

E-COMMERCE THE HIGHWAY TO GROWTH

Many entrepreneurs from the Northeast are now using online market places to sell their produce so that it reaches the nooks and crannies of the nation and beyond

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For my first visit to Dimapur, the commercial capital of Nagaland, over a decade ago, I took a train, the famous BG Express from Guwahati to Dimapur. Like many train journeys in India, this was no different. There were families trying to keep together in the crowd, food vendors running around selling all kinds of savouries and there were luggage porters running with stacks of luggage. But at the end of the platform there was a long queue of people standing with cargo. I had seen stations with cargo piled up, but I had never seen such a long queue of people with cargo. When I enquired, they said they were

waiting to book cargo, hoping for some last-minute space available on the train. Some of them said they came every day and took a chance, some had yet not managed to connect their parcels even after coming every day for a week and some just looked exasperated and frustrated with the whole process.

One gentleman in particular looked worried, he had to send a set of 10 toasters to his distributor in Dimapur urgently and it seemed an uphill task given the number of people waiting. In our conversation that ensued, he outlined that the markets and consumers in the Northeast states are the most under-served due to the challenge of logistics and connectivity. Therefore, the companies and distributors waited for orders to accumulate and delivered them days and weeks later. Hence, the customers never got their purchases on time. 'Then what about goods going from the Northeast to the rest of India', I asked. He smiled and said, 'Now the market for that is non-existent, who will buy our products – in which market can we go and sell?'

Enter E-Commerce

It's been over a decade now since I took that train journey and connectivity across Northeast

and to and from rest of India has certainly improved, in the coming years many logistics entrepreneurs from the region itself will give innovative solutions to logistics and cargo movement. But the paradigm shift in the way goods move within and to and from the region has been brought by a completely new player – the online market place, E-Commerce. The advent of E-Commerce portals has opened up a channel of trade that no one expected. Suddenly, people from the region can access products from across the country and courier companies deliver them to their door step. What seemed like an inaccessible proposition earlier is now within the reach of common man. Even more so is the opportunity of selling products from the Northeast to consumers from across the country and the world. Many entrepreneurs in the region are now using online market places to sell organic honey, *raja mircha*, handicrafts, shawls, carpets and even bamboo furniture. E-commerce has brought the market closer to both customers and suppliers from the region.

Advantage E-Commerce

Online market places like Amazon and Flipkart already sell



The rise of niche platforms like Giskaa is truly heartening, E-commerce has brought the market closer to both customers and suppliers from the region

many products from the Northeast but the rise of niche platforms like Giskaa is truly heartening, which sells organic produce from the region to the rest of the world. Then there are ventures such as Impulse from Meghalaya that sells hand woven products on their own website or apps such as NE Taxi that allow tourists to book their travel requirements online and real time. These are all ventures started and co-founded by entrepreneurs from the Northeast. And that is the biggest advantage of the e-commerce boom. It has empowered many young people to come back to their home states in the region and start ventures that connect farmers and artisans from the region with markets. These young entrepreneurs are educated and have worked in some of the largest companies before returning back home. They have not just bright ideas but skills and commitment to shape them into reality. They are helping to create

an ecosystem of jobs and micro ventures the Northeast states have never experienced before.

The New Frontier

The new ecosystem of livelihood that online marketplace as a channel has spurred is most certainly a new frontier for the people of the region. The fact that they have embraced this change wholeheartedly and are participating in its evolution is truly encouraging. First and foremost, it has created opportunity for thousands of micro producers, farmers, weavers and artisans of the region to have fair market access. Secondly, it has precipitated the logistics connectivity need to a degree where many entrepreneurs from the region are now converting that need into a service they can offer. Last but not the least, it has created home grown local employment opportunities for educated youths from the Northeast.

The E-Commerce transformation is not just limited to trade. Online gaming in India sees largest participation from the Northeast and State governments from the region are using online tools to attract more and more tourists to their states. In reality, this is the catalyst that has started transforming the very nature of consumption and markets in the region.

The BG Express still runs daily and highways are being built across the region for better connectivity. But the online market place and E-Commerce opportunities have accelerated the region on a highway to growth and have connected the Northeast states with the rest of India like never before. 🚀

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