UFO digital cinema

Digital Cinema

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NAME
SANJAY GAIKWAD
OCCUPATION
FOUNDER, MANAGING DIRECTOR, UFO MOVIEZ
FATHER'S NAME
SHANKAR GAIKWAD
FATHER'S OCCUPATION
RETIRED NAVY CLERK

Distributing technology innovatively

Born in Baithi Chawl, and growing up in a small, modified one-room tenement in Bhandup, a suburb in north-east Mumbai, Sanjay Gaikwad dreamt big.

The boy with a penchant for technology studied in a Marathi-medium municipal school, the most his father Shankar, a clerk with the Indian Navy, could afford. That was in the 1970s.

Gaikwad is now an entrepreneur—the founder and managing director of ₹1,000 crore UFO Moviez India Ltd—and is credited with revolutionizing the way movies are distributed and exhibited.

UFO brought in pioneering technology, and a unique pay-per-show business model while introducing the concept of "first day first show" for film distributors and cinema owners. Producers, whose budgets once depended on how many prints they wanted to distribute, now could digital-ize the movie and make as many prints at one-tenth the cost. Therefore, even small theatres can show new movies on the first day (unlike the olden days when prints had to travel) and distributors could gain time by simultaneously delivering movies across the country, thereby arresting piracy.

Gaikwad recounts his modest beginnings: "I was an average student, but my father, like most, wanted me to become a doctor, which I was not too keen on. My passion was for technology."

At 16, the budding innovator developed an intercom telephone facility to connect with a relative who lived on the ground floor of the same building. "I remember a Casio mini computer my father bought me when I was in my early 20s. It was then unaffordable for him," he reminisces. That, Gaikwad says, was his first big break.

He decided to repay his father by becoming an engineer. He studied chemical engineering, but he was sure that his calling was elsewhere.

The second break came with Zee Entertain-ment Enterprises Ltd, as deputy general man-ager (IT), after his MBA in operations research and systems from Mumbai University. Gaik-wad conceived the idea of online lottery and successfully executed Playwin—India's first online lottery—as chief operating officer.

The third and probably biggest break came in the form of a friend and later business part-ner, Narendra Hete, a technocrat. "In 2001, we both promoted Valuable Reserves India Ltd as India's first tech-infrastructure service provid-er to the online, paper lottery and gaming in-dustry," says Gaikwad. Initially, the Valuable group was only involved in gaming infrastruc-ture but later diversified to digital films.

"The journey never stops. I wanted to chal-lenge the way things are working. That will give you opportunity for innovation. I don't know how to innovate technology, but I use technology innovatively. I wanted to make our digital media infrastructure as a base to ser-vice society at large," he adds.

P.R. Sanjai