

Entrepreneurs for Nepal – Let's create opportunities in Nepal

Facilitators:

Ashutosh Tiwari, CEO, Himalmedia

Sagar Onta, CEO, Benchmark Nepal

Ujwal Thapa, director, www.exoticbuddha.com

"Entrepreneurs for Nepal" is a global starfish-structured organisation established on 17 November, 2007, by a group of Nepali entrepreneurs back from the US. The organisation is actually a group on "facebook" based on trust and technology with members who want to be entrepreneurs. Due to the starfish design, the organization has not been affected even when members discontinue because just like a starfish which grows another limb in place of the cut one, new members join in. The group does not have a formal office. It organises monthly forums every last Thursday of the month for which information is sent via facebook or e-mail.

Says Ashutosh Tiwari, CEO of Himalmedia: "We are not registered anywhere. This is because we want to cut down on overhead costs and bureaucratic hassles having an organisation like this. The members run their own enterprises and help each other through the organisation. It is just a network of people; if one needs help, everyone is ready to provide each other's expertise." Sagar Onta, CEO of Benchmark Nepal confirms: "This is not an

enterprise; it's just a social network which is there to enhance entrepreneurship through cooperation. For instance, if I have problems with labour at my organisation, I contact Tiwari for suggestions/solutions and if the problem is IT-related, I contact (Ujwal) Thapa (director, www.exoticbuddha.com)." Sharing know-how about business is absolutely free of cost, Onta clarifies: "If I really want to use Thapa's consultancy in my organisation, then I can get it for free but if I have to hire IT professionals, then there will be business dealings. The way we work is that we do not collect funds and donate them to a school. We rather help assemble resources to an entrepreneur who wants to open a school." Says Tiwari: "Basically, we want to keep this as a hobby. If it becomes a duty, it will be boring. We want it to be informal which we believe will make members want to share their ideas as per the availability of their time."

Onta says, "Our focus is also on small businesses which employ equal number of people as compared to big corporations, therefore, the group aims to encourage

entrepreneurs. If one entrepreneur can employ about 10 people and if we can multiply the entrepreneurs, the problem of unemployment gradually comes to an end. It is better than opening up huge factories employing thousands and getting stuck with labour and various other problems."

Economic perspective...

Tiwari elaborates, "We basically aim to reduce the overhead costs to overcome the costly information acquiring system in Nepal. So it is about open sourcing ideas and contacts. We feel that overhead costs are actually the capital of a business which can be spent in some other work." Thapa comments, "Entering business in Nepal is very burdensome; young entrepreneurs either have to know some business people to start off or have to be the children/relatives of business people to carry on. We want to overcome that. With a network like ours, young people gain confidence to start enterprises and once they cross the barrier, they gain momentum."



Ashutosh Tiwari



Sagar Onta



Ujwal Thapa

Need for Entrepreneurs for Nepal

The need to form this organisation emerged with a desire to lessen isolation of entrepreneurs. Tiwari says, "X wanted to start something but does not know how to. If 'X' belongs to a wealthy family, s/he will somehow manage from family links, but if one is poor, s/he may not know how to meet the resources, how to approach a bank, etc. So the need was to help those in need by sharing information and solving their problems in our monthly gatherings." Thapa states, "The need has been well addressed; members are constantly posting their ideas. Information is being aggregated in one location," and adds, "People ask questions from half way around the world saying they want to invest in Kathmandu. If any member of our group has an idea, then s/he responds by giving information about what s/he knows about that particular investment." The group members staying abroad do not have to come all the way to Kathmandu to conduct preliminary surveys beforehand. Onta clarifies, "It is basically to change the old system where one had to first pay for the service. We are trying to develop a system whereby the service provider first proves his/her worth for free, and if the client is satisfied then only will s/he pay for the services offered which is exactly the experience I achieved while working in the US."

Basically, forums like these happen elsewhere also. Thapa says, "I went to Delhi a few days ago where I met young IT people. To get them in contact, I just needed to sign up in the internet where they said we'll meet that evening; we met and now I have a big network of friends to start my work there." This is the way it should be in every corner of the world—less hassles, less formalities, no process for being members, etc. Thapa adds, "It is all about open sourcing our group, just a single-step solution for finding entrepreneurial network." Their recognition comes from the network that they have built. It does not come from whether s/he is the director of this organisation or not, but from the value that they keep. If one thinks that someone is credible, one will automatically help the needed person down the line.

Achievement...

The group has achieved a membership base of about 800 people. Its speakers' series is continuing. It is networking with other young entrepreneur groups like Samriddhi and NRN Youth. There are instances where Nepalis working abroad want to return to Nepal but do not know what to do here. For instance, if an IT person needs information about Nepal's IT market and/or related stuff, Ujwal can lead him/her in sharing know-how about his/her business in Nepal. The group has had its share of successes and failures.

Furthermore...

The group aims to run this kind of group

in different parts of the country and globally as well. There won't be leaders but a group of volunteers who organise regular meets to share information. Currently, the group is using the "facebook" platform to network but if it is to happen in remote areas, it will be conducted in their own way. This will also point out the group's drawbacks. Thapa points out, "The issue is not to make the organisation big, but to make people start sharing information about each other's businesses. We have no intention of running community campaigns though we are a voluntary organisation. Our belief is to develop people who will help directly in creating jobs." Their concept is to make sure that budding entrepreneurs focus on creating jobs rather than seeking jobs. The main concept of the group is to teach people how to fish rather than giving them the fish.

Thapa elaborates, "We come from a new philosophy which is hard to digest from the Nepali point of view. For us, small is big. We believe that this is the new way to do business. That's where the new Bill Gates will be born. This is inconsequential in the current scenario but will definitely stand out in the future. Tradition, hierarchy and bureaucracy are entities that consume a lot of time and money, and all we want is to cut those expenses."

Entrepreneurial limitations in Nepal

Tiwari says, "Currently, young people are only thinking about moving abroad which is also because we lack mentorship in youth entrepreneurship. Youth do not know if they have a group to work with." Often, information-sharing is very confidential. For instance, if a person knows about a plot of land available for sale, it is only passed on to his/her immediate circle, not openly. Similar instances take place in entrepreneurship, and the group aims to fill such information gaps. He further says, "People with traditional business backgrounds refuse to join this group."

About the trio's background, they grew up in the internet, and understand the power of information sharing. The internet shares information for free. Information is that commodity which one won't lose much by giving, in fact, s/he is likely to gain. It is not a material which one loses while giving but something that one can make a copy of as many times as s/he wants and share it with others.

If 'facebook' collapses!

"If it collapses, the group can be resurrected immediately," Thapa responds and adds, "Basically, 'facebook' is just a medium of contact, our network is intact with all of us." Tiwari says, "Even if 'facebook' does not collapse, the group can go dead with no postings and no interest of the members. So it is a challenge for us to keep it alive by posting interesting stuffs. We have to keep

instilling signs of life in the group at least by doing something monthly." They are thinking of doing a wiki on entrepreneurship in Nepal just like the World Bank has SME Biz Mantra so that the site keeps regulating with just the postings of people—it could be anyone.

Rooms for improvement...

The longevity and sustainability of such an organisation is always under a cloud because there is no membership and other formalities. The credibility of these groups depends on the quality of discussions and the quality of people involved. Therefore, they constantly focus on making people interested to join the meetings and share as much information about their businesses. Onta points out, "We keep posting interesting updates to keep the momentum going, maintaining the vibrancy of the group."

Funds...

We don't need funds. All we need is the expense of the restaurants where we meet. We have many restaurateur friends who often offer space for free.

Lacking in youth entrepreneurship...

"People worry about finances but they do not seem to think about how to form a team that delivers results. Once they manage the finances, they take it for granted that the business will run by itself. Money is probably the least significant factor to start a business," says Tiwari.

Government loans to young entrepreneurs...

"It may be a good idea if the government outsources to a third party to do a sort of competition but if the government itself longs to support ideas, there is no filtering mechanism," says Tiwari and adds, "The government itself does not know whether it will get the returns after giving Rs 200,000 as loans which it has proposed. It may just be the grant but from the entrepreneurship point of view, the government should expect something in return." Thapa elaborates, "Of course, the government has a target to generate employment but it is not the right body to do such things. It should be handed over to an organisation which has a credible history of investment and knows how to mobilise capital. The primary objective of the government is to maintain law and order in the country to create a conducive environment for entrepreneurs to work freely."

The traditional way that Nepalis still do business in Nepal needs to change. Traditionally, the strength of an entrepreneur was in maintaining secrecy about his/her business, but all that is changing with the rapid globalisation of the markets. A group is eminently more powerful than a single entity, now more than ever.