TEEN THERE, DONE THAT

Meet eight budding teenpreneurs who are giving wings to their startup ideas

Shailesh Menon

Thirteen-year-old Aiyana Menezes got her big business idea watching her cats — Poochi and Snat — play. Her love for creative writing and sketching encouraged Aiyana to start a comic book series featuring the two cats as central characters.

"I started this for fun, but now I don't mind earning some money publishing my work… We'll approach publishers after we've enough material to start off," says Aiyana, the owner of Smelly Cat Comics and quite possibly India's youngest aspiring 'bookpreneur.'

A great startup idea is no longer the preserve of engineering graduates or mid-level managers tired of their regular jobs. The long corridors of top Indian schools are buzzing with "bankable business ideas" — some of which could become imminently viable ventures with support and mentorship.

"Teenpreneurship is a very recent trend in India… and now schools and parents are slowly opening up to the idea of kids starting their own ventures. This is a welcome change," says Devika Majumder, CEO of Youngpreneurs India, a firm promoting teenpreneurship in India. ET spoke to eight budding teenpreneurs — all in different stages of starting their own venture. These superkids take time out of their studies and leisure to perfect their models, meet potential clients and also hustle for business.

"It'll be a big mistake if you don't take them seriously… especially the investor community," says Namita Thapar, CFO of Emcure Pharmaceuticals and founder of Incredible Ideas, which has partnered with US-based Young Entrepreneurs Academy.

"Investors should shed their scepticism and support good ideas. Some of these kids are ready for the market… it's the market that has to be ready for them," Thapar adds.

S ARJUN 17 Founder & CEO, LateraLogics **2012**
DOING WHAT: Twelfth grader at Velammal Vidhyashram, Chennai
BIZ GENRE: Mobile apps, software development
FUNDING: ₹10,000 from father
PRODUCTS: A schoolbus tracker, a chat scribbler, a quiz app, a volunteer connect app, an app for safety, a code inventor kit etc

THE YELLOW BUS TRACKER

A few parents residing in India, the UAE and Brazil have downloaded Locatera, a school bus tracking mobile application designed by a 17-year-old boy from his apartment in the western suburbs of Chennai. Locatera, developed by S Arjun, helps parents to keep track of the school bus their wards are travelling in.

"The Locatera app locates and tracks the school bus real time; it helps parents plan drop-off or pick-up of their child. Parents using normal phones can just give a missed call to track the bus and their kid inside," says Arjun, who prototyped this app five years ago.

Arjun started LateraLogics by borrowing ₹10,000 from his father. "I've paid back the loan a year into starting my company," Arjun says. "We're getting enquiries from countries in Latin America, the UAE, South Africa and Pakistan. The app has to be customised as per client requirement to generate 100% positive results," he explains.

A few venture capitalists have shown interest in LateraLogics but the teenpreneur is not very keen to "dilute equity" at the moment.

> "I'll study further, but I'll not cling on to it for long. My idea is to balance my academics and entrepreneurial venture"

SREELAKSHMI SURESH 19 Founder & CEO, eDesign Technologies **2009**
DOING WHAT: Final-year BBA student at St Joseph's College, Kozhikode
BIZ GENRE: Web designing and website maintenance
FUNDING: Negligible so far
PROJECTS: Bar Council of Kerala, VPK Food Products, Genesis Montessori, Angels International

STILL RIDING HER HOBBY HORSE

What started as a hobby eight years ago has become a full-fledged business for Sreelakshmi Suresh, a final year BBA student from Kozhikode, Kerala.

Sreelakshmi, founder-CEO of eDesign Technologies, has designed websites for over 250 clients — her first one being her school, when she was just an 11-year-old.

"After that, I got requests from clubs, associations and small companies… Now, I am selective about the orders I take. I focus mostly on website designing and site maintenance. I get a lot of projects from my past clients too," Sreelakshmi adds.

The teen intends to work on other platforms going ahead. She evaded questions around her company financials. "There's a lot of competition in this field. I keep my charges low and do a good job. I've not spent a penny on marketing till date; all my orders are through word-of-mouth," she says.

> "I don't need a big office… A computer with internet connection is all I need right now"

SHRAVAN KUMARAN 17 & **SANJAY KUMARAN 15**
Founders, GoDimensions **2012**
DOING WHAT: Twelfth- and tenth-graders at Hiranandani Upscale School, Chennai
BIZ GENRE: Mobile apps, software development
FUNDING: "Borrowed a few lakhs from dad"
PRODUCTS: Catch Me Cop (a game), Alphabets Board (Education app), Go Donate (Food, clothes for charity finder)

APPY GO LUCKY

Shravan Kumaran started learning computer languages when he was in class II. QBasic and Java came as naturally to him as Tamil and English. It was not long before Shravan and his younger brother Sanjay started making mobile apps.

"We knew back then mobile phones would be a stronger medium than computers…" says Shravan, whose first mobile app was a game called Catch Me Cop, launched in 2012.

"We launched Catch Me Cop on the iOS platform first… Apple runs stringent tests on all apps uploaded on their network. Once we were accepted by iOS, we felt more confident," he adds. Around this time, the brothers floated GoDimensions, their startup venture.

The success of Catch Me Cop encouraged the Kumaran brothers to launch other apps. They also converted a spare bedroom into their office, installed computers and filled up shelves with an array of electronic gadgets.

"We have a few investors wanting to invest in our company, but we're not showing much interest. If someone comes in as an investor now, we'll not be able to do things our way. We also have our studies to worry about," reasons Shravan.

Shravan intends to pursue engineering this year. GoDimensions has earned roughly $600 (about ₹38,500) through ad-clicks popping on their apps.

> "We don't want to work for anyone… We want to work on our own ideas"

AVI DAYANI 13 & **NAKSHH KOHLI 12**
Founders, Shanny **2016**
DOING WHAT: Eighth-graders at The Shri Ram School, Gurugram
BIZ GENRE: Mobile app; set for launch
FUNDING: ₹45,000 from Radhika Aggarwal, co-founder & chief business officer, ShopClues; ₹50,000 from a business pitch contest
PRODUCTS: Nanny services (via a mobile app)

UBER OF NANNIES…

Avi Dayani and Nakshh Kohli intend to "solve nanny problems" with their new app Shanny — a portmanteau for 'short notice nanny.'

"Many a time, regular nannies take a day off without giving you adequate notice. If you have our app, you can shout out to people in your neighbourhood, asking them if they could come to your place for a few hours," explains Avi, who is set to launch the app in a couple of months.

Shanny will connect you to people in your locality who are willing to spend a few hours in your home. It's more like a community initiative, with some money earning opportunity. Many of our 'nannies' will be well-to-do housewives or retired personnel who wouldn't mind earning some extra money," he says.

A nanny could be hired for a minimum of 2 hours for ₹700. The app-makers will get 30% of the billing as commission. Shanny nannies can be hired for longer hours too.

"We will make all our nannies sign a non-disclosure agreement; by doing so, they'll not be able to contact our clients directly. It's pretty much like how Uber works," Avi explains.

Shanny.com has managed to get ₹45,000 (no equity involved) from Shopclues founder Radhika Aggarwal; they have also won ₹50,000 in a business pitch contest.

"We'll select nannies only after doing a thorough background check… We'll start with women-only nannies for now," Avi adds.

At prevailing tariffs, Avi and Nakshh could make over ₹30,000 if they source 50 nanny trips every day.

> "We're starting small now, but will keep expanding once we perfect the model"

AVIRAT PUROHIT 15 Founder, Bagmybooks.com **2016**
DOING WHAT: Tenth-grader at Bombay Scottish
BIZ GENRE: Online marketplace for school stuff; complete rollout in a year
FUNDING: ₹1 lakh borrowed from father.

…AND AMAZON OF SCHOOL BOOKS

Avirat is on the verge of creating an Amazon for all school products, including textbooks. The tenth-grader hopes to tie up with schools across the country, secure their list of textbooks (and other schoolware), source them from the manufacturer directly and deliver these at the buyers' doorstep.
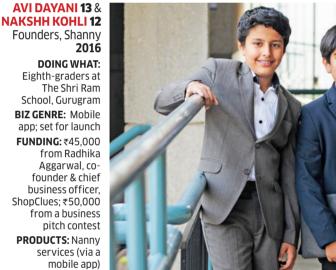
"So you don't have to search around the city for one particular textbook or a schoolware… you just have to click on the name of your school, specify your class/standard/grade and add all the school-recommended wares to your cart in one go," says Avirat.

"This marketplace could be a blessing for parents who dread the school reopening rush. We'll keep school supplies (notebooks, journals, shoes, water bottles, school bags, et al) throughout the year," he adds.

Bagmybooks.com will not take any inventory on itself. The portal would source all wares from manufacturers directly and pass them to the customers. "We're in the process of empanelling more schools now. We'll have 4-5 ICSE schools by end of this year," Avirat adds.

> "My business will eliminate the middlemen in the school stationery business"

ISHAN VARSHNEY 16 Founder, Reachex **2015**
DOING WHAT: Eleventh-grader at The Shri Ram School
BIZ GENRE: Mobile apps, software development
FUNDING: ₹40,000 from various business pitch contests
PRODUCT: Reachex (life-saving mobile app)

SEND OUT SUCCOUR

Reachex is a mobile app that sends SOS alerts (SMS) to pre-selected contacts in time of emergency. If a mobile user (with Reachex app installed) has met with an accident, the mobile phone in his pocket will send out SOS text messages to pre-selected contacts.

"The accelerometer in the phone will sense a high impact following a fall or an accident… There's a one-minute timer for the mobile user to cancel the message going out; after that messages are sent to pre-selected contacts," explains Ishan.

"This app comes handy if the mobile user is unconscious or is not in a position to use his mobile phone," says Ishaan, adding, "We're also adding other features to help senior citizens — like keeping their medicine schedules and doctor appointments."

Ishan is also talking to ambulance service providers and hospitals for a higher level of linkage with persons in distress. The eleventh-grader intends to major in computer science, with electives in Economics. Ishan spends his spare time reading science fiction and watching science-based TV shows.

> "It's not only about money; it's about creating tech solutions to solve everyday problems"

HRIDAY DHAND 13 Founder, Strength-O-Seeds **2017**
DOING WHAT: Seventh-grader at Chatrabhuj Narsee School, Mumbai
BIZ GENRE: Nutritional supplements; at proof-of-concept stage
FUNDING: Negligible so far

PROTEIN SCOOPS FOR VEGANS

Hridhay Dhand started researching about protein sources after a few family members — all vegans — were diagnosed with low protein levels in the blood.

"Most vegans do not get enough nutritional values from the food they eat. They measure low on critical health parameters such as Omega 3, B-12 and D3," explains Hridhay.

"This is where our product scores… Strength-O-Seeds is prepared from natural ingredients such as dried fruits and seeds. It would be sold in two basic flavours — salty and sweet," he says.

Hridhay intends to sell his product at ₹199 per 100 gm. To start with, the product would be manufactured at his home in Mumbai. The product is yet to be lab-tested for assessing nutritional values. Hridhay has discussed his business plans with Marico group chairman Harsh Mariwala.

> "Protein sources for vegetarians are scarce. That's my opportunity"

RAHESH SARAF 15 Founder, Zip Zap **2016**
DOING WHAT: Tenth-grader at Jamnabai Narsee School, Mumbai
BIZ GENRE: Accessories (a plastic zipper for bags); at proof-of-concept stage
FUNDING: Negligible so far

ZIPPING ALONG

Rahesh Saraf has developed a bag zipper that will not break or rust even after prolonged use.

"Metal zippers turn rusty a few months after they're put on a bag. If you apply force to a rusty zipper, it breaks. My plastic zipper runs smooth and is unbreakable," Rahesh says.

"My zipper works like a Ziplock cover. Attach the railings on the bag and use a slider to open or close the bag," he explains.

Rahesh is perfecting his zipper prototype now. "I'll start manufacturing it after my class X examinations," he adds.

> "I am not ready yet… I'm getting my proof of concept right"