

Chemistry of success

NCL's Venture Centre gave him the push he was looking for desperately with R&D. His is not the only success story. Three other start-ups have reaped the benefits too

By Devidas Deshpande

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The Lab block provided by NCL to entrepreneurs. Samir Gijre (inset)

The National Chemical Laboratory (NCL) is not just a bunch of scientists steeped in research. It is also helping many dreams come true.

When Samir Gijre, a chemical engineer with a passion for the processing industry, wanted to set up his own company, he approached Venture Centre set up by NCL.

What Gijre got in response was a grant from the Ministry for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, a hot desk service, an address service and a technical networking facility.

He said, "For a young and new entrepreneur like me, it is extremely helpful to work with NCL. We get all the benefits of R&D as well as networking facilities.

Since most resources for a new venture are spent on this field, it not only becomes viable, but also gives an added advantage to the entrepreneur."

Because of this, Gijre's company Samir Gijre & Associates is operating from the NCL campus itself. "With Pune Cluster envisaged by NCL becoming a reality, it is not impossible for talent from other places to come here," he said.

Gijre said, "My company has made available hi-tech solutions to Indian companies at 1/20th cost of generic solutions available from multinationals.

We started as a one-man company, working from my dining table, without any funding, and got the initial orders sitting there!

But after one year, I realised that beyond a point, you need an office and a decent address, irrespective of who you are. At that time, a chance websearch landed me at Venture Centre's website.

I liked what I found and gave a call. Venture Centre verified our credentials and innovative work done until then, and in the next 10 days, I was a resident at Venture Centre! I have got much more than an office and an address!"

Gijre added, "Venture Centre is particular about who they do business with. I believe that this atmosphere is more important for technology [chemical, material and bio-tech based innovators to flourish and grow.

I have benefited a lot from the informal interactions, technology discussions and many seminars and events organised by NCL/Venture Centre.

Venture Centre's physical facilities, in my opinion, are comparable to the market prices. Its advisory services are very competitively priced."

About Venture Centre

The Venture Centre was formally set up on September 18, 2006. It is a technology business

incubator specialising in technology start-ups offering products and services which use scientific expertise in the areas of materials, chemicals and biological sciences and engineering.

It is a trademark of the Entrepreneurship Development Centre, a not-for-profit company set up by NCL and funded by Department of Science and Technology, Government of India.

It's an incubator

The Venture Centre has assumed the role of an entrepreneurship incubator. After providing technical and networking support, the Centre has put forth a proposal to raise funds for supporting start-ups and is awaiting the nod of the Technology Development Board. In addition to helping local aspirants, it will be bound to attract talent from other places to the city.

How the Centre works

Explaining how it functions, Kaushik Gala, business development manager of Venture Centre, said, "The focus areas of the Centre are material science, chemical synthesis, biomedical sciences and technology, chemical and process engineering, research, technology and knowledge management.

We tend to work with companies developing products/services that have a strong technology and knowledge component.

Depending on the service provided, the time frame can vary from a few weeks to two-three years. Physical incubatees tend to stay longer, but we assist many entrepreneurs via an advisory, which is typically a two-three month engagement.

Venture Centre helps technology entrepreneurs identify appropriate sources of funding. Usually, government funding ranges from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 50 lakh, and in rare cases, up to Rs 5 crore.

Professional investors such as venture capitalists usually put in larger sums of money. As of now, Venture Centre does not have its own investment fund."

Gala added, "The Centre's proposal to launch a mini-sized fund is pending with the Technology Development Board. If this proposal is approved, it will enable the Centre to compliment other sources of funding."

Overseas Interest

The Centre has received queries from overseas also. "We have had many foreign agencies contacting us to explore opportunities to work together [from UK, Belgium and Finland, for instance.

These opportunities range from helping Indian entrepreneurs enter European market to helping Indian scientists avail scientific support services in the bio-medical industry," said Gala.

The beneficiaries

Biopore Surgicals: A Mumbai-based start-up company founded on NCL technology in 2005. The products of the company have successfully passed critical trials and are currently being sold in India. Further products for maxillo-facial surgery are under development.

Membrane Filters Pvt Ltd: A Pune-based start-up company founded on NCL technology on ultra-filtration membranes that prevent viruses and bacteria from passing through.

Tridiagonal Solutions: A Pune-based start-up founded by recent NCL & IIT alumni. It specialises in engineering services and products and offers services and solutions in the area of computational modelling of flow and chemical processes, flow diagnostics, etc.

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