

SPIRIT OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Backup Biggie

Narayanan Krishnaswami | TNN

Jaspreet Singh's first brush with entrepreneurship ended up a victim of its own success, resulting in the third year IIT Guwahati student being expelled from his hostel in Darmstadt, Germany for conducting a business. Jaspreet was one of the few students selected for an assignment in Germany's prestigious Fraunhofer Computer Graphics Research Institute. His hostel room became famous for the quality of his cooking, the spicy Indian dishes becoming so popular that people started paying good money for a taste of his butter chicken. Volumes rose to a point till it was impossible for the hostel authorities not to notice that one of the rooms had become a thriving commercial establishment and they took action.

"That was my first taste of entrepreneurship," says Jaspreet, CEO and co-founder of Druva Software. "I come from a mainly military background—my father and uncles were either in the Services or into farming. I had never really thought of starting a business. At IIT, all I wanted to do was get a job in Infosys." He laughs, recollecting the tameness of his ambitions. "It was in Veritas (a storage management software company that was bought by security solutions major Symantec) that I really started thinking of starting something". "The most important thing about being a successful entrepreneur is persistence. You must learn to deal with failure," he says.

He should know: They initially wanted to name the organization "Dhruva", after the Pole star, but that name was already taken. They had to settle for a workaround. Their first attempt at a product got nowhere. Druva was started in late 2007 as a disaster management product company. But Druva Replicator, a real-time server replication application never took off. "What we did not realise is that there are very few organizations—organizations that are willing or mandated to invest in disaster recovery—that will entrust disaster recovery to a startup."

2008 was a tough year for Jaspreet and his two colleagues, Ramani Kothandaraman and Milind Borate. They had left Veritas India in 2007 to start Druva Software in Pune. "It was around the later part of 2008 that we took our biggest risk. Our money was running out, it was clear that we were

not made out for disaster recovery and my marriage was scheduled. We tried to position ourselves as a laptop backup company and then things clicked." The company reworked the replicator into a small client agent and a server application that would allow network administrators or laptop users to backup their data on a regular basis to the enterprise data centre. The entire suite was put up on the company's website with little expectation and a lot of trepidation. But then things started to happen.

"We got a call one day from a company that tried our software and liked it. They wanted to know about the support we provided and were satisfied with our answers and within twenty four hours of the call, First Reserve Corporation had paid for our solution with a Paypal money transfer and we were off and running." First Reserve, appropriately, was the first of a thousand strong customer list that now includes the US Marine Corps, NASA, Deloitte and PricewaterhouseCoopers. The company has seen a great deal of investor interest since, noting its burgeoning client list and its small staff—the company has less than a hundred employees and around 18 engineers. Delhi's Indian Angel Network, Hong Kong-based Accord International, Sequoia Capital and Nexus Venture Partners have all put money in Jaspreet's vision for Druva.

"We still face a number of challenges," says Jaspreet. "We are a product company, and product management knowledge is nearly non-existent in India. We made so many mistakes because of that. Our product is developed in Python (programming language)—we thought that Java was too slow and .NET ties you to the Microsoft platform, and Python skills again are hard to find. So we have to hire and then train. But on the other hand, we have excellent word of mouth and our regular customer contact programmes after installation gives us invaluable feedback and improved relationships and guides the product roadmap."

What's next? "Up till now, I've been focusing on selling, now I want to really get into the finance part of the organization," says Jaspreet.



The most important thing about being a successful entrepreneur is persistence.

Entrepreneur's persistence

JASPREET SINGH, CEO, DRUV SOFTWARE



Druva Software has nearly 100 employees and around 18 engineers