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Raju Vegesna's goal as MD and CEO of Sify Technologies Limited, a leading internet, network and e-commerce services company, is to turn this \$200 million company into a billion-dollar company in five years' time by growing its data centre and connectivity business and adding business analytics to its portfolio.

Currently, Sify is India centric, he feels. He wants to take its products and services beyond India and turn it into a global company. He wants to make it a leading corporate player in the twenty-first century high technology world.

Sify has focused so far on making IT products. Vegesna wants it to move up the value chain and work on value creation by devising solutions for its customers rather than merely IT infrastructure. He sees the company becoming a value creator, solving business problems and adding real-time business analytics offerings.

He agrees that analytics is already a very competitive space. "But in any country, the small and medium business market is huge. If there is no competition in the space you are operating in, you are doing something wrong. I want ten people to say the same things I am saying. But, of course, at the end of the day, who executes best will win," he notes.

Sify is one of the biggest network operators when it comes to data centres. It was the first ISP, the first multi-protocol label switching network, and it is present in 625 cities.

The company has five of its own Tier III data centres, six Tier II centres and in 2009, it won five state data centres. “The focus now is on growth and making Sify a global player. We already have offices in the US, the UK and Dubai. Soon we will have a Singapore office,” says Vegesna.

A well-known Silicon Valley entrepreneur, Vegesna’s investment company, Infinity Capital Ventures, LP, invested roughly \$100 million to acquire about 40 per cent of Sify’s shares in 2005.

Initially named chairman of the board, Vegesna was appointed MD and CEO in July 2006. Having lived in the US since he was a student, he grabbed the chance to be back in India to renew and reinvigorate his ties with his home country.

He grew up in coastal Andhra Pradesh where his grandfather was both a powerful personality in the village where they lived and a pivotal figure in Vegesna’s life.

“My grandfather was a great influence on me. He was a farmer who knew hunger but worked hard and did so much for his family and the village,” he says. “He enjoyed the respect of the entire village. He was an intellectual. I used to watch the way he talked to people and how he got things done. He won the best farmer award in the district sometime in the 1970s. It was he who taught me that to succeed, you have to put your heart into things.”

Vegesna says that the environment people operate in is very important in moulding their outlook. The environment of his childhood was supportive and dominated by his grandfather. Then, when he went to the US to pursue further studies after graduating in engineering from Bangalore University, he was catapulted into an environment that was all about excelling.

While earning his master’s degree in computer engineering at Wayne State University, Vegesna took a course on the Motorola 68000. Inspired, he decided to create a software simulation of the 68000 for his thesis and called a senior Motorola engineering manager for help.

After showing his work to the Motorola manager, he was delighted to receive an offer from the

company management, which was impressed with his talent. He accepted and went on to write the microcode for the 68030 and the specifications for the 68040.

Vegesna's mentor at Motorola, Roger Ross, who was known for his ability to spot talent, invited him to be chief architect for Ross Technology, Inc., a start-up that developed 32-bit Sparc processors.

At Ross Technology, Vegesna was integral to the development of the first-generation HyperSparc, which Sun Microsystems, Inc. chose as the CPU heart of its first multiprocessing computer.

Around this period, Vegesna realised it was time for him to take the next step, to create not just technology, but a technology business. He left Ross Technology in 1994 to found a leading-edge technology company, ServerWorks, the first step on his path to Sify.

During his time in Silicon Valley, Vegesna thrived in the hothouse of ideas and talent. He became one of the Valley's most innovative engineers, leveraging his technical and market expertise to found not just ServerWorks but also ServerEngines LLC.

ServerWorks began as a four-person company in 1994. Under his leadership, it quickly grew to a highly profitable powerhouse, dominating the market for Intel-based PC server chipsets.

In 2001, seven years after its formation, ServerWorks was acquired by Broadcom Corporation for approximately \$1.8 billion. After selling ServerWorks and working for Broadcom for a brief time, Vegesna founded ServerEngines LLC, of which he is still chairman and CEO. ServerEngines is a rapidly growing Silicon Valley-based company engaged in the development of innovative enterprise computing products with offices in Texas and Hyderabad.

As someone who has built three successful start-ups, he says that he realised very early on in his career that one person cannot do everything – you need to build a good team. “People are the most important asset of any organisation and the best way to motivate them into doing good work is to communicate transparently with them.”

“I always tell my kids that people are not computers, you need a different approach for each human being. You can’t duplicate things. Since we all have faults and good points, you can either look at people and focus on their negative qualities as the starting point or you can focus on the positive, and that is what I always do, start with the positives,” he says.

Having seen lots of managers and lots of different management styles, Vegesna says that in the end, it all boils down to building the people in an organisation, besides leadership and vision.

He is very happy with his team at Sify. “They are excellent and I make it a point to continuously challenge them and keep training them. In a wider sense, I can see how people’s thinking processes in India are maturing and I can see that in my team too,” he says.

“I want them to think not in terms of making a great product in the abstract but to think of how they can make a product that benefits people, that improves their lives and to see by how much it improves their lives. I want them to think of solving people’s problems and providing solutions.”

On the growth drivers for Sify, Vegesna says that in the enterprise business, which accounts for 80 per cent of Sify’s revenues, the company has network solutions, data centres, system integration, and voice and enterprise applications, all of which are growing.

“The second business segment is consumers, with cyber cafés and so on, which gives 8 per cent. We are changing the model. Our cyber cafés started as browsing centres; they will become transaction centres for e-commerce. We have 2,000 cafés and are targeting 5,000 in the next year,” he says.

“The remaining 12 per cent is managed services offerings, what we call our international business. We are into consulting, network building and monitoring, both locally and remotely. This is the global side of Sify, which will also grow.”

Asked to pinpoint the highlights of his career, Vegesna laughs and says that “every day of my life is a high point”. Pushed a bit more, he does not come up with this particular job or that particular assignment but says simply that his eight-year-old twins and wife Bala are “the best things that have ever happened to me”.

In addition to his business activities, Vegesna is an active philanthropist, individually and through his US charitable foundation, the Raju Vegesna Foundation, and through its sister Indian charitable trust, the Raju Vegesna Foundation (India).

In India, the foundation supports water projects, education (through scholarships) and health. He has put quite a lot of his personal wealth into the foundations because he believes strongly in helping people at the grassroots.

Apart from being with his family, his other great love is music, both jazz and Indian of all kinds. Future goals? “To make someone’s life different and happy,” he says.

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