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Business Line

Agents of automation

Venkatesh Ganesh



K Ravindra, head, Agent Technology

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What does a man who has filed 17 patents with LG, Honeywell, Intel do after a dozen years? Start a company of his own, seems to be the answer.

K Ravindra heads one such startup after twelve years of filing patents and working for multinationals. Interestingly, he does not come from a 'renowned' college; neither does he have a management degree.

However, one look at this company Agent Technology or Agentech, located in HSR Layout and nestled amongst scores of companies –both IT and non IT is a technology product company with a difference.

It designs, manufactures and sells wireless automation products at home and offices. In other words, it provides interoperable and reconfigurable wireless digital products in such a way that an old security camera installed in an office can work with a smartphone.

"You can control, monitor and manage their home devices through wireless universal remote, mobile phone (with or without SIM) or tablet, PC/laptop or over the Internet," beams Ravindra. He goes on to add that his product has a built in converter which converts from one radio band to another, one communication technology to other and at very affordable costs.

In a country wherein R&D amongst startups is a rare phenomenon, Agent Technology has spent 5 years which includes 18 months of products tested at several homes in India and abroad. "Over the period we have contributed for 12 Indian and 10 International pending patents," says Ravindra.

So, how did this idea come about? The company believes that modern day purchases- whether real estate or a car is based on what's new on offer.

Take the case of real estate, which is a target area for Agentech. Builders are forced to provide a unique selling proposition (USP) to sell their property and one cannot differentiate on the properties developed by a big builder and small or first timers.

"Therefore, there is a need for an integrated, interoperable and reconfigurable automation at home products as an USP," says Ravindra.

As the common saying goes, the proof is in the pudding and in Agent Technology's case, the company is running trials in Nigeria, Dubai, Qatar, US, Argentina, and Malaysia. "Some of our hardware is in the 13th revision, incorporated the

best methods and techniques so that same product works across the globe for any power, frequency, communication band and other technologies, says Ravindra.

This has seen global technology majors like IBM, Microsoft, Intel amongst others to choose Agent Technology as its partner.

It has also worked on License plate recognition (LPR) technology through its proprietary video analytics algorithm and tools which help in identifying numbers on the vehicle license plate in text format. This could be compared with database or port through wireless devices for customer specific applications and can be used at toll collection, traffic violation etc. Also, the company has already filed 3 patents.

Initial challenges

Like many startups, funding was an issue. Also, consider the fact that Indian investors seem to have an apathy towards products coming out of the country (despite industry body Nasscom's evangelising efforts) the company has had a tough time.

"No one likes to invest in product development companies in India," says Ravindra. To put it in perspective, according to Nasscom data, the software product industry is pegged at \$1.81 billion, which pales in comparison to the \$70 billion software service exports. However, the company has persisted with its product strategy and has not wavered from its core principles of building Intellectual Property (IP) within the company.

According to Ravindra, the last six month things have changed and some builders have realised that Agentech is novel, simple and cost effective.

The focus towards IP, R&D and product marketing costs more when compared to a services or an e-commerce portal requires deep pockets.

"Soon, we will be closing a round of investment from a foreign institutional investor (FII), says Ravindra and adds that the company has received additional investment opportunities from other investors.

All startups have learnings that come from the market place, partners or within their own organisation or a combination of all of the above.

According to Ravindra, senior employees of multinationals in Bangalore who have a similar product like Agentech tried to steal their IP and this is something he advises all product companies to watch out in their lines of business.

Last decade, most of us have witnessed the clone of products by small companies, which was originally developed by big MNCs.

In contrary this decade we can see several MNCs are doing reverse engineering on the products launched by small companies.

Future plans

As a part of its future plans, Agent Technology will focus on customer service and reliability, scale up to tier II and III cities in India, make home automation products affordable and even plans to have an Initial public offering (IPO) by 2014.

While the overall work environment for a small company to sell new product with a new brand is challenging in India, Agent Technology is confident that this decade will witness wireless home automation revolution, something similar to what happened with the mobile phones in the last decade.

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