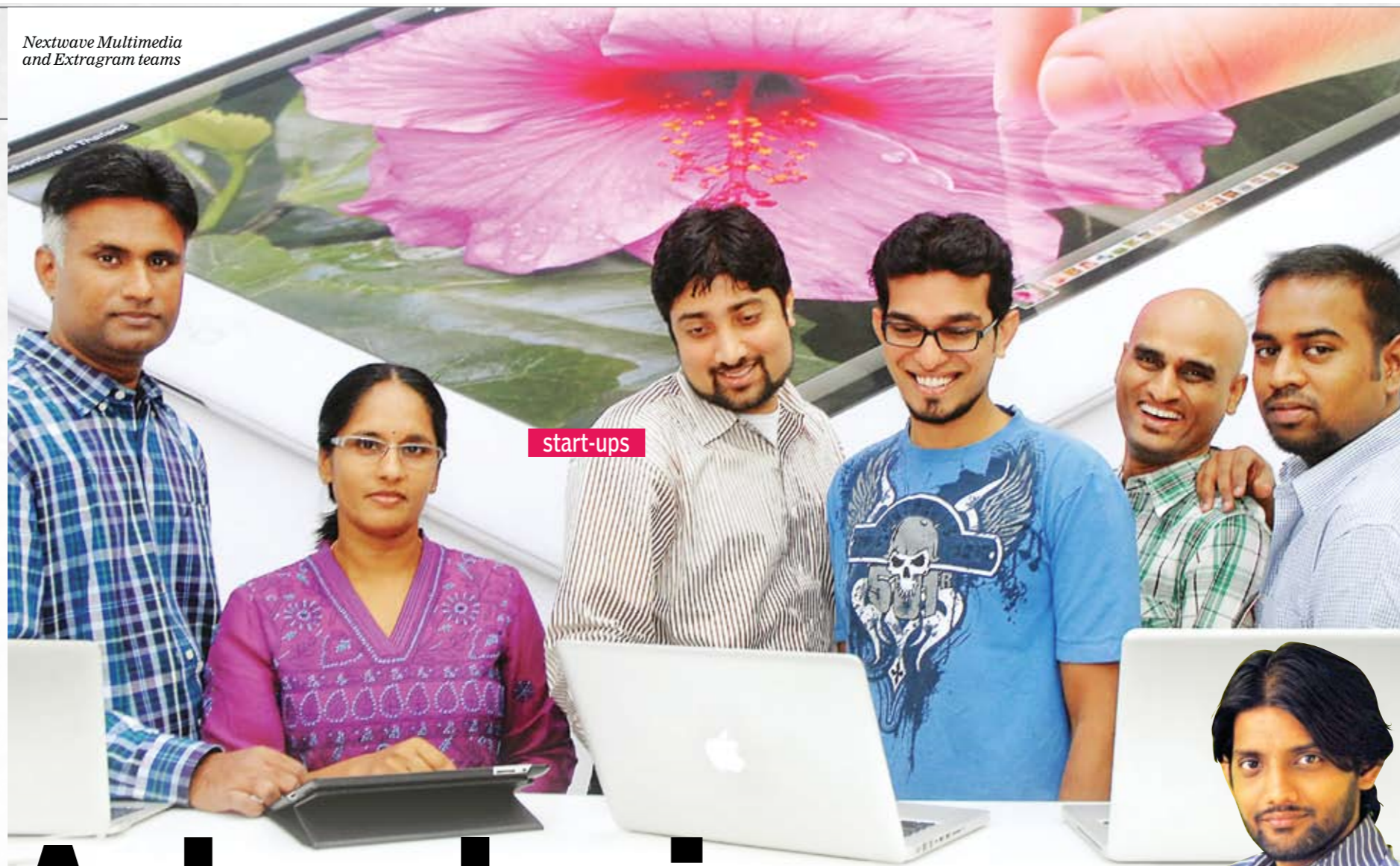


Nextwave Multimedia and Extragram teams



start-ups

NCE DESCRIBED as a merely functional field, the software industry in India has seen a complete turnaround. It has become 'cool', with a great future, not just for software developers, but for anyone with an idea, thanks to Apple's developer fee etc for anyone with the passion and commitment to make it big. Many builders agree that it is no longer about genius coders. At the annual Apple Inc's Worldwide Developers Conference earlier this month, the company paid \$5 billion to its thousands of app developers. Mobile phones are all about apps these days, so companies like Microsoft are also determined to get the best for their Windows Phone app store. It is no surprise when Distimo, a research company, says apps are a \$10 billion market, growing at a rate of 100 per cent every year.

India is one of the largest mobile consumer markets in the world and Nokia Publish is a favourite with Indian developers, for their support through orientation and training. The Finnish major has also launched tie-ups with Reliance and Vodafone, marking a bigger Indian presence. As for the apps themselves,

eight hours on a lazy Friday afternoon to create a crude version of the same.

Babu did not expect it to go viral in a month. "We didn't even want to put it on the market. But tech bloggers like Techcrunch wanted to review it and it went viral, crossing almost a million downloads," he shares. This was followed by the usual reports of bugs. Babu reminisces, "Although we did get a negative response, the best part was we got some unexpected encouragement from the Android community. They backed us, saying that Siri took 15 years to develop and that comparisons are unfair to us. It spurred us to create a much improved version a month later." Thanks to tie-ups with content provider, Chacha, for the answers, Wolfram for geographical and mathematical questions, MagicBricks to find a house and TimesJobs for job searches, they made their app unique.

Babu says Dextra is a product company. "We only build apps for consumers, which we feel will touch people's lives," he says, pointing out that developing an app takes anywhere between ₹5 lakh and ₹10 lakh. "We may overrun budget and time, but the purpose is to make a better product," he points out, adding that Iris was made between ₹10 and ₹20 lakh. Running a start-up involves 18 hour work days. "I hardly get to go home (Thiruvananthapuram) and socially also, am cut off," says the 26-year-old CEO. But he doesn't seem to mind. "I get to try

Today, a writer/illustrator can create his own app and upload it to the app store, without writing a single line of code. Many people in the children's book category are already doing so, without a publisher.

— PR Rajendran, Nextwave Multimedia

Arun Benty



the big names on our radar are Games2Win, with 10 million downloads, Mojostreet, Orangescape, Zoho and Freshdesk. Leading app builders tell us about their journey and why we are different:

Iris: Dextra Software Solutions

Narayan Babu, CEO, Dextra Software Solutions Private Limited, says he dreamed about his own start-up back in college. "So I joined Bosch in the Blaupunkt department to learn about the business," recalls Babu, who brainstormed and created apps in 2009. Friday (like a personal butlerservice), was created then, and scheduled to launch this month. When the alpha version of Friday was well received and was featured in tech blogs like Mashable and The Next Web, Babu decided to move out of Bosch and start Dextra in Bangalore. They made news with the Android version of Siri (Apple's personal assistant), which they named Iris (yes, Siri, spelled backwards). That was in October 2011. "When Siri was launched, everyone was talking about it, but we didn't consider it a big deal," Babu recalls, pointing out that it took them only

new gadgets and read about technology. So technically, I am having fun all the time." If there is one app he wishes he could have developed, it is Flipboard, which automatically gets feeds from Twitter and Facebook. "It's such an easy, hassle-free app with a simple design and I spend almost 30 minutes every day on it," Babu concludes.

Extragram: ByteAlly and Effect Works

One of the few Indian apps to be featured by social media news blogs like Mashable and The Next Web, Extragram lets Instagram users access photos on the web, instead of just via the iPhone app. It has two million users globally and was created by four Chennai men - Sonaal Bangera, Narayanan Hariharan, Karthikeyan Mani and Ilaya Basu - in April 2011. "The idea was to create a simple website to make it possible to browse Instagram photos on the desktop," explains Bangera. The app, which cost

A developing story

The app industry is at its nascent stage in India, yet builders are creating products for the global market. Meet some of the frontrunners. **By Reshma Iqbal and Madhuwanti Saha**

approximately ₹1.5 lakhs to build, is the product of two start-ups, owned by the team. ByteAlly is by Mani, 26, and Basu, and Effect Works is by Hariharan and Bangera. "Mashable has called Extragram 'the sleek web app for Instagram,'" says designer, Bangera, adding that its clean, uncluttered look made it stand out from the other API Instagram apps like Webstagram. The app caught the eye of Robert Scoble, also known as the technical evangelist of Microsoft. "The day Scoble (blogger known for his blog Scobleizer) tweeted about it, our site crashed," laughs Karthikeyan.

The two companies have been joined by another start-up, NFN, also Chennai-based, and

the team is working on food services apps, to be ready in three months. They strike a balance between services and products. "We at Effect Works pitch ourselves as storytellers. So we do presentations, videos, users experience and design for web and mobile for companies who want to convey their message to the consumers," says Bangera, a stickler for deadlines. They agree that the valuation of the apps has gone haywire. "Start-ups are overvalued," says Karthikeyan, observing that most of the start-ups in India are enterprise solution-based, like FreshDesk. "India is known for offering solutions. So when it comes to design, we lag behind," believes



Narayan Babu

Pics: Nagesh Polali & A Raja Chidambaram

The indicators for the start-up to be successful are that your bank account should dwindle or go negative, and your wife as well as your dog should run away.

— Gokul Visweswaran, NFN

Hariharan, who says the best place to showcase apps is SXSW and Techcrunch Disrupt, both conferences in the US. What works against Indian start-ups? "Millions of start-ups lack purpose and they make apps because they think it's cool," offers Karthikeyan. That said, the workaholics admit they are having fun. Unlike corporates, they don't have any rules to follow. "We don't have a specific 'swipe in' and 'swipe out' time and can work till 6pm or sometimes, till 3am. As long as the product is fine, nothing else matters," concludes Bangera.

Comics Creator: Nextwave Multimedia

The Comics Creator (now renamed Comics Head in a new version), by Chennai-based Nextwave Multimedia, is a content creation tool for mobile phones, tablets and PCs. One can also use the camera on the device to capture images and create photo comics. The PC version was the Grand Prize Winner for

SAS Survival Guide app team



the Intel Appup Most Innovative Application in 2011 at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona. PR Rajendran, founder, says that the app developer business has spilled over to non-tech fields such as publishing, as well. "Today, a writer/illustrator can create his own app and upload it to the app store, without writing a single line of code. The tools for content creation is now extremely simple; it is no longer about genius coders." The simple pleasures of his job includes instant feedback from users. The downside? "If someone releases an app that is similar to yours, you have to abandon your own effort," says Rajendran.

Thanks to a global market and low entry barriers, one is motivated to be professional and original. "Low entry barriers are bad if you are big, but it is a great opportunity for ordinary people like us, who at least have the opportunity to get a shot at success," says the Loyola College alumnus. Rajendran's success mantra focuses on sustaining the hard work

till the end, besides a "good idea and quality finish." Sustainable revenue generation is a challenge if one is moderately successful. One has to come up with ideas and explore business models and keep going until a big hit is achieved. The gaming business is being overhauled rapidly, and Rajendran explains, "Presently, there is a heated debate on how games on mobiles and tablets are threatening the long term growth of the console game business. While console games cost about USD 50, games on mobiles and tablets are free or only a few dollars. Small teams are creating great apps, which overtake established players in the content creation space." The director, who is in his forties, lets us in on his future plans, which includes his fifth cricket game - "the fastest growing in that category", the next version of Comics Head, music and audio book apps. Rajendran is another fan of Flipboard - "a great news integration app" - which he uses a dozen times a day, Evernote and Procreate, which he says is "excellent for creating art". Details: nextwavemultimedia.com

SAS Survival Guide App: Trellisys

The SAS Survival Guide App is based on the book by John Lofty Wiseman, that has, for over 20 years, been a favourite with guides and explorers across the world.

HarperCollins, the publishing company, was looking for a mobile version, with relevant features such as search, bookmarks, image and video galleries, and helpful 'micro-apps' like survival checklists, Morse code generators and a sun compass. Trellisys, a Bangalore-based company headed by Arun Benty, developed the app on the iPhone, iPad, Android and the

First up

Parking Frenzy, an online game from Games2Win.com claimed 2.3 million downloads and 8.5 million plays in just 10 days after the launch. It was the first game from India which reached the #7 position on the Free Games section in the Android market.

Then and now

Before the advent of app stores, the only channel for distribution was the mobile operator. The revenue share was approximately 80 per cent for the operator, and 20 per cent for the developer. Now, with app stores like Nokia Publish, iTunes and Android, the tables have been turned, with the developers getting 70 per cent of the profits. Small developers make USD 500 to USD 1,000 every day.

Windows Phone, and it went on to gross a total of well over \$1 million in sales. The app was the Honoree Winner of the Webby Award for Lifestyle - Handheld Devices, 2011. Rohit Regonayak, director, technology, says, "The SAS Survival Guide has very often been likened to an 'insurance' app. People love going through the app several times, to keep themselves updated." When it comes to dealing with corporate clients, Regonayak reveals, "For apps that are converted from books, development costs can be anywhere from \$20,000 to \$80,000, depending on the complexity of the app. If the apps require additional inputs like 2D/3D animation, any additional integrations etc, it could be much more."

Details: trellisys.net

— With inputs from Saptarshi Roy Chaudhury, VP-Marketing, PurpleTalk Inc, Dallas. Location courtesy: Currents, Khader Nawaz Khan Road

The day Scoble (tech blogger known for his blog, Scobleizer) tweeted about Extragram, our site crashed. — Karthikeyan Mani, ByteAlly