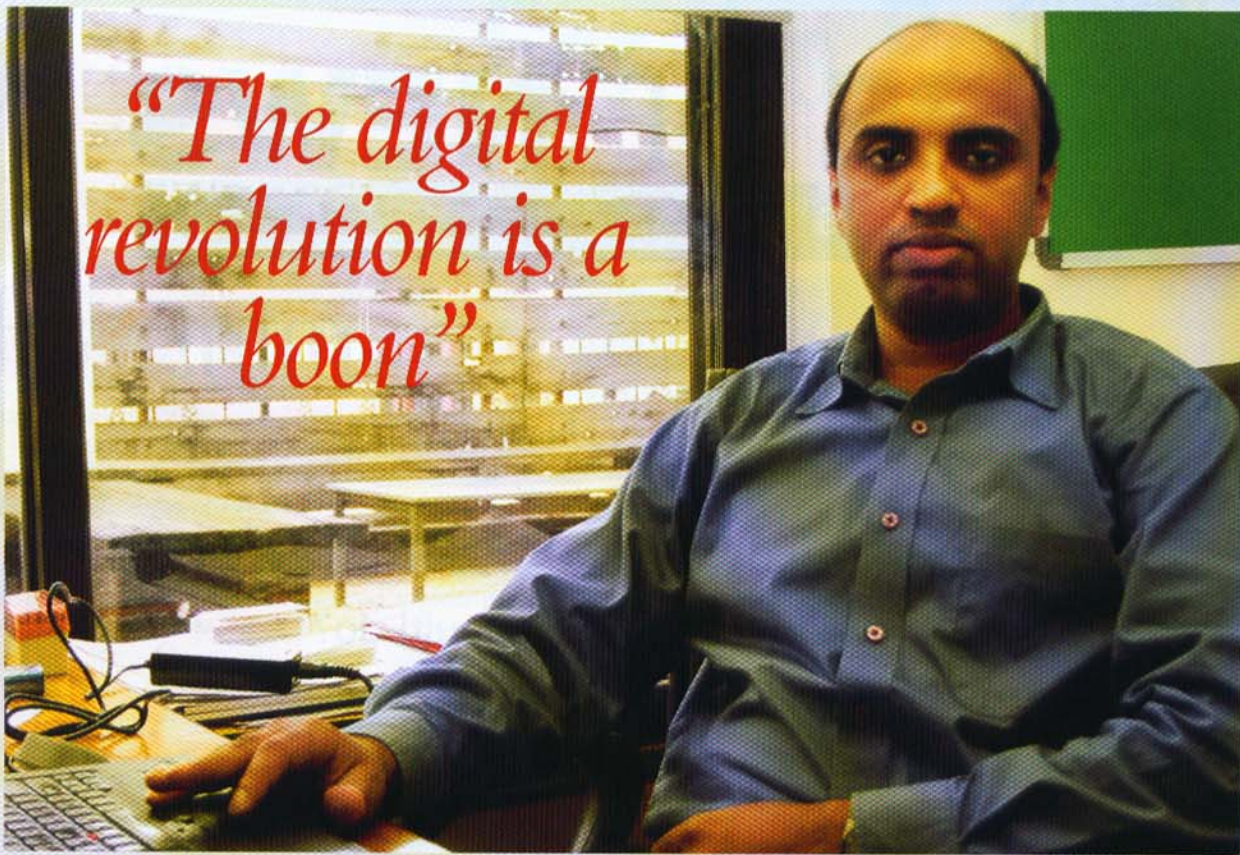


“The digital revolution is a boon”



FOTOCORP

By Sapna Nair

Prasana Krishnan has been a financial journalist (with The Economic Times) and an investment analyst (with Arthur Andersen). But in 2002, with Andersen closing down, he went back to Bennett, Coleman & Co to try his hand in a corporate role.

When he joined the Times Group in the Group Corporate Strategy function, he had the “right blend”. Krishnan went on to spend over three years there, quitting when he was general manager. “Times has an extremely strong brand image and is willing to innovate. Given that we were leveraging the Times brand name, any new launch had to be a market leader. It is an organisation that would back you to establish market leading products,” he states. So, Zoom was launched as the extension of Bombay Times on TV and Indiatimes, which started as the newspaper content on the web, was expanded into e-commerce and mobile and related areas. Krishnan was also involved with the planning of Times Now.

Moving on, Krishnan joined the Nimbus Group in 2006. Incidentally, it coincided with Nimbus bagging BCCI’s cricket telecast rights for a whopping \$612 million - the largest sports contract ever. “So it was an auspicious start,” he recalls. His mandate was to roll out associated business plans and scale it up.

Krishnan proudly points out that Nimbus, in the last four years, has grown 100 per cent year on year. “It has been a high-adrenaline phase,” he says. When he joined he was based in Singapore, “with one leg in India”. He handled business development and strategy and content acquisition. Krishnan explains that putting everything together involved identifying which sports rights are coming up, interacting with the rights holders, the federations, acquiring rights and working with the programming, marketing and sales and distribution teams to create a cohesive strategy.

Krishnan, who was instrumental in the launch of Neo Cricket, the first cricket-centric channel, explains why the cricket-only channel happened. “Cricket was being seen as a straight-forward transmission of a match and is ignored at other times. So, we launched related programming as we felt there was a market,” he says. That belief, was validated because, “many of our talk shows on cricket often do better than mainline sports such as tennis,” he adds.

The second launch was that of a non-cricket sports channel - Neo Sports. While the former was an India specific product being disseminated to other countries, the latter was global sports delivered to India. “With Neo Sports, we are not reaching hundred of millions of people. But the idea is to cater to both the niches and the masses,” he elucidates. Football, tennis, motor-sports and golf, in his view, are popular sports. The channel also saw opportunity in badminton. “Strangely, a sport that everyone of us has played at some time or the other did not enjoy TV coverage. It may not set ratings on fire or yield huge revenues initially but it’s a big opportunity,” Krishnan says.

In June this year, Krishnan was elevated to chief operating officer. When asked what has changed, he says, “Suddenly you are not supposed to do everything on your own - you have to get your team to do it.” Apart from programming, international alliances and finance, he also oversees studio operations. “Now I am responsible for the entire profit and loss account - earlier I was responsible for various elements of it,” he says.

He feels that the digital revolution in cable has been a boon. “If you’d asked me three years ago if a channel like Neo Sports would be viable, I would’ve expressed doubts because one was at the mercy of the analog cable operator who does not think beyond cricket. With digital, we are in a position to cater to niche audiences.” ■

sapna.nair@afaqs.com

“Nimbus has been a high-adrenaline phase in my life.”