

Finance by Chance, Entrepreneur by Choice

As executive director and CFO of Quattro, Raj Dutta ensured that the four-year-old service provider received a fresh \$13 million VC funding this year. A keen student of global affairs, he is now hoping Western economies finally bounce back from the downturn, opening up new areas of growth for Quattro

by DHIMAN CHATTOPADHYAY

RAJ DUTTA wanted to study political science and become a psephologist. Or don the gown as a civil rights lawyer. Clichéd as it may sound, fate, however, had other plans for this Bollywood buff from Guwahati.

Today as a successful financial professional who has been CFO of several firms before becoming an entrepreneur, Dutta looks back at his over two-decade-long career with some degree of satisfaction. Setting up systems and processes, leading the strategy team to discuss new growth opportunities and other areas of finance are his bread and butter after all. But Dutta says he came into the world of finance quite by accident.

"I went to Don Bosco School and then to A V College, both in Guwahati. In college I did Economics and Political Science and then came to Delhi to study law at Delhi University's Law Faculty," recalls Dutta.

That is where he met an old school buddy, who was studying to be a chartered accountant. The friend introduced him to the books he was

■ SUBHOJIT PAUL

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5 MILESTONES

FIRST JOB
→ With Vam Organics, just after I became a Chartered Accountant

BIG BREAK
→ When I became CFO of the Network-Picker Joint Venture. This job gave me a chance to look at different areas of a business.

A HA! MOMENT
→ When Wipro acquired our first 'baby' - Spectramind. It showed us that in less than two years we had created a brand that even the giants were attracted to.

LITTLE KNOWN FACT:
→ I had come to Delhi from Guwahati in the early '80s, to become a lawyer or a political scientist

DREAM
→ To go back to college and study psephology



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studying and after a quick read, Dutta figured he was game for giving it a crack as well. "It was as simple as that. Some of my friends and relatives did try and talk me out of it, warning me that few passed the tough CA test, but the more I studied for the tests the more I liked the subjects. Guess what? In three-and-half-years, I had become a CA," he laughs.

Life thereafter has moved at a fast clip for Dutta. He did his articleship at V Shankar Aiyer and Co and then joined Vam Organics, a Delhi based firm. Initially thoughts of going back to his home town and working there did cross his mind. But here again, fate intervened. "Firstly, I realised there did not exist too many opportunities in Guwahati. More importantly, it was at this time that I met the woman in my life. She was based out of Delhi and had a successful career. There was no question of going anywhere else after that," smiles Dutta.

His career took a turn for the better in 1992 when, Dutta, still just 30, joined Network and became CFO of Network's joint venture with the Picker Group, a British pharma company. During this stint, he also tried his hand at sales, taking charge of sales for the eastern zone operations for a few months. The big break for him though came in 1995 when he joined GE Capital as VP Operations and then, in 1997, became CFO of GE Capital International Services, soon to be re-christened 'Genpact'. Two years later, he was instrumental in setting up Genpact's Hyderabad office.

"The first decade of my career really gave me a chance to work in diverse areas, learn about various aspects of the finance function, and about other areas of a business. In GE I managed the entire back operations and in Picker, I handled sales as well. So as the new millennium approached, I sensed I was ready for a fresh look at life," he says.

That new beginning happened in April 2000, when Dutta, along with Ramen Roy, acknowledged as the father of the Indian BPO industry, quit Genpact and started Spectramind.

"Spectramind was a big success and established our credentials as entrepreneurs. By 2002 it had become one of India's largest BPOs, and successful enough to come under the radar of Wipro. Funny as it sounds, my 'A Ha' moment came, not when we launched Spectramind but



FAVOURITE PICKS

NEWSPAPER
Economic Times

MAGAZINE
Time, India Today

MUSIC
Bollywood, film music

MOVIE
"Peeli live"

BOOK
Who moved my blackberry

DESTINATION
Mediterranean islands



BELIEF
Travel, work, see and learn from around the world, but be faithful to your roots.



↑ EAGLE EYE: AS AN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT QUATRO, DUTTA LOOKS AT OTHER VERTICALS AS WELL, APART FROM THE FINANCE FUNCTION.

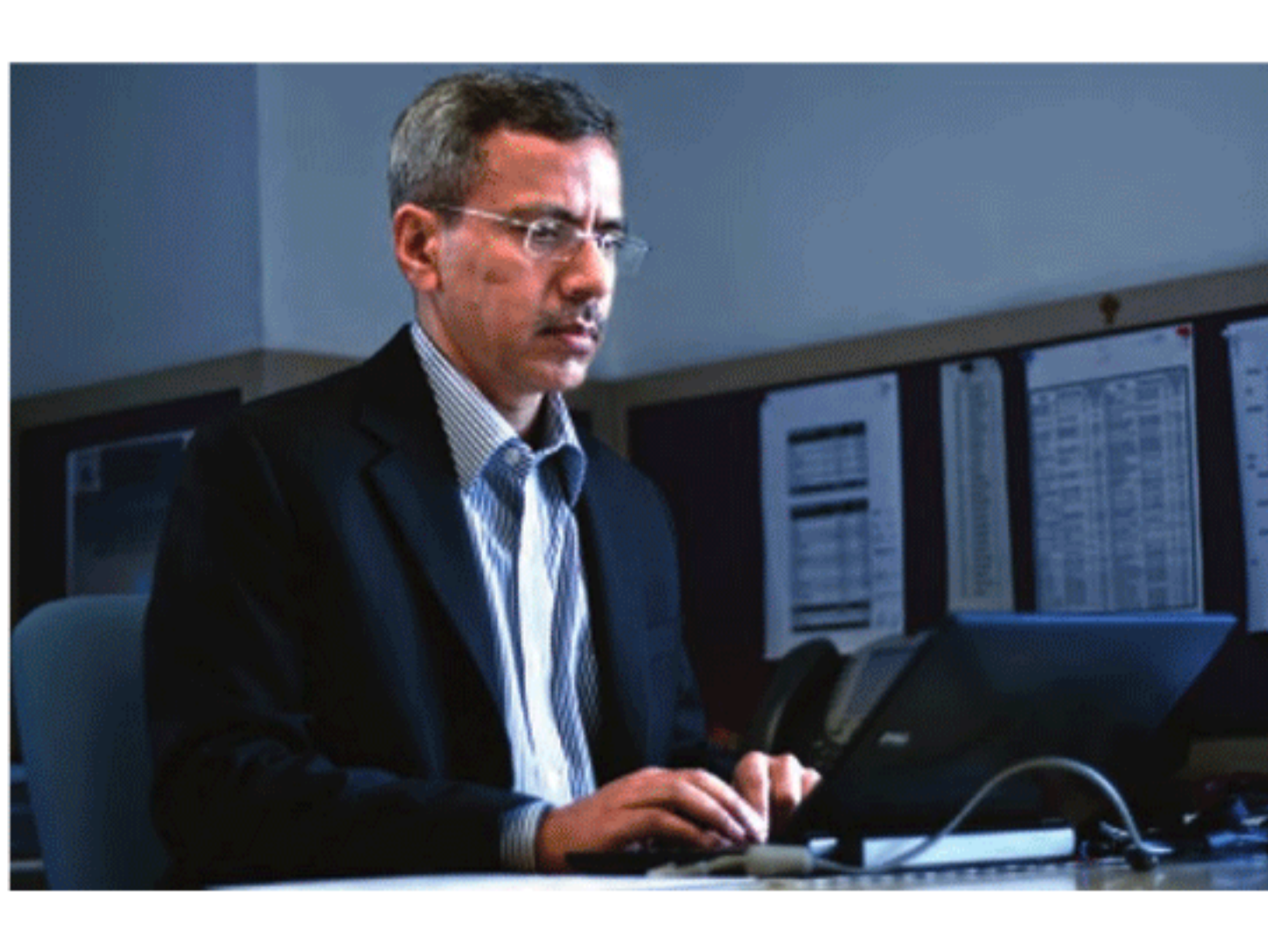
when Wipro acquired it! It proved we had built a company worth buying. The offer that Wipro made us was amazing," says Dutta.

In 2002-03 Wipro-Spectramind was born and by the time Roy and Dutta finally exited in 2005, it had become one of the most profitable BPOs in India. "The acquisition still remains the high point of my career," admits Dutta. But there was

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"What we have done is re-look at the way we work and spend. With new cost rationalising measures in place, we are setting ourselves up for a highly profitable year ahead."



no time to relax now. The entrepreneurial bug had well and truly bitten Dutta. Around the end of 2005 the duo, backed by a few other Spectramind colleagues, launched another start-up - Quattro.

"Quattro has been a growth story all the way. Here I have an expanded role, not only the CFO. I am a member of the board and I look at several areas of the company," says Dutta who is now executive director and CFO.

Doesn't he find an overarching role too taxing? "Well, behind my back, I am called 'Aloo' by some colleagues, because like the humble potato that goes into every dish, Raj Dutta has his finger in every pie. But honestly, I do not mind the nickname since I revel

in knowing about different parts of the business," says Dutta.

The last two years though, have not given him too many reasons to smile. The downturn affected the US market badly and like other service providers, Quattro felt the heat too. But now, 24 months after Black September, things are back on track.

"What we have done is re-look at the way we work and spend. With new cost rationalising measures in place, we are setting ourselves up for a highly profitable year ahead. Honestly in 2011, every dollar we earn will be a profit for us," says Dutta, with some confidence. He also hopes Quattro will establish itself as the 'most-preferred' brand in the high-end service and solutions provider

business. "Quite simply, the aim is to become the best," says Dutta.

Away from his director's cabin though, Dutta is a man of simple pleasures in life. He loves watching Hindi films and will happily forego heavy metal and jazz for a Kishore Kumar or a Shreya Ghoshal rendition. At other times, he remains a voracious consumer of current affairs, reading books and periodicals that talk about world politics and political economy.

What's next on the agenda? "There is no point getting too far ahead. As of now it is Quattro's growth that excites me. But yes, one day I want to go back to college and study psephology," he signs off. ☞

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