

i-tech.



GLOBAL ONLINE PORTAL EXPEDIA TO LAUNCH IN INDIA SOON
After Travelocity, which opened an India site with hotel bookings in March, global giant expedia.com will open shop in India. Expedia's travel bookings are worth \$20 billion (approximately Rs 79,400 crore) a year through its online portal globally.

with contributions from watblog.com

MLM to a PC near you!

ANKIT SAXENA

"... AMPEE, a revolutionary rewards program that harnesses the power of your personal network to provide Perpetual Matching Rewards..." goes a line on the website of AMPEE. Okay. Good jargons. And impressive mission statement, value statement (or whatever). But what is it? I used the website for a while. What I think about it? One phrase. Multilevel marketing or MLM, as it is popularly known as. The website is basically offering multilevel marketing service. As in the offline world, even here the service is promoted using exotic statements reading which, you can hardly make out that it is actually good old MLM.

The website has been launched by the Hyderabad based "Metaminds Software Solutions". The website looks good and uses some catchy language to lure viewers into becoming "members". Sample this - "AMPEE is a truly distinctive offering in the marketplace. Our uniqueness derives from our community-based model, combining each individual's passion to succeed with their desire to



PIC FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSE ONLY

benefit friends and family."

The company has tied up with two partners - Prish (prish.com), an online shopping portal and TakeOffTrip (takeofftrip.com), an online travel portal. Once registered, the user is supposed to make online make transactions from these websites, which will make him point-rich. (Hmm...again...someone launching own point system). Then there are point-rewards for registering, buying from the partner sites, and making others join your "network". Prism.com is a Metaminds

company. So, can it work here? MLM has benefited quite a few people. It has been quite successful in case of companies like Amway. However, with a lot of people entering into this space, there started a phase where companies with no clear business model except adding more people to the network entered the scene. This led to an MLM-burst kind of situation, where such companies, after attracting the customers with a promise to help them make crores, went kaput. Thereby making a serious dent into the trust

of the customers. Now the scene in India is that people see with doubt every person who approaches them with an MLM offer.

Prish.com and Takeofftrip.com both belong to Metaminds. So, rather than making Ampee as an independent network who "partners" with Prish, if Metaminds would have introduced this system for Prish itself, it might have worked. But with the current scene in India, it's really difficult to expect a multi-level networking business to make any serious profits.

cool take

SKYPE TO LAUNCH PHONE SERVICE IN THE UK SOON

Skype, the internet messaging service founded in 2003, is about to launch its much awaited 3 Skype-phone in the UK on November 2 in association with Britain's mobile carrier '3 mobile'. The mobile phone will be launched soon in the UK, Australia, Italy, Hong Kong, Sweden, Denmark, Austria and the Republic of Ireland. Skype's tagline for the Skype-phone is: "Skype is now mobile. Calling your world is free." This means that Skype has enabled all its users to call other Skype users for free through the skypephone without the need for the user to login to a computer and make a call. The free calls will be made through the voice-over-internet-protocol. Currently, the '3 Skypephone' is priced at £49.99 Sterling in the UK on a 'pay-as-you-go' tariff or free on a 'contract basis'. Moreover, users of the mobile phone can even send 'Instant Messages' to other Skype users online. This move specifically will enable Skype to encourage internet users to sign up for a Skype account as the brand popularity of Skype will increase drastically. Meanwhile, the mobile carrier '3 mobile' will capitalize on the opportunity so as to capture the non-Skype calls segment.



CLEARTRIP.COM TAKES THE INTERNATIONAL ROUTE

We had earlier mentioned in our blog that online travel bookings are booming in India. It is one of the hassle free ways to book your tickets instantly. Lately many of the offline players are switching over to online for better presence and to cover larger number of audiences, attractive discounts and other promotional packages are its key features. The big players in online travel are makemytrip.com, travelguru.com, ezeego1.com, yatra.com, cleartrip.com and many more. After makemytrip.com, travelguru.com, yatra.com, ezeego1.com the next company to step into their shoes by starting international bookings is cleartrip.com. Cleartrip targets to achieve a growth of 300 per cent by next fiscal by starting international bookings. The portal being launched in July 2005, till date has an average booking of Rs 7,000 per customer. In an interview CEO of the company stated "In the last fiscal, we dealt with three lakh customers and now we expect to increase this number considerably."



Sold on Seed Funding

ANKIT SAXENA

Google recently acquired 30 per cent stake in the seed-stage fund Ventureast TeNet Fund II. The fund is run by the Tenet group of IIT-Madras and Ventureast Fund Advisors. Tenet is a telecommunication and computer networking group, and is focussed on incubating R&D companies. There have been successful companies launched from Tenet such as Midas Communication, Banyan Networks or NexGe Technologies. Along with Ventureast, the seed fund now aims at funding companies at the seed stage.

There have been VC funding available to the newer companies, but most of them were in the second of third stage. If one starts a company from scratch, and is looking to a support capital at the seed-stage, the options, though existent, were really few.

The situation is changing now, though. This is Google's third investment in seed funding in India after Seed Fund and Erasmic Fund. Well, fourth, may be, because Google is also onboard Angel Network - a group consisting primarily of successful entrepreneurs who invest in early stage companies. Things seem to become more favourable for aspiring entrepreneurs.

India badly needs an eco-system to nurture entrepreneurship. Seed funding is one major part of that. Organisations such as NirmaLabs, Band of Angels, and now Ventureast are doing some really good work in this direction.

A contest now for shopaholics

RAJIV DINGRA

FutureBazaar the online shopping portal backed by Pantaloon was launched last year and had also been criticised for being very old school in its approach with its e-commerce site. Though a no nonsense approach to online shopping the site did nothing for the uncertain or confused shopper. One has to still visit sites such as gsmarena or mouthshut for knowing reviews of which products to buy. So future bazaar seemed like the portal for shoppers who had made up their mind about both the product as well as the price they want to buy at and just wanted to get over with the formality of buying.

But now it seems futurebazaar has realised the importance of engaging users beyond just having a catalogue of items for sale at a discount on their website. It has tied up with contest2win to launch a "shopaholic contest" in which a user gets to dress the virtual characters or 'avatar' created by a user with all the accessories after guessing the best price offered on futurebazaar.com.



PIC FOR REPRESENTATIONAL PURPOSE ONLY

Raj Menon, COO, Contest2win.com, said, "C2w has been the pioneer in interactive marketing and it has been our constant endeavour to use innovative solutions to connect with our users. The contest is interactive as well as engaging for e-commerce websites."

Rahul Sethi, Marketing Head, Futurebazaar.com, said, "The contest gives us a perfect interactive solution to create awareness about the site. We are excited about the gaming contest since it is the first time that we have adopted such a communication route."

This is a nice way to get users to engage with the site and search for the prices on future bazaar and also see the free-

bies they are giving out along with these buys.

I still feel though that there is scope to engage a user in an e-commerce site which converts a passive buyer into a participative buyer and then to an active buyer.

So the question arises how does one engage passive buyers? Buyers who want to buy but are in a state of confusion, uncertainty with both the medium i.e. internet and the product/brand to buy.

Well here is what I feel... So a site that makes it easy for users to make a choice or helps them reinforce the choices that they have made better shall see more e-commerce transactions happening on their site.

ZAPAK JOINS FACEBOOK RACE WITH APPLICATION

We have given enough reasons earlier as to why having a Facebook application can be very beneficial to one's brand. And we had also listed companies like zoho, slideshare, nautanki.tv and techtribe. Now it seems the another one to join the gang is the online gaming giant zapak.com, which has launched its own facebook application. This application provides casual multiplayer games such as chess, tictactoe, sudoku and backgammon. It looks like a smart move by the gaming company which has earlier made mistakes like diverting its attention from its core i.e. gaming and looking at mail and other services which are already saturated.



What's your feedback on this page?
SMS BMIT <space> your feedback to 58888