EARNING BY TALKING

It was way back in 2005 that, two management graduates - Abhishek Kumar and Aditya Mahtre founded Indicast.com. They have been credited with having pioneered the Indian podcasting scene. Their venture over the years has established itself as a rare example of 'making a living by just spreading the word'. Kaveri Roy chats with Abhishek Kumar on their innovative business and how they have nurtured their venture to grow it to this size. Excerpts:

How did Indicast happen?
Aditya, my classmate from Pedar College and I had decided during our college days that if one of us hits upon an idea and it’s feasible to execute it without quitting our day jobs (preferably), we’d try and give it a shot. So after doing MBAs, while our respective companies, Aditya gave me a call one day sometime in September 2005 telling me something about podcasting and iTunes and how it was catching up in the US. He was in the US at that time.

The idea was simple. Got on Skype and have a candid conversation on current affairs news that affects the common man id cover topics - not in a bland monotone of the news channels (at least some news channels), but spice it with a tinge of neat smart humor. Frankly, I wasn’t too convinced why people would listen to two blokes talk for 20 odd minutes on issues, but in a month’s time, our podcast was listed on Apple iTunes under the ‘New and Notable List’ and covered by IC Radio. We have many friends who contribute to our site tweeting their time across time-zones to help us deliver quality content.

Try the podcast network to start with?
As MBAs, our occupational hazard is that we have to talk, so writing doesn’t come very naturally to us. Since we didn’t blog as some of our friends did diligently and regularly, we decided on the next best thing - talk...

What was your career plan prior to the inception of Indicast?
I was in a Sales job prior to Indicast and Aditya was a consultant in a Fortune 500 company. He came back to India to try out new things in the business domain.

What has been the response to this innovative concept?
The initial response was timid since the concept of podcasting in India was not well known. Even today, podcasting might raise a few question marks on the brows of many. Surely, we’ve been lucky and privileged that being among the first to get on the podcasting bandwagon, we have had an opportunity to talk to people like Dr. Shashi Tharoor, Pritish Nundy, Harsha Bhogle and the likes. So, you can call it an alternative media channel run by people with no journalistic backgrounds, but hopefully (I’d like to believe) run by people who have a reasonably good head on their shoulders... who can discern between what’s gossip and what’s news...

Could you elaborate on the business model of Indicast?
It has two ways of earning revenue: 1) Podcast advertising - insert the ad of the advertiser at the beginning of the podcast. 2) Consulting - Consult companies from various backdrops to help them produce podcasts and get their content on the web (among other things).

What scope do you think podcasts have in evolving as a career avenue?
Podcasting is a part of the ‘new media’ (for lack of a better phrase) world. There are companies like Web Chutney, Flip which use such tools to help companies brand themselves online. These digital marketing firms act as consultants. So while one may make a career in web journalism or in online advertising, podcasting can act as a major impetus in helping him/her get there...

What according to you is the profile of a podcaster?
Age is not a constraint for any podcaster. In the US there are people as young as 40 who are the hosts of some famous tech podcasts. E.g. Leo Laporte from ‘This Week in Tech’ is considered to be one of the most important voices of technology/gadgets coming out from the stable of companies such as Apple, Microsoft, etc. (Interestingly, Aditya, the resident geek at Indicast got an opportunity to do a live podcast with Laporte some time back on how differently social networking sites being used in India.)

What qualities do you think sets apart a good podcaster from the others?
A good podcaster would be someone who is informed and opinionated and is willing to call spades a spade without being provocative just for the heck of it.

What kind of skill sets does one need? Do you think any kind of professional training is required?
From a technology perspective, all you need is a decent internet connection speed, a microphone, an open source (free) editing tool like Audacity, a website (even a blog page would do), a place where you can house your MP3 files. No great professional training is required. All you need to do is to be able to make sense while you talk because the listeners of that podcast are taking their time to download the 12 Mb file and then listen to you. Also, if you are interviewing someone like Tom Standage, the Business Affairs Editor of The Economist on the launch of the iPod, you must make sure that you have enough dope on the subject to keep him engaged... While professional training can help, it’s hardly a prerequisite.

What is your advice to newcomers as podcasters?
If someone’s starting a podcasting program, it’s important that one is consistent in releasing episodes on time. This ensures that you build a dedicated listener base over time.

Future plans.
Hope to diversify in video and start a sports podcast.