

All charged up

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Why can't I charge my cellphone without electricity? Or, for that matter, power up my mobile on the go? Come to think of it, why isn't there a charger that fits all mobiles?

If you are one of those millions of mobile users who have asked these questions at some time or the other, there's good news for you. The founders of IdeaForge – a start-up incubating at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay – are developing products, which they hope will be the answers you are looking for.

Ankit Mehta, the founder of the firm, had left the IIT-B campus immediately after completing his M.Tech in 2005. But six months into his job, he realised his calling and came back to the campus. He then roped in two other founding members – Ashish Bhat, an electrical engineer, and Rahul Singh, a mechanical engineer.

Working together at various tech-fests, the trio realised that they had a common passion for developing tech products. It was during this time that the idea of developing mechanical – rather than electrical – products was conceived with a focus on the rural areas of the country.

“The business idea behind this was the uptake of mobile phones in the rural areas and the constant power outages these regions face,” said Mehta. Surprisingly, their products are being lapped up more in urban India. Since its launch, the company has introduced six products for cellphones – a mechanical charger, a USB charger, a bike charger, a car charger and even a wall charger.

As is the case with most start-ups, the initial funding came from the founding members themselves. Then they got a Rs 15-lakh funding from the Department for Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR), Government of India as well as additional support from an angel investor focused on the cleantech sector.

Since the last two years, the company has been incubating at the Society for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (SINE) at IIT-B. IdeaForge members are still looking for that one big break, which will propel them into the next league. A deal with Airtel is in the offing, but it is yet to finalise. The only good news is that they have been successful in sell-



The three founders of IdeaForge (from left) Ankit Mehta, Ashish Bhat and Rahul Singh, with the mechanical charger that their firm has developed

ing their products online through websites like eBay, HomeShop18, Indiatimes Shopping and Gadgets.in. Overall, on a monthly basis, the company registers a sale of 1,500-2,000 pieces worth Rs 5 lakh. IdeaForge has already taken its products to neighbouring countries like Bhutan and Nepal and is currently in talks with partners in the US too.

This has encouraged the company to enter what it calls Phase Two. It recently appointed Vipul Joshi as the sales and marketing head of the company. Moreover, it has also signed up BrightPoint as national distributor and has roped in a regional player too. IdeaForge is also scouting for another manufacturer to ramp up production and is planning to raise another round of funds.

The idea, says Mehta, is to ramp up their sales to Rs 1.5-2 crore in the next one year.

A correction

Our report (Gmail made easy) published on April 13 had wrongly referred to Gmail's experimental feature called autopilot. The company has not released any such feature. The error is regretted.