

## **'Charge mobiles without electricity'**

**Mumbai-based entrepreneur Ankit Mehta is working towards creating sustainable power solutions**

**By Shubhdarshani Mitra**

Now you don't have to worry about irregular electricity supply or those ambiguous situations, when your lifeline (read mobile phone) is at danger (read low or no battery). A solution exists in the form of mechanical hand chargers, which requires you to rotate a wheel to charge your mobile phone. Twenty-six-year-old Ankit Mehta, an IITian and a risk-taker, designed the product that aims to provide sustainable power solutions, with his team members. IdeaForge, which began in 2007, was created so that energy from the most convenient space around, could be tapped and used, to power electronic gadgets. His company has a range of products, all of which have been created keeping clean technology in mind.

Mehta, who worked for six months in a sales and marketing consulting firm, essentially to get cash to start his own venture, graduated from IIT Mumbai in 2005. He has had no dearth of ideas ever since he was a child, he says. The young entrepreneur speaks to Educare about his venture in an interaction. Excerpts from an interview:

### **How was Ideaforge formed and what motivated you to start this venture?**

The roots of starting a thing on my own had taken shape in my mind way back when I was a kid. I would get so many ideas that I always wanted to do something about them. But at that time I didn't have any resources to execute any of my ideas neither did I have any knowledge about the same. When I came to graduation, and studied engineering as a subject, that's when I started implementing a bunch of my ideas. Gradually, I realised that my ideas work and that I can develop technology.

When I was at IIT, I was working at the innovation cell and I would collect a bunch of people and try and motivate them to make something on their own. We would also take part in a lot of competitions. As a result, Ashish (Bhat), Rahul (Singh) and me got together. That's how we came together to start our own company.

### **Could you elaborate on ideaForge as a venture?**

Basically, what we are doing is trying to create sustainable power solutions. Most of the time and at most of the places, we don't have a regular supply of electricity. And most of the devices that we are using today, like our mobile phones, our MP3 players etc or for that matter if you need light to see in the dark you don't really have a way to sustain, unless and until you have a grid power available to you. The question was that can we build something that would help in powering these devices without the use of grids. So, that's what we basically do at ideaforge.

### **How new or old is the concept of mechanical chargers that do not require regular electricity supply?**

The concept is not entirely new. It's just that our execution of that concept is very different. Like the hand chargers were available earlier as well but they were more of emergency devices. These products were not successful because they were not sustainable for those who needed them.

The idea is that a rural guy needs such products which he can use day in and day out as he is the one who needs these kinds of solutions more. And the products that were available in the market did not provide such solutions. That's where our products came in.

### **Could you elaborate on your different products and their utility?**

Right now we have six products. Since mobile phones entail a huge market that we can tap, we started off in that domain and developed six different solutions for mobile phones. One of our key products is mechanical chargers where you can simply rotate the wheel and charge mobile phones. Wherever you are you can use them without the use of electricity. It has a lot of scope in rural and semi-urban India,

where there are a lot of power cuts. Even in urban India, there are a lot of ambiguous situations where you require solutions.

Another product that we have is called a bike charger. You can install that on any bike and charge your phone. You just have to switch on the ignition and you can charge your phone. Then we have USB charger, which you can put in any USB port and charge any phone without the requirement of any installation on the computer. Then there are car chargers as well. All these products are already available in the market.

**Where can one find these products? How do you market your products and where do you see the scope?**

Some of our products are available at retail stores like Mobile Store, HotSpot, RPG stores on a pan-India level. Another channel of distribution is online sales. We also sell our products through local distributors who supply them to mom n pop stores across the country.

**What are the prices?**

If we talk about the mechanical chargers, they come for Rs 450 and they are universal chargers. We give a year's warranty on all our products. Essentially, we have all our products in this range but we expect the operating price to be a little lower.

**How has been the response?**

I would not say that the response has been phenomenal so far but it's been normal. One, we have relatively less number of distributors and secondly any product that needs some kind of explanation from the market needs some time to settle down as a regular sales commodity. Because when a retailer has the product he needs to tell the customers that we have this product and explain which generally doesn't happen.

**How are you going to tackle this?**

We will have to start pushing the sales to tackle this issue and we might have to appoint promoters in few places who would pitch to every customer who comes in a store. We need to create some enthusiasm and educate the customers about the product. We have started doing all this but only recently. As of now, we are focusing more on the distribution.

**Were there any glitches initially?**

When we had started, we had no funding. We were relying on our consulting work, as well as small amount of cash that I had saved while I was working. In time, we were given grants by a lot of agencies; we got a government grant for product development. Then we got a soft loan from our incubator. After that we applied for an incubator inside IIT Bombay and thereafter we started working from this place.

**How do you plan to penetrate in rural India?**

There are two ways to penetrate into rural India. There are established networks in cities, where these people come and buy products and sell them to rural India. To push our channel distribution, we would definitely need some penetration with time. In recent times, a lot of push has come with the help of modern retail penetration in rural India. We can now reach to more areas than before. We are in touch with most of these players right now and we hope to penetrate the rural landscape with time.

**Do you or any of your team members have an MBA degree or feel the need for one?**

We have roped in a friend who recently finished his MBA. So, now we have an MBA person who is looking at our sales and marketing.

**Are you working on any other product or device?**

We have started making these micro-air flying devices which are an advanced version of small helicopters. They can fly within a room and if you take them to any outside space, they can fly to any GPS location that you direct them to. They can be used for scouting or surveying of an area if there is a cloud cover or any such problem. They have cameras in them as well. They are meant to provide tactical

support, tell you about an area before you actually enter into it. They can scout an area and get an aerial view of any place.