



For  
**THE**  
GLOCAL  
**INDIAN**

APNACIRCLE HAS ACHIEVED CRITICAL MASS IN THE PROFESSIONAL NETWORKING SPACE. CAN IT NOW TAKE THE NEXT BIG LEAP?


Karan Arora

There is more to networking than just being 'connected'. It is all about being connected to the 'right' kind of people, which is the entire basis on which sites like LinkedIn.com stand. Thanks to the advent of social and networking communities in India's multi-billion dotcom industry, business and corporate networking has become an integral part of working population lives. To tap the growing interest of Indian consumers (*rather prosumers*) in this niche area of social networking, Apnacircle.com launched itself into the space in 2007 and projects itself as India's answer to LinkedIn in the 2.0 domain, where user interest and technology change at the wink of an eye. To their credit, the website has got itself an impressive user base

of 36 million professionals worldwide. As a joint business venture – ApnaCircle-Viadeo-Tianji-Unyk – the firm holds a global network of over 100 thousand users per month.

ApnaCircle was established by Yogesh Bansal in October 2007. Yogesh completed his MBA from University of North Carolina in 1997 and was working with McKesson Inc. Soon after that, he shifted to India in 2006 and crafted the idea of ApnaCircle. It was his vision, self-belief and conviction in his brand, which helped him to sail smoothly through troubled waters in the dotcom domain. Serial entrepreneur Sabeer Bhatia joined in as director a year later. On the inspiration behind the venture, Yogesh exclaims, "The social net-

2006




Inspired by the revolution in social media, Founder Yogesh Bansal shifts to India and begins the ground work for his entrepreneurial venture

2006

ApnaCircle founded as India's first professional social networking site to cater to needs of professionals by Yogesh Bansal

2006



The company launches the virtual business card exchange feature, which enables users to exchange their visiting cards online



(Left) ApnaCircle.com founder Yogesh Bansal, (Centre) Yogesh receiving Entrepreneur of the Year Award for technology innovation in 2011 and (Right) ApnaCircle-APREE 2010, a forum for social networking professionals, in progress

working fury in the west, especially US, fueled my idea of starting a business on similar lines in India. Backed with extensive research in this domain and how professionals globally will react to it, I anticipated robust growth in this industry. The key was to research and cater to working youth wants". Social media had become the buzzword back then in 2006 itself. But ApnaCircle was formed with the aim to specifically be the answer to a boy-next-door's socialising needs and a professional's networking needs.

Bansal derives his inspiration from the late Apple founder Steve Jobs. Passion and innovation are two things that drive him and he makes endless efforts to inculcate the same values in his brand. An adrenaline-junkie, Yogesh is someone who loves to live his life to the fullest. 'Work hard and party harder' are the four words which describe his approach to life. Yogesh believes that success can never be credited to a single attribute or business model and consists of many ingredients such as belief in yourself, forthright vision, the right team and of course the right product. He further goes on to say that success is all about "solving a

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problem or a need at the right time and being consistent with it".

A lot of work went into the formative years of ApnaCircle to ensure that it would be a unique proposition. And that started with deciding the name itself. The core team conducted a lot of polls through questionnaires and did an intense brainstorming before gaining a consensus on the ApnaCircle name. What also went in favour of the name was the earthy feel to it and the instant connect it could make with Indian audiences. Although there were mixed reactions to the *desi* name, Yogesh was adamant on the same and also derived inspiration from the fact that sites like Naukri.com or Shaadi.com had also achieved unprecedented success with local names.

2007	2009	2010
 <p>Silicon valley entrepreneur Sabeer Bhatia joins ApnaCircle's board of directors</p>	<p>ApnaCircle merges with business social networking majors Viadeo of Europe and Tianji of China. Yogesh Bansal and Sabeer Bhatia are appointed to the board of Viadeo</p>	 <p>Viadeo-ApnaCircle-Tianji combine acquire Canadian social networking site Unyk to further grow their Indian market</p>



PHOTO: MANISHA DE



Yogesh Bansal with some of his team members. Yogesh believes in encouraging bottom up innovation

Apnacircle considers its glocal strategy to be a very important part of its positioning. With a combination of global and local professionals on its network, ApnaCircle recently rolled out its Application Programming Interface (API)-based platform, which proposes to uplift the scalability of the website. In this strategic and planned move, they have career opportunities for application developers and for website users. Their 'go-to-market' strategy is unique as they always aim at going from bottom to top and not from top to down. This gives ApnaCircle a fairly unique brand positioning.

If some trending global business reports are to be believed, then within two years of time, India's going to be the world's largest working population. And 5-year-old ApnaCircle couldn't have managed to arrive at a better time. Riding high on a mammoth database of 36 million professionals worldwide, ApnaCircle connects 3000-5000 users to the right kind of professionals on daily basis.

For a business networking brand, the target group is any individual who is career-oriented. It can be a banker, a painter, a sales executive or a CEO of a com-

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pany. Word of mouth works best for a brand like ApnaCircle and they believe in riding high on this marketing strategy. They have been a part of many online and offline networking operations as well, which helps in providing their brand that extra mileage. Viral marketing has worked extremely well for them, as Yogesh explains, "It's like I send you an invitation online and you like it. Now, you send this invitation to ten others and this will spread like a viral". Other than this, PR and media coverage have been a conscious part of the company's branding strategy. To tap the critical mass in India, they are also doing various ATL and BTL activities along with running TVC commercials. Gone are the

days when only a bad product needed strong advertising and marketing. In today's day and age, even a good product needs the spending bandwidth to be able to grab the early adopters and build the initial momentum. "With online companies spending crazy dollars on their marketing and innovating advertising gimmicks, people are ready to pay only if your product is good enough", adds Yogesh. This is part of a very strong trend in the recent times of online companies going mainstream.

2010



ApnaCircle launches application for iPhone to further extend its network's scope to users of the popular communication device

2011

ApnaCircle adds new interactive features to its website including Dashboard, I-frame and rich media videos

2011



ApnaCircle launches the Application Programming Interface (API) platform to help developers to conveniently build and integrate new and innovative applications