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Light at the end of the data tunnel

MAIA's Innovative Products Strike The Right Chord With Clients

AMERICAN scientist Carl Sagan once said, knowing a great deal is not the same as being smart. Intelligence is not information alone, but also judgement, the manner in which information is collected and used. This holds as good for companies as it holds good for individuals. Companies are accumulating information all the time, sometimes much more than they can manage. The collective corporate memory of all such information can be mindboggling and companies may struggle, and eventually fail, to effectively use it for decision making. One fallout of such complexity is that a company might be sitting on information that it desperately seeks, but simply does not know that it exists.

It was this problem that gripped the minds of Sanjay Mehta and his friends four years ago. The start-up they were part of had taken decisive growth steps, implementing enterprise resource planning (ERP) software. The customers were happy with the product, but often found that an ERP implementation alone would not suffice to meet their information needs.

The opportunity to fill this gap spurred Mr Mehta and his colleagues Jigisha Sanghvi, Vipul Mehta, and Hiten Rathod to set up MAIA Intelligence, a business intelligence product company, in August 2006. The seed for the idea had been sown at a business meeting with officials of Parker Hannifin Corporation, which had bought the ERP product from Udyog Software, the earlier start-up that the four friends were part of. "Having a catalogue of over 12 lakh products, they wanted to know what was moving and what was not," says Mr Mehta. With the basic business software implemented at the Indian operations of Parker Hannifin, it was possible to compile a visual representation, but it was a tedious affair. The customer's employees asked for a simple solution that would help them access intelligent data without their technical experts racking their brains over it.

"After we had set up this ERP product, we found the challenges of creating lots of report. People were putting in data and saying that they weren't getting enough back," says Mr Mehta. The Udyog team added a reporting tool to the business software as a plug-in and found the users liked it. Customers soon started asking for reporting features in specialised business software such as customer relationship management and human resource application. Its appeal and functionality was good enough to convince the group of four to spin off the product as a separate company, targeted at its own audience rather than the typical ERP user.

There is a wide choice of reporting tools in the market, including Business Object, Cognos and SAS, but Mr Mehta claims they are expensive and hence, typically used by only the top officials of a company. There was a need for business intelligence (BI) at almost every level of the organisation. "We started with the core idea of helping companies to take quicker decisions across all levels of the organisation," says Mr Mehta.

MAIA's business intelligence product, 1Key, is server-based and can be accessed by hundreds of employees at the same time. One of its clients has 1,200 of their employees hooked to the product. "We say to CIOs, who are already using other products, 'Go ahead'. Instead let the underserved use our product," says Mr Mehta.

The decision to spin off the product and brand it separately from Udyog was taken in view of the different market segments they served and the pricing models



From (left): Jigisha Sanghvi, Hiten Rathod, Sanjay Mehta and Vipul Mehta

needed to be adopted. MAIA targets companies having large-scale operations, generating hundreds of data points. Udyog's business software, on the other hand, caters to small and medium enterprises. "Whenever we presented the product at industry gatherings, we were referred to as the 'excise company'. We had to completely shed that image," Mr Mehta, referring to one of Udyog's software products.

Pidilite Industries was one of the early adopters. "They had 170 reports in static form. Pidilite wanted to convert all their static reports into a BI format, which enabled business users to have dynamic reporting capabilities," says Mr Mehta. MAIA has gone on to win prestigious clients such as Reliance Capital, Edelweiss Capital and Essel Propack. The company has so far invested Rs 4.5 crore and expects to close this year with a business of Rs 4 crore. Mr Mehta says he expects MAIA to break even next year. The projected revenue for 2008 is Rs 20 crore. There are also plans to market it abroad, especially the US.

MAIA has proven that even in the crowded field of business software, there is enough space and scope for an innovative product that will solve a strongly felt pain point at a price that is all too Indian.

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Jacob Cherian | jacob.cherian@timesgroup.com | Mumbai

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The decision to spin off the product and brand it separately from Udyog was taken in view of the different market segments they served and the pricing models needed to be adopted. MAIA targets companies having large-scale operations, generating hundreds of data points. Udyog's business software, on the other hand, caters to small and medium enterprises. "Whenever we presented the product at industry gatherings, we were referred to as the 'excise company'. We had to completely shed that image," Mr Mehta, referring to one of Udyog's software products.

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