

MBA · ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Where Is My Train

How one frustrating delay became India's No. 1 travel app

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The spark — a delay at the station

- ◆ 2015: the founder, rushing to a railway station, had booked an Uber to pick someone up.
- ◆ The train was already 30 minutes late — and slipping further.
- ◆ There was no reliable way to know where the train actually was.
- ◆ Great companies often begin not with a grand vision, but with a real annoyance the founder refuses to ignore.



The problem — a nation of trains, no live data

- ◆ ~23 million passengers ride Indian Railways every day.
- ◆ At the time, Indian Railways offered no public real-time tracking API.
- ◆ Delays were common; rural connectivity was poor.
- ◆ Huge need, locked-away data — the real question is: can I reach the resource needed to solve it?



The people — the founder and the team

- ◆ Ahmed Nizam Mohaideen — software engineer and co-founder.
- ◆ Built at Sigmoid Labs, a Bengaluru startup (co-founded by former TiVo engineers, 2016).
- ◆ World-class engineering aimed squarely at a very local, very Indian problem.



The struggle — more than 20 prototypes

- ◆ He started building almost immediately once he had the idea.
- ◆ Over several months he built 20+ prototypes — none worked consistently.
- ◆ Most people quit after five.
- ◆ The breakthrough usually sits on the other side of a long, unglamorous stretch of things that don't work yet.



The breakthrough — tracking without GPS or internet

- ◆ Stopped relying only on GPS and internet data.
- ◆ Used cell-tower triangulation to estimate the train's location.
- ◆ The phone's signal between towers became the sensor.
- ◆ The constraint forced a smarter, simpler design — frugal, constraint-driven innovation.



The edge — why offline changed everything

- ◆ Because it leaned on cell towers, it worked in low-network and fully offline conditions.
- ◆ Perfect for rural, remote routes where the signal is weakest and ordinary apps fail.
- ◆ Eventually supported 8 regional languages (Hindi, Bengali, Malayalam...).
- ◆ Clever in a way that fit real Indian travel.



Traction — India's No. 1 travel app

- ◆ Launched around 2015–2016; the response was rapid.
- ◆ Became India's No. 1 travel and location app.
- ◆ Crossed 10 million downloads on the Play Store.
- ◆ Praised again and again for simplicity, accuracy and offline use.



The exit — Google comes knocking

- ◆ December 2018: Google acquired the company.
- ◆ It was Google's first product acquisition in India.
- ◆ Widely reported at around ₹300 crore (price not officially disclosed).
- ◆ The app was folded into Google's ecosystem.



Strategy — why Google wanted it

- ◆ Reach India's huge, fast-growing mobile user base.
- ◆ Strong fit with Google's 'Next Billion Users' strategy.
- ◆ Offline-first design suited low-connectivity markets.
- ◆ Buying three things at once: market reach, proven local talent, and a product that already worked.



Takeaways — lessons for entrepreneurs

- ◆ Start from real, lived pain — not a clever-sounding idea.
- ◆ Treat constraints as raw material for your best innovation.
- ◆ Persist through many failed prototypes.
- ◆ Solve for your local context — offline, language, network.



For discussion

- ◆ Why is solving a personal, everyday frustration often a stronger start than chasing a trend?
- ◆ How did the absence of an official data source actually improve the product?
- ◆ Would you persist after 20+ failed prototypes — how do founders know persist vs pivot?
- ◆ How important is local context (offline, languages) versus a globally uniform product?
- ◆ Was selling to Google the right move, or could it have grown independent? Argue both sides.



THANK YOU

From a delayed train in 2015 to Google's first product acquisition in India by 2018, Where Is My Train shows that a real lived frustration, frugal constraint-driven engineering, and stubborn persistence can build a product millions love. Solve a painful everyday problem better than anyone — for your own context — and distribution takes care of itself.

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