

Failure did not deter Akhilesh Pandya, who went on to set up GenieOnCall, which claims to do everything where your physical presence is not mandatory. In short, it eases you out of those routine chores that unnecessarily take up too much of your time and effort

SAKSHI DENIS

While most people often only wish they had a genie at their beck and call, Akhilesh Pandya, 38, who hails from Agra, has actually made it a reality. Yes, his genies do everything from paying electricity bills and fixing leaky taps to preparing that presentation for which the boss has been raising hell. Based in Noida, GenieOnCall is Akhilesh's brainchild. The almost 1.5-year-old firm provides lifestyle solutions. "GenieOnCall was created because modern day life is very demanding. How many of us are really able to find time for family or ourselves? When did you last enjoy some 'me' time?" Akhilesh asks.

The name of the firm was derived from the famous American sitcom, 'I Dream of Jeannie', and as "nowadays everything happens on phone/app/web, GenieOnCall sounded as the perfect brand name," says the founder, who has more than 16 years of experience of working in customer-centric domains, dealing with clients like Dun & Bradstreet and Verizon (USA) among others. "My work experience involved fruitfully delivering customer services and operations for multi-country businesses with the help



of my large teams of thousands of employees," Akhilesh reveals.

"When I launched GenieOnCall, I only wanted to focus on the professional side of people by giving them an assistant, who would be virtually helping them organise their lives," he says. The operations were launched from Agra in 2013 but the road ahead was not easy. Elaborates Akhilesh: "The first challenge we

faced was that people in India weren't aware about this service as this was a brand new concept. They didn't know if such a thing exists and even if it did, they were not sure if it was workable. So a lot of time was spent in explaining about what our services are all about." The second challenge was that while Agra gave him an advantage of having low-cost infrastructure, it gave Akhilesh serious headaches in



Akhilesh Pandya

terms of finding the right resources. And so he decided to bid good-bye to Agra and shifted his operations to Noida, the bubbling place of new energy and activity close to the national capital, New Delhi.

“I failed many times, but each time I failed I learnt something new. People used to tell me that this won’t work. I used to feel bad but it was all good. I understood their

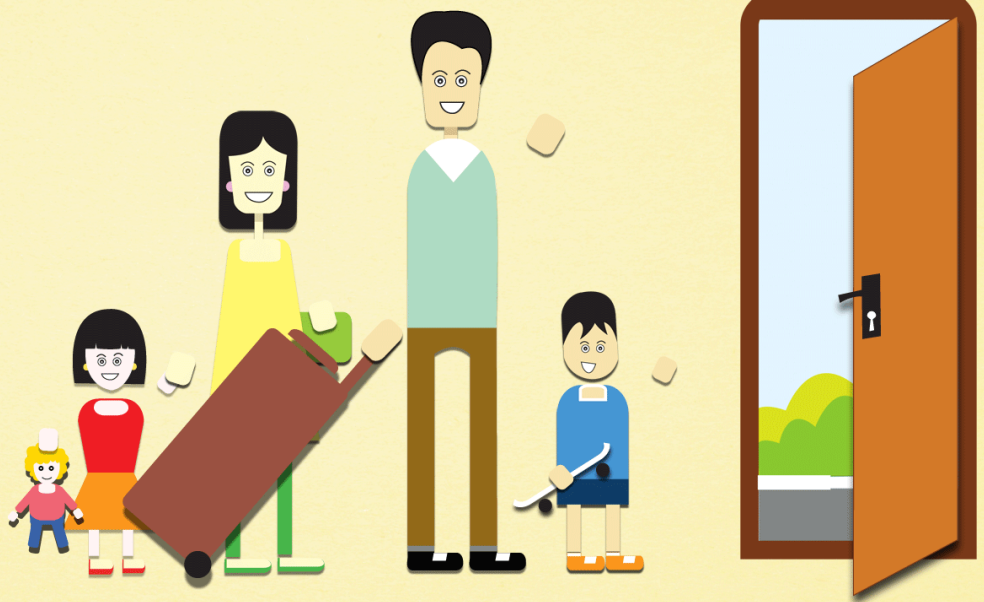
reaction as this was not something they had experienced and were not in a habit of seeing innovation,” he adds, admitting that lifestyle management is a western concept ‘like many other good things’. “Lifestyle doesn’t mean or relate to luxury - it just means organising your life in a better way so that you focus on doing what you love, rather than standing in queues or driving through traffic. Some people have

got it already and some are still getting it and some would need a bit more convincing. I guess that will happen only when they experience our services,” he says with a smile.

“The best part is that there is no niche market for us because everyone in metros can be our customers as all of them need these services. If we look at Delhi and NCR alone, the number of families is approximately

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8 million, out of which at least 21 per cent have a 'very busy' lifestyle. If we are able to capture even 10 per cent of them, we would be a huge hit," he says. GenieOnCall is divided into three domains – the concierge services wing, home care assistance, and virtual assistance.

The concierge service helps one with his or her day-to-day errands. People of this wing undertake tasks that require a visit to a store, office, and agency - wherever your presence is not mandatory. The home care assistance wing helps in getting things fixed or installed and provides the services of electricians, plumbers, carpenters, AC mechanics, pest control, etc. The virtual secretary or assistant is the person who works like a client's personal secretary, the only difference being that it will be available only virtually. It helps one with personal work like setting up an appointment, reminding about things, making presentations, working on complex spreadsheets, updating documents, researching, etc.

While virtual assistants are exposed to corporate cultures, they mostly belong to the fairer sex. Ask Akhilesh why and he credits it

to Jeannie from his favourite TV show in which actress Barbara Eden played the role. For concierge services, dynamic boys are preferred. "They know the best way to get the work done. They ride bikes and know each and every road of the city," says Akhilesh. For home care services, GenieOnCall partners with local service providers. "Our team ensures that the local service provider is well-trained and well-behaved and most importantly, gets things done on time perfectly," adds Akhilesh.



Senior staff members ensure the quality of the deliverables to customers who can get in touch with virtual assistants through web (www.genieoncall.com), mails, phone, WhatsApp and SMSes and can even follow the firm on its social media wings (www.facebook.com/

genieoncall). The firm also has a distribution team which distributes tasks to various team members according to their locations. Above them, supervisors ensure that everything is run smoothly. GenieOnCall welcomes even the differently-abled. "If someone is differently-abled but can deliver what it takes, we welcome them with wide arms. We motivate housewives too who cannot work during certain time periods by telling them not to let their skills rust," says Akhilesh.

The price range of the services starts from as little as Rs 200 per errand and can run into thousands depending upon the nature of work demanded. The company claims to deliver most of its tasks within 3-4 hours. GenieOnCall provides virtual assistance cutting across geographies but concierge services are provided only in Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR). While currently the company partners with corporates, it has got into the retail model of business, available for all from March 1. It is also about to launch a mobile app.

"After Delhi-NCR, we will spread our wings in phases. The second phase will be Mumbai, Bangalore,

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senior citizens as well. “My ultimate objective is to be part of each and every household. When that happens, thousands of doors would open,” beams Akhilesh. Even as the firm has been approached by many private equity investors, Akhilesh has faced problems because he says that he is not ‘tagged’. “The investors who came to us loved the concept of GenieOnCall. But the moment they came to know that I am not tagged (from IIT, IIM and ISB), they say sorry. I find it funny but maybe that’s their prerequisite for funding. We are looking for seed level funding as we are building things from scratch,” he says.

Hyderabad, Chennai, Pune, Vizag and Kolkata and in the third phase we will go to other big cities,” says Akhilesh. Not surprisingly, plans for the big leap are already set. “Our website, targeting the retail market, is already under development and we hope the same will be up and running sometime in February.

The company has allocated a certain budget for marketing this bouquet of services. “We are more than confident about achieving numbers which will make this business successful and most importantly sustainable,” he says. Akhilesh has come to realise that he needs support and has got a co-founder on board whose name will be revealed soon.

We’ll be ready with the app too. After all sorts of tests, we would launch it. Social media will play a major role, supported by e-mails, SMSes, FM radio stations and depending upon investors, we would also go on air with the help of TVCs,” he says, adding, “The main thing in such a business is that you must know what message you wish to convey to the audience, and if that is sorted, things fall into place.”

The company wants to stay stuck to its domain and further grow in the sphere of lifestyle only. Akhilesh wants to move ‘from regular concierge to a dedicated one in order to target the upper classes.’ The company also wants to further diversify its services to include laundry, car washing, nursing, medical assistance, luxury concierge, etc. and the founder wants to help

“The entire universe was once against my idea. Initially even my family never believed me. But today they are a great support. They do not expect anything from me as they know how important it is for me to focus on GenieOnCall,” Akhilesh says.

Ask him what he has to say for others like him and he says: “Entrepreneurship is not just about setting up a business - it is about selling your dreams to the people. Had people not criticised me enough, I wouldn’t have been able to achieve all this. Their criticism kept me on my toes. Success doesn’t come easily - if it did, everyone would be a billionaire.”

■ feedback@businessforall.in