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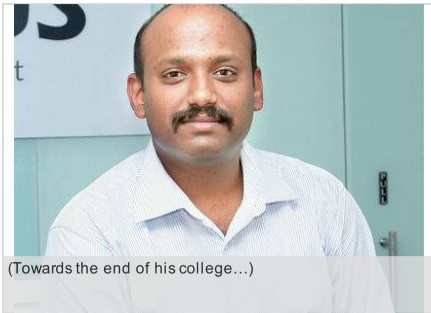
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How Sriram Manoharan's Contus became Rs 5 crore web venture

Amit Shanbaug, ET Bureau Dec 2, 2013, 08.00AM IST

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His father had represented the country in volleyball. Chennai-based Sriram Manoharan had similar aspirations, the only difference being that his passion was badminton. However, a knee injury in 1997, while he was studying at Loyola College, Chennai, shelved all his plans for a career in sport. So Manoharan turned to entrepreneurship, and today, heads a Rs 5 crore firm, Contus Support Interactive.

Towards the end of his college life, Manoharan toyed with several business ideas, but could not pursue any. "For instance, I came up with the idea to start an online advertising portal much before Sulekha came into the picture. However, hailing from a middle-class family, I did not have the necessary resources at that time. So I was compelled to take up a job as a customer support executive at Wipro Infotech immediately after graduation in 2000," he shares.

Two years later, he joined the CSS Corp, followed by TCS and IBM. It was while working for the last that Manoharan reconsidered starting his own venture. "I began planning in 2005 and worked towards accumulating the seed capital," he says. He wanted to start a company in the IT space. "As I did not have any experience in marketing, I thought of creating a website, where people facing problems with their operating system, Internet connection or software could get in touch with us. Since acquiring a registered branded software is a costly proposition for the customer, we decided to provide home-developed software at a much reasonable rate," he says.

In February 2008, he quit his well-paying job and convinced four friends to invest around Rs 5 lakh each in his dream venture. The first thing the 34-year-old did was to lease a small office in Chennai, investing nearly Rs 15 lakh to create the necessary infrastructure. Thus, Contus was born in February 2008. For the first five months, the company did not generate a single rupee.

"We had already spent around Rs 22 lakh on fixed costs and monthly expenses, but we were not generating any business," he says. At one point, they were struggling to pay salaries to the three people that they had employed. However, they decided to hang on without taking any salary. The team then decided to change their outlook and focus on any computer-related work. They also began to push Contus on the social media platforms. "After five months, we landed a small job from a Chinese company, which wanted to redesign its website. Soon, more website-related jobs began coming our way," he says.

By the end of the first year, Contus had registered a revenue of Rs 30 lakh. Before long, Contus began developing Web applications for various customers. "Today, we provide Web application products to around

6,000 retail customers and have around 100 reputed companies, including Jabong, Accenture and Mahindra, as our clients," he says, adding, "We have around 140 employees and the turnover should be Rs 8-10 crore in this fiscal year, up from Rs 5 crore last year."

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