

After CUHK MBA, Celebrated Poet Aims To Revolutionize Indian Handicrafts Market

Indian Innovator is passionate about poetry, brave in business

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31 Dec 2015 MBA Entrepreneurs (/news/mba-entrepreneurs)

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CUHK MBA Arnab Neogi had his first poetry published aged 12

Arnab Neogi, a celebrated poet who was published aged 12, made his first foray into entrepreneurship early in his career, setting up a trade agency for the Indian handicrafts market.

The business couldn't take off and he moved on to work as a systems engineer at Tata Consultancy Services.

However, the intrepid Indian innovator is determined to attempt to break into the handicrafts market again. This time, with the knowledge of an MBA in tow, from Hong Kong's **CUHK Business School** (<http://www.businessbecause.com/chinese-university-of-hong-kong>).

In the long term, Arnab plans to find a solution to the business issues of India's handicrafts and handlooms sector with his own company. He hopes to fast track his career immediately in the consumer goods industry.

Previously, the computer science graduate worked as a regional sales manager for Spain's billion-dollar olive oil distributor Borges International Group. He also interned at healthcare start-up iKure, which uses cloud-based technology to deliver medical advice to patients in remote, rural areas of India.

Outside the world of business, Arnab is a celebrated and internationally published poet, who recently co-authored "Synthesis" — the world's first ever duet poetry anthology — alongside his wife.

What are your career plans?

After my MBA, I want to work for a global consumer goods company in a strategic marketing role.

In the long term, I plan to find a solution to the business issues of India's handicrafts and handlooms sector through my own enterprise.

What challenges does India's handicrafts sector face?

The market is disorganized and monopolized by the government.

Rural artisans, having inherited their knowledge across generations, produce fine handicraft art, and the items are mostly sold to middlemen who sell it on at a margin to a few government agencies.

The government's distribution network is not wide-ranging and mostly involves direct selling. So there's low awareness of the market among the urban masses, and handicraft products are confined to the homes of [the] urban elite.

How did you attempt to combat these issues with your first business venture?

After my undergraduate degree my classmate and I started a trade agency, which tried to bridge this gap by reaching out to "consumers who had taste".

The objective was to source handicraft items from rural areas in Eastern India and sell them at government-licensed trade fairs in upscale urban markets.

Unfortunately, it was difficult to navigate across government policies and the agency couldn't scale.

What advice do you have for MBAs looking to work in consumer goods?

It's a very fast-paced sector which requires certain, specialized skills. Having good product knowledge, knowing your consumer and understanding the supply chain are key.

How do you explain your passion for poetry?

It took shape very early in my life, following a tragic incident in my childhood.

I was inspired by the works of Keats, Byron, Shelley and Elliot, although I always considered Auden my guiding light. I took solace in the imaginative and soothing world of poetry and my first work was published in a leading Indian daily at the young age of 12.

Can you see any link between your passion for poetry and your passion for business?

There exists a close similarity and synergy between poetry and sales and marketing.

Someone who is creative and imaginative, but can plan their objectives in a structured way, can be both a poet and a marketer at the same time.

For me, poetry is an imagination of the ideal self, and poems are the tools through which we can bring ourselves closer to that ideal. Marketers regularly use this concept to create an artificial need for aspirational products.

Like poetry, marketing is an art and sales is the tool that manifests this art to its intended consumer.

Why did you decide to pursue an MBA?

I wanted to make the next big shift in my career; to gain an insight into global sales and marketing practices; to study in a multicultural classroom; and to get a global perspectives of business.

Why did you choose to study at CUHK in particular?

Hong Kong is a financial hub, a gateway to China and an ideal educational playground.

CUHK is one of the top schools in the world. It's the oldest MBA program in Asia and its alumni base is large and diverse.

It's a global school which not only offers world-class education relating to Eastern business practices, but — through its various field trips and student exchange programs to the US and UK — also provides ample opportunities for insight into western-style education.

How have you profited from your MBA experience so far?

It's been simply awesome!

My classroom is a potpourri of cultures and diversity; the faculty is inspiring; and the practice-oriented curriculum has given me deep insight into global business practices.

What really stands out is the quality of team projects required with every course. The effort team members put in during each stage of the project is commendable.



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