estimated net revenue from app download in 2011 is \$15.1 billion i.e., a 190% increase, so there's plenty of market for these new designers to target.

There were 45 applicants for the contest. The first round of screening was based on video links and other data gathered like no. of downloads, no. of last 30 day active users etc., through which the uniqueness, applicability and novelty of the app was judged. The twelve companies who made the cut were then invited for the demo round through web conferencing. Mobile emulators were used by App developers to showcase the performance and capabilities of their respective apps. At the end the jury picked seven apps as winners.

So far, so good for these home grown application developers. At the dawn of a new era of technology consumerisation, these developers might find themselves the next big thing in the world of technology.