

# Around the World in Less Than a Million Dollars – Featuring EMERGE 50 – iXiGO.com

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*Influenced by companies like Kayak in the US and Skyscanner and Travel Supermarket from Europe, Alope Bajpai, Founder-CEO, iXiGO.com, and his fellow founders Rajnish Kumar (CTO) and Dharmendra Yashovardhan (COO) found the meta search business model more enticing than anything a mere travel portal could offer. And from this was founded iXiGO.com, a website that trawls different travel websites to offer the user an aggregated information of almost all the options available out there.*

## **Growth Path**

iXiGO.com was founded in 2006 and launched in 2007. Around that time, the online travel space was abuzz with excitement. Travel Guru and Cleartrip had just been funded and Make My Trip was getting more bullish on spending marketing dollars in a big way. The founders of iXiGO.com decided that the time was ripe to launch themselves in the fray. But they wanted to do something different.

“We realized that with increased fragmentation, it made a lot of sense to work on the meta-search business model,” explains Alope Bajpai, Founder-CEO of iXiGO.com. “We wanted to be an ‘infomediary’, a neutral marketplace for information, not an intermediary.” adds Dharmendra Yashovardhan, Co-Founder and COO. And this is precisely what the team set out to launch. iXiGO.com aggregates information from multiple travel websites and booking sites and displays that info to the customer. It is not transaction-oriented – if a customer wants to make a booking, he / she is taken directly to the booking site.

The airline search engine was the first product to be launched in June 2007. Prior to its launch, iXiGO was showcased at Proto.in, the premier startup showcase event. The company bootstrapped till 2008 when it had its first round of funding. By the end of the year, the team had moved to a new office, grown from six to 15 people and launched the hotels and buses products. In 2009 and 2010, buses, trains and deal search engines were launched, thereby rounding off a complete product portfolio.

iXiGO.com has grown completely through word-of-mouth, and has even been featured in the 2008 Red Herring Global Top 100 Finalists. Currently, the website gets around 1.5 million searches and 8,00,000 visits a month purely through word of mouth today. It powers around 1000 transactions a day and enables roughly Rs. 20 crore of online travel transactions every month.

## **Winning Post**

iXiGO.com was one of the EMERGE 50 – League of Ten in the Start-Ups category. “I think we made it to this list because of what we have achieved with less than a million dollars of funding, ,” remarks Bajpai. “This speaks volumes about our team’s ability for marketing and capital-efficient execution” echoes Rajnish. The company has also been a role-model for various other start-ups whom it mentors through forums..

The Success Ladder

- “The success of internet companies is product-driven,” opines Rajnish. “This means that we need to have the ability to attract and retain good, creative talent that is motivated to churn out interesting and easy to use products.” And this is what iXiGO.com has been successful at, with a friendly work culture that encourages creativity.
- iXiGO.com has always adhered to the principle that products should be built from a customer-centric perspective, not a technology perspective. To the team, this means launching interesting products, optimizing the speed of searches, and making sure content is relevant. In fact, they even share their products with power users before launch, and then incorporate feedback received into the design of the products.
- iXiGO.com signed partnerships with large media companies and airports including NDTV, Hindustan Times, New Delhi Airport, Hyderabad Airport etc. to power their travel searches. It has also collaborated effectively with several other startups such as Naaptol, Pricesbolo, TravelYaari etc.
- iXiGO.com’s business model is capital-efficient and self-sustaining.

### **The X Factor**

“We are here to stay,” declares an emphatic Yashovardhan. “We are not in this to gain from one transaction, but to build trust with our customers and to build long-term relationships.” The website has a very high repeat user rate, which seems to be proof of the fact that the company is fulfilling its objective.

### **Obstacle Course: The Challenge**

- Scaling in a competitive environment without spending too many marketing dollars on brand-building
- Building a global brand and taking it from India, iXiGO.com’s proof-of-concept market, to many more geographies around the world

### **Voice of Experience:**

Bajpai has some valuable advice for aspiring start-ups:

“Build a good strong management team that helps to attract and retain good talent. Stay lean and capital-efficient. Don’t overspend cash and raise only as much money as is necessary. Innovate – think about what consumers’ requirements will be two or five years down the line, and work on that today. Don’t be content with status quo and you are on your way!”

*Contributed by Kritika Srinivasan, Prayag Consulting for the NASSCOM EMERGE newsletter.*

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