

Hot Start-up: In-silico approach to drug discovery

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He and his wife Ms Sapana Mehendale together founded RASA in 2010, a [Bioinformatics](#) and Chemoinformatics start-up offering solutions and services in Life Sciences.

The last four years has been very hectic to Mr Sameer and his team.

In fact, when they bagged their major project with Wipro, he and his wife, back then, had to work till a day prior to their wedding.

"It was quite exciting," recalls Mr Sameer, a professional Bioinformatician.

Mr Sameer has a decade of experience in datamining, scientific workflow development, product development and off-shore services and management. Ms Sapana is a pro in software development and Chemoinformatics.

He says that his father-in-law and businessman Mr Ashok Mehendale was the real inspiration behind starting his company. Alongside, Ms Sapana also had a long-time dream of owning a company in the [BioIT space](#).

So far the founders have invested Rs 8.5 lakh in the company through soft loans from friends and family.

Both the founders bid good-bye to their burgeoning careers with handsome pay packets to build RASA from scratch.

"We started our company with a dream to provide BioIT services as well as work more closely on in-silico approach to drug discovery. But soon we realized that most of the life sciences students and professionals lack required skills and always wondered about their careers. So we brought the idea of skill-based training to enhance their profiles," adds Mr Sameer. "At

times we were broke financially and morally. But we helped each other building upon our courage and positive hopes."

RASA has few products in the pipeline which will be launched by the end of 2015.

RASA plans to open few more branches in other Indian cities including Ahmedabad, Kolkata and Chennai.

In the future, it wishes to partner with companies in the US and Europe.

"We believe, very soon, we will be able to grab the attention in the Middle-East, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and a few African countries," reveals Mr Sameer, who loves reading and singing.

Mr Sameer feels that a demographic study for a particular business is absolutely essential for a start-up.

"Entrepreneur must be able to identify the present and future prospects of the services or products they are going to offer, and also consider competition from the big players," he advises.

In the last 4 years, RASA has done business worth Rs 30-40 lakh per year. It has a target of achieving Rs 1 crore in the next couple of years.

Even in the era of internet and social networking, Mr Sameer says that the best visibility for a start-up is through word-of-mouth.

"When you provide good and effective services, the clients are surely going to talk about you to others. And the word spreads. This is very effective because the clients have experienced your services and can vouch for it," he points.

He suggests that India needs more governing bodies like the BIRAC for encouraging start-ups.

"In the field of life sciences, we have very minimum support from the Government. It is extremely difficult to obtain funds from the Government or venture capitalists in this space. India needs to understand the public-private partnership model to the full extent. Investments in life science sector is limited to education. Industrial investment has to be taken as priority and should have separate budgetary allocation. Looking at the broader prospects of life sciences which enriches human life, it is time for the Government to take a note of it. We hope the new Government will be able to attract investments through the 'Make-in-India' initiative," he explains.

Mr Sameer opines that personalized medicine with genomics- and proteomics-based clinical diagnostics, stem cells, BioIT, NGS are the current happening areas in Life Sciences.

He states that Pune and Ahmedabad are hot-beds for Life Science start-ups, only next to Bangalore and Hyderabad.

"Pune has a better scientific community mainly because of its iconic research institutes. It also provides skilled manpower. The Gujarat government is spending a lot of money in building the infrastructure for biotech. They are supporting new start-ups by providing them with seed funding," he validates.

Current Collaborators:

• Dr D Y Patil College, Pune

• Modern College of Pharmacy, Pune

• Interdisciplinary Science and Technology Research Academy (ISTRA), Pune

• Sinhgad College of Engineering (SCOE), Pune

5 Entrepreneurial Mistakes To Avoid:

• Improper market research

• Unspecific services

- ĩ,§ Inadequate funding
- ĩ,§ Random hiring
- ĩ,§ Ignoring IPs

5 Dumb Myths About Life Sciences Start-ups:

- ĩ,§ There is a dead end
- ĩ,§ No gain after all the hard work
- ĩ,§ Requires huge funds

Entrepreneurial Lessons Learnt:

- ĩ,§ Easier to manage computers than people
- ĩ,§ Credible entrepreneurs attract right talents
- ĩ,§ Staff loyalty increases when shaped up well

4 Killer Strategies For Raising Billion-Dollar Start-ups:

- ĩ,§ Focused service
- ĩ,§ Good funding
- ĩ,§ Qualified and dedicated staff
- ĩ,§ Passion