

Gaming for a living

VIRTUAL SUCCESS From a gaming-addict at 13, to a small-time entrepreneur at 16 and to a global business head, spearheading India's gaming industry at 33...Here's a look at Vishal Gondal's journey. **MADHUMITHA SRINIVASAN**

While parents may tell you that playing video games all day will get you nowhere in life, here's Vishal Gondal, whose addiction to gaming resulted in him being the torch-bearer for the multi-million dollar Indian gaming industry. This 33-year-old Founder, CEO and 'GOD-in-Chief' of Indiagames started his first venture FACT at the age of 16 with a team of six and later launched the Indiagames.com portal at 19 with funds from venture capitalists. Over the years, it grew into India's largest mobile gaming company. Vishal's story is another instance of "passion meets success".

Starting young

"I have been gaming since the age of 13 and programming since 16. I used to play games almost 24 hours a day. I played and played and scored like million points and then I thought 'what after this?' That's when it occurred to him to start his own game-designing company.

You'll be surprised to learn that he "didn't do an engineering or MBA. I am what I call myself T.Y.B.Com fail. I was mostly self-learnt." The experience of running his own business as an inexperienced young entrepreneur gave Vishal what he describes as "the most expensive MBA that I have done — on-the-job." But his choice of business worked out positively for him. "I always believe that to differentiate you have to stand out in the crowd and I think the gaming business helped us stand out everywhere we went." Now Vishal spearheads a global business empire, better known as IG-FUN outside of India, with over 300 employees and offices in Mumbai, Beijing, London and

Los Angeles. His expertise earned him a place in The Nokia Advisory Council for Games and a globally-recognised entrepreneur who has featured in the lists of many an Indian and international magazines.

His current and future projects include the launch of a high-end cricket game in partnership with Apple exclusively for iPhones, launch of the popular game Bioshock on other platforms and the setting up of franchisees in various cities who will "evangelise gaming" by providing information, support and also helping people with gaming hardware.

They are also contemplating on renting out gaming consoles for a charge. That must have been quite a journey to get to where he is now. But Vishal isn't speaking metaphorically. "There was a time when I used to travel from Chembur to VT and that became Mumbai to Chennai to Delhi and now that has become Mumbai to San Francisco to New York to China to Japan...the journey has become longer and the world has become smaller."

Passionate entrepreneur

Vishal swears by passion to such an extent that he advises aspiring entrepreneurs "don't do your engineering and MBAs, because he says education makes you believe that the world

is round, while it's not... "I don't think so."

"Always look at something new and something that's not done before. If people tell you that your idea is really stupid, believe me I think you have a really good idea" says he. And those yearning to spin a success story for themselves like Vishal's, he would only be happy to mentor you and fund your idea but the only criteria being that your idea HAS to be innovative.

Through his Sweat and Blood Venture Group, Vishal has so far funded two start ups. Explaining his reason for starting it, "I was 22 when they (VCs) funded me. Similarly, there are many, many young people out there who have great ideas but not the mentorship, the execution capability or the money. Personally, for me, more than the money it's about the mentorship" he says.

He concludes by inviting wanna-be entrepreneurs with refreshing ideas to connect with him. So you can start by logging on to Facebook. "The best way to find me is on Facebook" reveals Vishal. Get clicking!

Fact file:

- Was a National-level Volleyball player — "...I am now getting back in shape, I must tell you that!"
- Is passionate about gaming and food — "which is not helping much (with the above said)"
- His new passion is body building. He is getting trained by Satyajit who trained Aamir Khan for "Ghajini" — "Don't know if I'll get the "Ghajini"-look but maybe even two packs are enough!"
- Is proud of having proved sceptics wrong and putting India on the map for gaming.
- Believes that in the next 10-15 years gaming is going to rule the world!

