Founder's Corner

Sanjay Srivastava co-founded Denali, which Cadence acquired when he was chief executive officer. Sanjay was also chairman of the board of NVELO, which Samsung acquired in 2012. After Denali, he founded Vocareum because he wanted to focus on leveraging cloud computing to build labs for education. His involvement in education also includes investment in Lifelaunchr.com, a board position at the nonprofits Foundation for Excellence and Pratham, and participating in various initiatives at his alma mater, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

What was the best business advice you received while launching your EdTech startup?

Education technology (EdTech) is a marathon and not a sprint. The higher the impact you aspire to, the more patience the market will demand of you.

What did you do early on that you would do differently today?

In the beginning, Vocareum focused on creating labs for computer science-related courses. However, I realized later on that the broader segment of digital skilling needed lab solutions, and we ended up expanding our product line and go-to-market strategy. With perfect hindsight, we would address the broader virtual lab market from day one, instead of solely focusing on computer science.

What inspired you to start your EdTech startup?

When I first founded Vocareum, I wanted to focus on education. My goal was to create a low-cost solution that could help students all over the world learn remotely. EdTech provides an opportunity to not only improve learning outcomes but also economic mobility outcomes for learners as well. Vocareum is now a cloud lab platform built specifically for learning, researching, and assessment for a broad range of courses that require computation. The mission is to close the global digital skills gap through cloud-based learning labs and performance-based assessments.

With the start of massive open online courses (MOOCs), it became clear that someone in a remote country can get access to instruction from a top-notch university. They don't have to be at the institution in person to receive the education they are looking for. But to convert that access to a life-altering career opportunity, the education infrastructure needed labs and credentials at scale and a low cost. This was an opportunity that I did not want to pass up.

What was the biggest challenge you encountered and how did you mitigate the risks?

In the early days, we were hit with a large scale distributed denial of service (DDOS) attack. We realized that we didn't need to handle all of these challenges alone. There were a lot of services available from Amazon Web Services (AWS) and others on a pay-as-you-go model that made it affordable to integrate and leverage.

What was the best resource you discovered that enabled your success?

Education reform has broad interest, and there is a diversity of opinion. We tried to learn from all of them including peers in EdTech, researchers in the education field, and educators.

What advice do you want to share with today's EdTech startups?

EdTech provides an opportunity to not only improve learning outcomes for learners but also economic mobility outcomes. There is no shame in focusing on the latter.

About Vocareum

Vocareum offers a broad range of virtual labs that are used for computer science, data science, machine learning, Internet of Things (IoT), cloud computing, and cybersecurity. They make it possible to administer coding assignments, perform assessments, and deliver student feedback.

Connect

Website: www.vocareum.com

LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/in/sanjay-srivastava-258a/

Email: sanjay@vocareum.com