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From Pathankot to Pampore, how ideaForge is powering the Indian Army

By *Chhavi Tyagi*, ECONOMICTIMES.COM | Updated: Dec 15, 2016, 10.52 AM IST 💬   **Post a Comment**

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50 HOT **Startups to watch out for in 2017**

Name of the Company - ideaForge Technology Pvt.Ltd
Name of Founder (s) - Ankit Mehta ,Rahul Singh, Ashish Bhat, Vipul Joshi
City - Navi Mumbai
Revenues - NA
Headcount - 125
Industry - Unmanned Systems, Robotics
Investors Details & Amount raised - Raised Rs 70 cr in Series A round led by Silicon Valley based WRV Capital, US-India Investment Fund IndusAge Partners, and Indian IT major Infosys.

Whether it was in 2013 when the Indian Army needed to look for survivors in submerged areas of Uttarakhand or more recently in 2016, when the Army commandos wanted essential intelligence on the positions of the Lakshar-e-Taiba militants holed up in a government building in Pampore, it was ideaForge's UAVs which acted as the Indian commandos' eyes.

Developing drones for the Indian defence establishments and other government organisations is what ideaForge has been doing since 2008 - the year when India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) spotted the talented team of the three founders rubbing shoulders with the students of MIT USA.

"We had just tied up for the first place in the MAV 2008 competition (held by the Indian Army and the Department of Defense, USA) with MIT USA in a

hovering competition. This opened the eyes of the DRDO to the fact that there is a team in India that can develop technology from first principles and actually make it work. They started approaching us to deliver a lot of products for them. Till then we were just making avionics for UAVs," shares Ankit Mehta, Cofounder and CEO of ideaForge Technology.

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In 2009, the startup came out with the world's smallest and lightest autopilot UAV (only 10gm) and then soon after that developed the country's first fully autonomous vertical take-off and landing UAV. The team has not looked back since then. While refusing to divulge its revenue figures, Mehta says the company has gained sufficient market strength based on that initial traction.

Currently, the company has developed two categories of UAVs - NETRA, VTOL UAV and SKYBOX Fixed-Wing - and delivers this technology specifically to India's defence organisations and other government bodies.

"Serving government contracts evolved naturally for us. After the success of NETRA; a product we developed with DRDO, ideaForge Technology and the NETRA family of UAVs have become synonymous with the defence and the government sector," says Mehta.

Watch:

The company also provides training for its use, but the products are easy-to-use. Mehta assures that there are middle school educated jawans operating the platforms with minimal training.

Versatile
The drones are used by the organisations for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance of moving and fixed targets. There are many missions wherein ideaForge's drones have played a primary role including Pathankot attack (2016), the 2014 Beas River tragedy and recently to close the 44-day hunt for a man-eater tigress in Uttarakhand. "Many," says Mehta "are classified and cannot be divulged."

For the three founders, it was in 2004 when they had their first brush with drones after they built their first Quad-Rotor - a multi-rotor helicopter lifted and propelled by four rotors.

"That was the genesis of our story, the story of getting into developing UAVs. We felt like there is nothing else we would rather do, nothing else that will give us the same kind of satisfaction. It was almost like an obligation we felt

towards what we have already achieved independently. We were also very fortunate in finding a team in college itself with common interests and passion," says Mehta.

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The team has built a healthy reputation for itself and a pipeline of orders from government organisations that gives it the freedom to not engage the private sector - something which would bring its own set of tangles given the tight regulations in India regarding selling drone technology for private use.

"There are certain regulations in place, but they do not cover the entire spectrum of UAV usage. For example, the temporary regulations prevent the import of drones into the country without prior permission from the government. Additionally, civilian usage of drones is prohibited by law and is punishable. So while these rules have definitely impacted the Industry, our company has been less affected by them, mainly due to the fact that we cater to the armed forces," says Mehta.

The plan for the future is to further consolidate ideaForge's position in the Armed Forces market and become the lead provider of industrial and agricultural UAV solutions which, Mehta says, will also lead the company towards underserved international markets. To this effect, the company has just secured Series A funding of Rs 70 crore in a round led by Silicon Valley based WRV Capital, US-India Investment Fund IndusAge Partners, and Indian IT major Infosys.

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