

INTERVIEW: **CHETAN NAIK**

VICE-PRESIDENT, SALES, IBM INDIA/SOUTH ASIA

Indian start-up story is becoming stronger

FROM PC to web to mobile era, IBM has been driving the technology revolution and replicating its success story across markets, including India. Big Blue's flagship programme called Global Entrepreneurship Programme (GEP) is its biggest initiative currently, enriching the start-up ecosystem. As part of this programme, IBM offers start-ups access to its enterprise-class cloud platforms and services at no cost. "We are committed to provide Indian start-ups with the tools they need to build and capitalise on the next generation of apps for the cloud," says **Chetan Naik**, vice-president sales, IBM India/South Asia in an interview with **Sudhir Chowdhary**. Excerpts:

Tell us about IBM's Global Entrepreneurship Programme.

When we came out with Watson—a technology platform that uses natural language processing and machine learning to extract insights from large amounts of unstructured data—which is a collection of a whole range of algorithms, we realised there were lots of algorithms that were standalone and could be used to build independent applications. We believe that we can't do it all, so there is a need to go and work on this with the ecosystem. This outlook was very well-supported in the US, India and many other parts of the world.

IBM's flagship programme called



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it will be a large-scale session. Recently, I had a 200-people session at a bank and we ran a full-day workshop about what all is possible with cognitive technology. We curated the contacts in terms of what they wanted to see and we got the best of the guys to go and run the full workshop.

Second, there are many modes of awareness available via web and the entire IBM Digital team is working towards creating this thing. I think we have 18 months to two years edge over anybody else at this scale, whether it's Bluemix as a platform or Watson as a platform and we have made it consumable by the enterprise, irrespective of the size.

Have you seen Indian companies adopting Watson?

There is a lot of interest and there are early adopters too. Manipal Hospitals has adopted Watson for oncology to help physicians identify options for individualised, evidence based cancer care across India. This is the first deployment of Watson's cognitive computing platform in India.

Where does cloud fit in all this?

It fits beautifully. There is no other way you will be able to deliver these services at such a big scale without the cloud. Imagine the computer power and data centre you require trying to get it done! Can you afford to create a business

IBM's flagship programme called Global Entrepreneurship Programme (GEP) is our biggest initiative currently, enriching the start-up ecosystem. As part of this, we offer start-ups access to enterprise-class cloud platforms and services at no cost. This programme enables start-ups to move rapidly from idea to application, providing access to more than 100 IBM services. These services allow developers to stitch together an application or update in minutes, while also providing access to IBM's full suite of integrated DevOps, giving them a platform to drive their agile development.

To date, IBM has engaged with more than 8,000 start-ups through entrepreneur initiatives and is registering an average of 19,000 new developers on Bluemix each week, and has partnered with 2,400 independent software vendors (ISVs) to help drive IBM Cloud revenue. We have launched the programme in India and we are doing a lot of activities to support it here.

What is your take on the Indian

start-up story? Is it still intact?

Intact? It's only becoming stronger. There is a lot of talk in the market about valuations and those kind of things, I prefer to keep away from it. I feel there is an amazing amount of talent available and people have the courage and aspiration to go and create something innovative. According to me, the start-up story has just started. What is surprising is that it's not just the 25-year-olds who are coming out of the IITs and creating a startup; we have bankers who have left plush jobs because they believe they can combine their domain knowledge with the technology people and create an innovative solution.

While IBM is committed to building a strong ecosystem of start-ups, how is it going about doing it?

Global Entrepreneurship Programme (GEP) is a formal way of acknowledging, registering and giv-

ing you visibility if you are a start-up. There are a few other things that help in building this, some of that is awareness and knowledge which is Developer Connect. There are also events like the Start-up Challenge, Hackathon or Targeted Hackathon with a client or a Targeted Start-up Challenge of an industry in association with a few clients. The third set of things that we announced was the IBM garage where the start-up can come and work with us.

IBM seems to be aligning all businesses around the cognitive power of Watson. How is IBM going about the task while educating clients about the cognitive era?

IBM Business Connect 2016 is a part of it. Basically, it's going to work both ways. One, there is an enterprise audience and you can bring them together and do sessions like these. But if you are a big bank, our teams would be going and conducting some sessions at your place and

you require trying to get it done! Can you afford to create a business case by putting all of that together even before you have seen the first rupee of revenue and the first impact on the business? You can't. Cloud becomes the underline and eventually all of this software needs some hardware to run on—so it eventually provides you that ability to get started fast.

We have a stated strategy for IBM: We are a cloud solutions company and cloud remains our top preference. IBM's cloud platforms are designed to empower companies to innovate rapidly by providing a full suite of infrastructure as a service (IaaS) and platform as a service (PaaS) offerings.

As far as the India market for our cloud-based services is concerned, the cloud business is growing rapidly. As a company, we are growing overall in India and the cloud business has been growing faster than the rest. Over a period of time, you will automatically see very different numbers in India, in terms of number of customers, revenue and usage.