

The author's 20 years experience in the enterprise software and wireless infrastructure sectors involves a turnaround (of VERITAS India operations), a startup (now part of Cisco), and an intrapreneurial setup of AT&T's and later Lucent's R&D operations in India in mid-90s. He can be reached at [sharadsharma\\_dps@hotmail.com](mailto:sharadsharma_dps@hotmail.com)

# Riding the India-out Wave

Most intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs in India today are involved in "US-out" ventures. What this means is that their initial markets are in the U.S. In most cases this makes good sense as the U.S. customers and consumers are the early adopters for most product categories. But there are exceptions to this US-out strategy. Back in 2001 when I did my wireless infrastructure startup in the U.S., our lead market was Europe. The rationale behind our Europe-out strategy was that mobile operators there were ahead of the U.S. mobile operators by about 18 months. Establishing a beachhead in Europe allowed us to move-out to other markets more easily.

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Now the exceptions to the default US-out strategy are growing. If you are into the multiplayer online gaming market then you need a Korea-out strategy. If you are a serious online advertising platform then you need a UK-out strategy (yes, the U.K. is ahead of the U.S. in this!) When do you need an India-out strategy? You need one when you are doing something in the mobile space. India is the fastest growing market in the world right now and a great place to start a wireless infrastructure or mobile content business.

I believe that we are close to a tipping point in seeing many more India-out ventures. There are three reasons for this. First, C K Prahalad's ideas about fortune at the bottom-of-the-pyramid (BOP) are finally catching fire among the technology firms. In part this is because of Nokia's huge success with the designed-for-India 1100 series handset. There is also a buzz that Texas Instruments' LoCosto chipset is on its way to a big success. The software success story is Tally which sold more than a million software licenses to micro-firms last year. Airtel's ability to make

better margins at \$8 ARPU compared to Verizon Wireless whose ARPU is above \$50 is also not lost on people. All in all these BOP success stories are having a tremendous motivational effect.

Second, there is again a lot of venture capital available in India. The VCs have raised over a billion dollars in the last 18 months that they are now keen to invest in local ventures. What's more, the new breed of entrepreneur-turned-VCs that have entered the business last year are happy, indeed keen, to pursue India-out deals.



Finally, there is a product ecosystem that's come together as a result of the US-out initiatives inside MNC captives and local startups. This ecosystem is not perfect but it does offer product management, product architecture and business building skills that can be re-purposed for India-out efforts.

The best time to embrace a trend is before it hits the tipping point. So this is the time to seriously examine whether you want to do a career shift and become part of the India-out wave. At this time the opportunities are limited and so you will have to search for them. They could be inside MNC captives where new India-out products are being incubated, but more likely they will be in startups. The good news is that once you identify the right venture, getting into the team is not going to be difficult given that not many are queuing up for these opportunities. Thus this is the true test of whether you want to play safe or want to step outside your comfort-zone. I suggest that you take the plunge.