

## BREAKING THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

*Breaking the barriers of various languages and dialects across India, Uniphore Software Systems worked its technology grounds up and now supports more than 25 global languages and over 150 dialects. It became a flag bearer of an Indian company which first started solving language problem for Indian villages and is now exporting to other parts of the world. Umesh Sachdev Co-founder and CEO of Uniphore Software Systems shares more.*

By Punita Sabharwal

While studying Computer science at JP Institute of Engineering, Noida, Delhi-born Umesh Sachdev met his co-founder Ravi Saraogi. While Ravi belonged to a business family, Umesh was keen to explore the world of entrepreneurship. As a summer project, both of them built a prototype of a software and participated in a technology competition by a French company ending up winning it. They were soon flown to Paris. In the final year, they participated in an Intel business plan competition and made a business plan for the same product. On winning the same, they were flown to San Francisco winning some money as a prize. Interestingly, in both the competitions they were the only Indian companies participating.

Right out of engineering the duo started a company called Singularis Technologies, which was into mobile location based services. As amateur entrepreneurs they understood technology well but lacked business acumen.

They spent two years but the idea seemed ahead of its time. Soon they met Prof. Ashok Jhunjhunwala, who chairs the incubation programme at IIT Madras. He was quick to point out the challenges they were facing asking them to join the incubation programme. The two soon moved to Chennai.

“When we decided to move to Chennai we had told ourselves that we will do it for six months. If we do not succeed as entrepreneur, we will take up a job. Uniphore was our last attempt at entrepreneurship,” remembers Sachdev. Joining IIT Chennai incubation programme in 2007 they spent a year in the lab working on the new idea, creating technology and validating it. In 2008 they formed the company Uniphore Software Systems.

To validate it, they set up a 3-4 seater call centre in the lab. Went to a few villages in Tamilnadu and did some marketing via posters in panchayat providing a call centre number. Surprisingly, they got 10,000 calls. They realized people would call but doing this with just humans is not a scalable model. The question was can we virtualize the human being.

### FAST FACTS

- >> Umesh Sachdev, CEO & Co-Founder, chosen among the 10 ‘Next Generation Leaders’ in 2016 by Time Magazine
- >> Incubated at IIT Chennai, India in 2008
- >> Offices in India, Philippines and U.A.E.
- >> 100 employees spread across all locations and expecting to have a total headcount of 150+ by March 2016
- >> More than 70 enterprise customers and over 4 million end users
- >> Robust intellectual property, with 6 patents on technology stack
- >> Investors include Kris Gopalakrishnan, IDG Ventures, Yournest Fund, Stata Ventures
- >> Recognized by Deloitte as a Technology Fast 500 company in Asia Pacific in 2014
- >> Recognized by Deloitte as a Technology Fast 50 company in India in 2014
- >> Uniphore’s founder & CEO, Umesh Sachdev, received the “Exemplary Application of IT Award for 2014” at the CII CONNECT 2014 Awards
- >> Ranked as the 17th fastest growing technology company in India by Deloitte Fast 50 in 2012
- >> Awarded the Best Incubatee in the ICT Category at ISBA Awards in 2011



**We said because this is our last try let's do something really big that hasn't been done before and others will find it hard to do. If we fail, we will fail but if we succeed we will make it big.”**

Umesh Sachdev  
Co-founder and CEO,  
Uniphore Software Systems

They worked on a technology to do what the human being is doing, picking the phone and understanding what you are saying in a vernacular language, converting speech to text. “The idea was a majority of population doesn't live in larger towns. They live in villages and smaller towns, disconnected from digital revolution, not using the internet. The barrier was literacy and language, but interestingly a mobile had reached every household. There is a certain need of accessing information and there is a communication tool available. We said how we



use the phone as a medium and vernacular voice as the communication mode and connect the bridge to the internet,” says Sachdev.

Today Uniphore operates three softwares. Akeira is one of them! For a villager who only speaks vernacular, it may be the only way of doing a transaction. Stating an example Sachdev says, “So, any business which has a large customer-base which runs call center would use our technology to add vernacular aspect. A farmer can now call up to know the real time price for his goods to decide which mandi is best for him.”

Uniphore has seven patents in the company and hopes to increase the patent count as the business and R&D grows. Its customer is the enterprise which works on a pay-per-use model. Various call centres can use it as a Virtual Assistant before transferring calls to a human. Banking, Aviation and Telecom are its major users.

The second software, auMina is a speech analytics’ software which can listen to all the calls made at a call centre, recorded for training purpose. It has speech recognition feature, it converts speech to text

and can even do emotion detection. It generates an analytical report stating the areas of improvisation. Today, call centres, e-commerce companies and media companies form majority users of auMina.

The third is amVoice which is a voice biometric software, which authenticates you by your voice. Largely banks form to be its users. “But, we even saw many interesting cases, wherein people say that we have a dispersed. So, it is really tough to take attendance. They can use the combination of a mobile phone which has a GPS and

voice biometrics,” claims Sachdev.

Today, Uniphore serves over 70 large enterprise customers spread across India, South East Asia and Middle East. SEA and India are equal in terms of revenues. There are 700 million people in villages. With 4 million users currently, Umesh’s aim is to reach a billion. Google, Amazon, Apple are investing in this area but are doing great in American accents of English. Uniphore plans to beat them at their own game entering the US market soon. (E)