

Entrepreneur of the Month

INSPIRING A GENERATION OF BUDDING ENTREPRENEURS!

By Vignesh.A



Chandra Bodapati, CEO

A common saying in the startup world goes "you can mine for gold or you can sell tools miners need to mine for gold," referring to the California gold rush of 1848. Surprisingly, the great businessmen who emerged out of the gold rush were not the miners digging for gold, but were tycoons like Levi Strauss and Samuel Brannan who sold tools all miners required such as jeans, shovels and pickaxes

Following in the same footsteps, eGrabber, led by CEO Chandra Bodapati, sells Internet research tools that enable companies to grow their business. Bodapati says, "Every company, no matter what they sell or the technologies they use, will need to acquire customers and find employees. They use our tools to do just this". Just like the miners who needed pickaxes to move ahead.

Having started his entrepreneurial career in 1992, and having witnessed the Silicon Valley move from fruit orchards in 1975 to semiconductor chips, Bodapati is a true veteran in his entrepreneurial space.

He emphasizes on the importance of hard work at team meetings and family dinners. During his son's Stanford graduation this June, Bodapati recalls a part of the commencement speech given by Michael Bloomberg, Mayor & Founder of Bloomberg LP "Get a job where you are the first inside the office, and the last out of office and you enjoy every bit of it". This is something that the CEO of eGrabber has been following throughout his illustrious entrepreneurial career spanning over 30 years and something he encourages all future leaders and entrepreneurs to follow. Since his school days, he always had the fire and immense aspiration to begin his own company.

Striving To Be Something More Than an Engineer

Bodapati is from a middle class family from India. His family moved to the Silicon Valley from Cambridge (UK) in the late 1970s when his father landed a job at NASA. "My father always told me that my goal in life should be to become something more than just

an engineer or a manager. But first I had to gain some experience before I embarked on my own journey," he adds.

Bodapati's passion to start a company ignited when he was at Bishop Cotton's school in Bangalore, India. His schoolmates, who seemed to have everything he wanted, had parents who had started their own companies and he aspired to be like their parents.

Bodapati went on to finish his MSEE and MBA postgraduate courses from Santa Clara University. He started his career as a digital signal processing engineer at IBM. He later left to work with the founder of the modem at Racal Vedic. In 1984 he joined a small startup, soon became their lead architect and led the R&D division till it become the largest communication company (DCA) in the U.S.

At these first three jobs, Bodapati was clearly focusing on gaining experience in building products and learning how a company truly functions. In 1986, he started to lay out a few blueprints for a number of companies he planned to start.

Plunging Into the Sea of Entrepreneurship

Bodapati founded his first company in 1992 in the form of CypherTech which brought out the first business card reader in the U.S. Being an advocate of building a product that has a high Proprietary Knowledge Component (PKC), he has ensured that almost all

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of his products are either patented or have a very low chance of duplication. A testimony to his emphasis on PKC is Bodapati holding numerous U.S. patents directly related to businesses he has started.

After licensing the business card reader technology to Seiko, Bodapati began his second company in the form of ProdEx TCR (Technical Consultant Recruitment). Here he ensured over 100 concurrent IT contractor placements and most importantly, understood how B2B companies hired top notch employees and found new customers.

At his next start up, ProdEx Technologies in 1996, Bodapati's main focus was on conceiving, prototyping, test marketing and launching innovative technologies. ProdEx Technologies was ranked #201 in Inc 500's fastest growing private companies in the U.S. between 1996 to 2001.

He successfully launched two product lines through subsidiaries in the form of eGrabber (www.egrabber.com) and AssetPulse (www.assetpulse.com).

Bodapati incorporated the need to empower startups and small businesses with tools as the foremost principle of


all his CEO stints. He is also a firm believer that products are the way forward for any startup. "In a product company, you can have ten people and sell a million products, but you cannot expect ten individuals to put in a million hours of work in a services company," he says.

Continuous Innovation and successes through eGrabber

With many new companies springing up and the Internet just starting to boom, he utilized eGrabber to its maximum potential by tapping into the huge market on offer in B2B research tools. Under his vast experience, eGrabber has developed the industry's most accurate contact finding research technology. The company holds a number of the U.S. patents in the field of expert search, fuzzy matching and intelligent parsing of Internet data.

But first, he had to build a company that is creative and innovative. An example of the company's creative culture is the half a day design competition, held several times a year, where employees get together and are asked to design a product based on a concept. Bodapati invests a lot in his employees by having mentorship programs and gives ownership and accountability to his employees in their products. Key players are imbued with the company's strategy and are given autonomy to operate like mini-CEOs within their team aligning their products to the overall vision of the company.

Many B2B companies today insist on eGrabber tools to help build and update prospect lists faster and jump-start inside sales and marketing campaigns.

Bodapati continues to inspire budding entrepreneurs and professionals to take up the cause of helping society through technological disruptions and engaging in philanthropic activities. 

Entrepreneurial Evangelist to Philanthropist:

Chandra Bodapati is as much of a socialpreneur as he is an entrepreneur. Bodapati believes one should start helping the needy children today, and now! – as opposed waiting for some time in the future when they are successful. By then it will be too late for the children in need today. To this end, from the first day the company opened doors, he gave each employee the power to provide complete education to one underprivileged child. eGrabber assumed complete responsibility of the expenses for the same and hundreds of children have benefitted from this program. He also invests time piloting budding entrepreneurs towards their goals.

A firm believer in fitness and his love for sports also keeps him busy outside work. He has been swimming at least 4 times a week for many years and plays table tennis and cricket at a competitive level. Bodapati has a passion for cricket and has been playing in the first division for the North California Cricket Association for more than 25 years.