

Chandigarh candle seller makes it big in Oz

Gulveen Aulakh
CHANDIGARH

At 15, he used to sell candles on the roadsides of Chandigarh. At 39, Naresh Gulati owns Oceanic Consultants Australia (OCA), a business group based out of Melbourne valued at more than AS 100 million.

In 2010, the group has marked its presence yet again with Oceanic Consultants winning the Australian Business Award for best enterprise in personal services industry. The group's other companies ObjectNext Software (which would start making profit this year after investments of AS 5 million) has won the award for best new product while the group's third company BPO Intelligence Pvt Ltd has won the award in two categories - product value and product excellence.

Selected out of 1,849 entries from 962 organizations, the group is the Australian Business Award winner third time in a

row. In fact, it has repeated its 2008 performance where the companies were honoured for the first time.

These achievements have not come easily for Mr Gulati who started his first business with a seed capital of Rs 5,000 from family and relatives.

"I did a computer course from RCC and then joined as a senior lecturer at Aptech Computers. I decided to go to RMIT in 1996 but there were so many problems I faced while getting there. I also realised that I would not be the only person going through these things," says Mr Gulati who then decided to set up Oceanic Consultants in 1996, an overseas education consultancy that would help students in their way forward.

As more and more Australian universities opened up to Oceanic's idea of third party consultancy, the company grew by leaps and bounds taking its business model to New Zealand and the UK.

The company has since helped more than 10,000 students to choose Australia among other countries as their overseas education destinations.

Today, Oceanic Consultants has 20 offices across India apart from network offices in other countries where it provides consultancy services. It is one of the few eVisa direct agents for Australia in India and supports the stringent immigration policies adopted by countries like US and Australia even when impact on business is substantial. "Every country has a different policy to attract quality talent and labour. Some offer permanent residency to attract people but a deluge of applications for PR can cause problems for the quality talent that genuinely wants to go overseas to study. When countries review their immigration policies it helps us to strengthen our credibility as we would like to promote the quality talent going overseas," Mr Gulati recently told ET.

In 2005, the company decided to

extend its reach into prospectus printing, postage and tracking for overseas-based candidates by starting BPO Intelligence with an investment of AUS \$ 1,000. This outsourcing facility has helped universities save 25-65% of their profits and enabled the company to have a large client base not only in UK, Australia and New Zealand but also US and Canada.

By 2008, the Fairfax Media Group's Business Review Weekly had ranked BPO Intelligence as the 32nd fastest growing company in Australia. Today, it contributes to around 30-40% of the group's total revenue of AUS \$ 20 million.

With the awards of 2010 under its belt, the OCA Group is now focusing on the US and Canadian markets and planning to tie-up with American universities. "The eventual goal is to make Oceanic a global player enabling consultancy and admission from one country to another," says Mr Gulati.