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NO PARALLEL YET

For a country yet to read the signs,
MapmyIndia could show the way

IF it wasn't for a change in strategy back in 1994, CE Info Systems, the holding company of navigation software MapmyIndia, could have been somewhere at the top with the rest of the IT majors in India, says its founder Rakesh Verma. "When we started in 1992, Wipro wasn't around and Infosys too was small. And we were one of the fastest growing IT companies at that time."

But Verma had other plans. He wanted to work in the products space, not just services. So in 1994, his company switched over to mapping software. "I had seen a similar business in Atlanta and it excited me. The lack of good maps in India gave me an opportunity. At that time, no one in India thought of making digital maps," he says.

Mapping was uncharted territory and to create a maps database, CE Info Systems deployed 200 surveyors across India. Its first customer in 1994 was Coca Cola, when the cola major was making a re-entry into the Indian mar-

ket, and was struggling to understand the territories of different bottlers. Similar enterprise clients helped the company stay on in a market where maps weren't quite the rage until recently. With the mobile phone boom a few years later, telecom operators used these maps to understand where they could put up their towers.

For a decade, CE Info Systems' customer base grew to a healthy 500 on the back of its B2B model. During this period, the company, for the first time, came out with a book called Mumbai Pathfinder, which contained

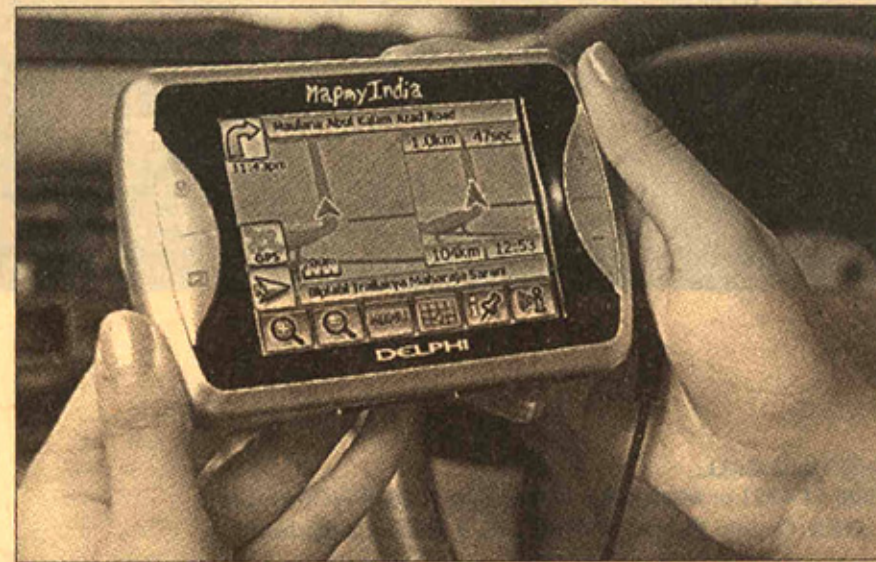
detailed maps of Mumbai and Navi Mumbai. The book was received well, says Verma, and taught Verma how to manage the complexities of a consumer business.

2004 was a turning point for the company. With signs of the Indian market picking up and the digital era setting in, CE Info Systems uploaded its maps on to the Internet. The success of Mapquest and Yahoo Maps was encouraging, says Verma. Interestingly, Google Maps did not exist in 2004. The MapmyIndia portal was launched in August that year. "People did not know

that maps existed for India, and we wanted to let the world know that they now did," says Verma. "We got short-listed for an IT innovation award by Nasscom."

But the quest didn't end here for Verma. "How to make maps navigable on the Internet? This is what hit me next and we spent 2004-06 putting maps on the Internet," he says.

Since the use of maps was growing, Verma decided his company needed to be present across platforms-on the Internet, in-car, mobile, TV and print. "But we couldn't have done everything on our own, so we decided to partner with international players," he says. Finally after a tie-up with Yahoo, both Yahoo and MapmyIndia maps were competing on yahoo.com.



And like most tech companies of the time, private equity money was chasing them. "But we wanted to partner with an investor who had the best ecosystem," says Verma. Those days his son Rohan was

enterprise
QUOTIENT

investments through Sheralo Ventures and Nexus India Capital (both part of Kleiner Perkins) in two years-Rs 12 crore each," says Rohan Verma, who's a director at MapmyIndia.

While some of this money was spent on creating infrastructure and marketing, a part was spent on creating products, the results of which can be seen today. The company has launched new consumer products in the last few years-an in-car navigation system launched in August last year and GPS navigation on mobile phones recently. Their maps cover 55,000 villages and town points, 150 cities containing landmarks and 18 major cities with all details. In fact, General Motors launched the MapmyIndia navigation device as a genuine accessory with some of its premium cars earlier this year and more car companies are expected to follow suit.

studying at Stanford and one of his professors was a partner at Kleiner Perkins. "This is how we got connected and got in-

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