Innovative business of waste

Faiz Askari | The SupportBiz Bureau

Paresh Parekh is the co-founder and director of Sort India Enviro Solutions, a company based out of Vadodara, Gujarat. The firm has an innovative business model, under the brand of pastiwala.com, which creates last-mile connectivity in the business of door-to-door waste collection.

In an exclusive interaction with SupportBiz, Parekh talked about his business and his plans to grow it to the next level.

Edited excerpts from the interview:

How did you come up with the idea of setting up your innovative business model?

I realized that the recycling industry in our country works in silos. On the other hand, waste management has become a problem for almost every household. We undertook a market survey for over two years, which indicated that there is huge business potential for a process-driven approach of collecting waste from door to door. Post that, we launched this initiative called Pastiwala.com. 'Pasti' means waste paper in Gujarati.

The waste paper disposal space has, till date, been unorganized. Pastiwala.com is an innovative, organized waste paper collection and recycling system that changes the very experience of waste paper disposal, going much beyond it.

How does Pastiwala.com work?

Pastiwala.com brings transparency to the age-old ways of waste paper collection. We have introduced the use of electronic weighing scales at the doorsteps of clients. We purchase waste paper of all kinds at a fair price, including newspapers, notebooks and magazines. We make use of technology in the whole process of collecting waste. We have a centralized call centre, and our mobile workforce uses tablet PCs for submitting their transactions. This enables trust among common people. We also take waste collection bookings through text messages.

What are the major driving forces for your business?

We have introduced a new business model, which we have been successful in doing because of two reasons. The first is because of our back-end integration for recycling waste, and the second is our managing to build trust among common households, who like to call us and sell their waste to our people.

Also, we realized that the conventional method of selling waste material was completely error-prone. Manual weighing machines were used to weigh waste, pricing was not uniform, and waste collectors were very choosy about buying different types of paper. We have tried to address these issues to the best possible, through our model.

Your business is highly manpower-intensive. How has your experience been in dealing with the issues this gives rise to?

Our customer-facing workforce is the main pillar for our success. We nurture our people. We give them training, soft-skill development, and a sense of financial security. We ensure that they get the best outcome of their hard work. It has been close to three years since we started our business, and we have a retention ratio of more than 95 per cent, which is phenomenal.

How has business growth been, from the perspective of revenues?

We are growing at a rate of more than 100 per cent year-on-year. This year, we have achieved revenue of Rs. 50 crore. We are expecting strong growth in the current year as well.

What are your expansion plans?

We are looking at expanding into newer areas. However, as of now, we are focused only on operating in Gujarat. We do plan to foray into new cities within Gujarat. We are also open to venture capital support and, in fact, are in talks with investors.

What is the impact you have made on the society with this initiative?

We have provided a respectable life to over 500 unskilled workers, directly and indirectly. Our collection-and-recycling initiative has conserved over 3,40,000 trees every year, over the last three years, and this number is growing day by day, as we collect and recycle more. Pastiwala is attempting to re-create our world, with the best use of every bit of paper. We work based on a simple thought, a strong belief and meaningful action, to change the earth we live in for the better.

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