



Microsoft Unlimited Potential Case Study: Scaling new heights

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Scaling new heights

Dusk has fallen in the small village of Jitwarpur in district Madhubani, Bihar, India. Tripura Devi wears her thick-rimmed glasses and begins to draw in the flickering light of an oil lamp. Ever since new avenues of income have opened up thanks to an innovative e-commerce initiative started by Microsoft and Drishtee Dot Com Ctd., Tripura does not let anything deter her from painting, not even power failure.

It is this determination and dedication that has catapulted 40-year old Tripura from a life of anonymity to one of fame and respect. The Microsoft-Drishtee e-commerce endeavor has played an important role in her journey from the national to the international stage. Now, thanks to information and communication technology (ICT), art connoisseurs all can log on to Drishtees' online store, www.drishteehaat.com, where her paintings are showcased, and buy her paintings.

More importantly, in addition to international recognition, this venture has accelerated economic empowerment. Since her association with Drishtee, Tripura has been able to increase her earnings. In fact, she has garnered enough resources to start building a three-room brick house. "Drishtee has provided me with an additional source of income. Earlier I earned about Rs 7,000 (US\$165) a month. Now I can earn more because there are no middlemen to cheat me. This has given me extra money," says Tripura.

One of the reasons for her improved financial status is the elimination of exploitation by middlemen. "It is a well known fact that middlemen exploit artists," says Nitin Gachhayat, cofounder of Drishtee. "In fact, we conducted a survey in 2004 in Madhubani to understand the dynamics of this transaction and found that the remuneration artists get for their painting was very little. For example, for a painting sold for Rs 1,500 (US\$35), the artist does not even get 25 percent of that sum. The artists were told that since the demand for their painting was low, the prices had to be low. This is actually incorrect. We have tried to use ICT to bridge this information gap between demand and supply so that the artists don't get exploited,"



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So, in keeping with their objective of using ICT to empower artists and further socioeconomic development, Microsoft and Drishtee hit upon a novel scheme to allow the artists to decide their own prices. Once the artist quotes her price, the owner of Drishtee Soochnalaya or Information Kiosk takes photographs of artist's paintings and sends them in an e-mail to Drishtee. These images are then showcased at the online store and once an order is placed, one-third of the price at which the painting is finally sold goes to the artist.

Sixty-seven year-old Bachcho Devi, also of Jitwarpur village, may have lost all her teeth—but that hasn't stopped her from smiling all the way to the bank. "I have been painting for the last 40 years. But I have never received so many orders within such a short period as I have done since I registered with Drishtee. In two months, I sold 12 paintings and earned Rs 10,000 (US\$235). I have never been able to earn such a big amount within 60 days before," she says.

Giving her competition is her own daughter-in-law, Hira Devi, who sold eight paintings in the same period. "I owe my success to my mother-in-law, who taught me to paint and to Parmeshwar [Mishra, a kiosk owner], who persuaded me to register at the Drishtee kiosk. This money is important for me because I will use it to fulfill my desire to open a bank account in my own name. Then, I will not have to depend on anyone," reveals Hira.

The technology that drives this initiative brings with it multiple benefits—better information flow, increased transparency, streamlined supply-and-demand channels and global market linkages. The ease, speed and efficiency

with which information is disseminated and transactions are executed would not have been possible without technology intervention. The human trust factor and comfort level still remains as well, with the kiosk owner being the facilitator for artisans to access the technology.

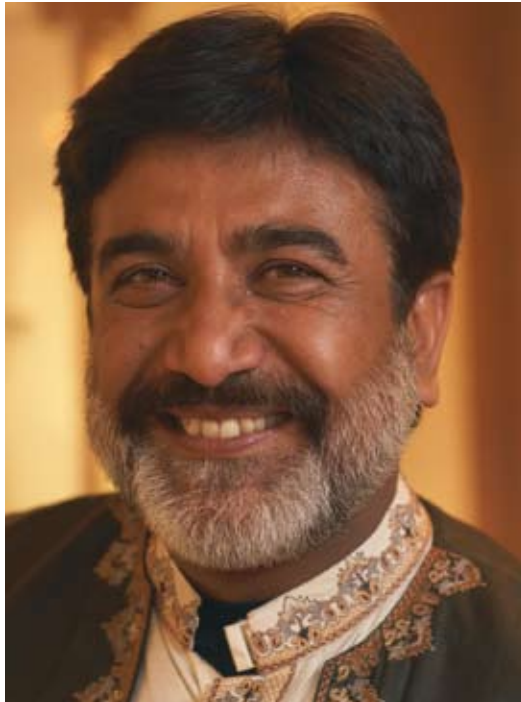


Microsoft has helped Drishtee to design and develop the portal by providing funding and business input as well as technical advice.

One such innovation is the Tablet PC. Not only does the Tablet PC fulfill all the functions of a laptop computer, it also gives the artist the option of operating it without a keyboard or a mouse, thus making it really user-friendly. All the artists require is a stylus or a special pen and they can draw directly on the screen. They can also fill in the colours and make requisite changes. Time and energy saving, paperless

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experimentation with new designs and colors—these are the reasons why the artists consider using the Tablet PC beneficial.



“This technology has given me the freedom to be more creative. What I really like the most about it is that I can replicate a painting as many times as I want since a photo of it exists in the Tablet PC”, says Tripura.

While the Tablet PC has brought the impact of technology innovation into the homes and lives of the artists, what has really given this venture a big fillip is the commitment of the kiosk owners. They have been quick to realize the immense potential of the e-commerce initiative.

Of the 30 information kiosks that Drishtee has set up in the district, the e-commerce venture is operational in two kiosks in Madhubani at present. In village Mangrauni, kiosk owner

Parmeshwar was first off the block. So far he has signed up 20 artists from Jitwarpur village, including Tripura and sold 60-65 paintings within the last eight months. “It took some time to win their trust. But once the orders started coming, other artists also realized it was profitable to register with Drishtee,” says Parmeshwar who has also improved his earnings with each sale. Since the kiosk owner gets 10 percent of the price at which the painting is finally sold, Mishra calculates his earnings have increased by Rs 5,000 (US\$117) in one year since the venture began.

Although regular power supply continues to elude Jitwarpur village, Madhubani artists are no longer willing to remain in the dark. The Microsoft-Drishtee e-commerce initiative has brought with it the hope that information and communication technology can enrich artists’ creativity and usher in a better future for them and their families.

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