The Rise, Stumble, and Reset: Journey of APNA app in India's Job-Tech Landscape

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Departments : MBA General,Marketing,Business Analytics,Healthcare,Finance,International Business,Digital Marketing,Human Resource Management

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Problem Statement:
Apna is a revolutionary platform for blue-collar job seekers in India, offering career-building tips, professional networking opportunities, and trusted job listings. It is known to be a trusted platform with over 2 crore users in India, offering a wide range of job opportunities, including full-time, entry-level, graduate, fresher, digital marketing, back office, sales, office admin, IT, accounting, operations, retail, and marketing jobs in multiple fields. This case study analyses the services offered by this portal and its competitors, as well as the challenges it faces. Its migration from batch updates to real-time data streaming has empowered Apna to highly outperform competitors, and in creating an outstanding customer experience, while it has also led to reduced costs and the delivery of a major & consistent improvement in time for new business solutions.

APNA's rise reflected not just the strength of its business model but also the untapped potential of India's 450+ million blue- and grey-collar workforce, who had long remained underserved by traditional job portals. The study provides a comprehensive examination of the operating model, conceptualisation, and strategy employed by the Apna app to capture the essence of its operation and identify the forces that contribute to its exposure to various categories of risk markets.

Please go through the Guiding Note attached below before diving into the caselet for better understanding.

Context:
Apna, a startup founded by Nirmit Parikh in 2019, is a pioneer in blue-collar & Grey collar job provisions. It became a unicorn in a short span of 2 months. APNA's user base has skyrocketed to over 22 million users and more than 200,000 employers, including prominent brands such as Flipkart, Big Basket, Zomato, Swiggy, Amazon, and HDFC Bank. Its ability to scale rapidly, combined with its community-led design and vernacular-first approach, helped it achieve unicorn status in 2021. This growth trajectory was especially noteworthy in India's start-up ecosystem, where few ventures targeting the informal sector had seen such scale or investor confidence.

The app utilises elastic semantic search technology to monetise its candidate database. Apna ensured that employers received high-quality job candidates. The app is following a standard protocol to match employer and employee profiles, which is a magic waiting to transpire. During the early days of COVID-19, when employment was a huge turmoil, APNA was a saviour. The user base exploded, as workers without jobs searched for their next opportunity, and employers—especially logistics, delivery, e-commerce, and healthcare companies that needed to fill large volumes of roles —searched for candidates to fill those roles too.

As a result of its extensive scaling, Apna is now operating in 28 Cities and 11 Indian Languages. In addition, the company has created 70 communities catering to the experts in a range of industries. The industries catered to include makeup artists to plumbers, to share knowledge, and in order to ensure exploration of opportunities. This application aims to empower job seekers in India with a trusted platform for job search, career development, and professional connections, ultimately enhancing their employment prospects. It is designed to foster professional growth.

The app is a unique concept acting as a job matching portal similar to the likes of LinkedIn, Naukri, Times Jobs, which are mainly for the provision of white-collar jobs. With a current valuation of $1.1 billion, Apna App is at the crossroads of enhanced competition and is looking at ways to beat the competition to survive. In order to emphasise its differentiators, Apna partners with educational institutions to offer free courses and certifications that enhance employability, making the platform a comprehensive solution for career development.

Discussion:
Despite the unique concept and all the constructiveness behind Apna, it has now started facing a lot of competition. Certain portals, such as Jobhai.com, Internshala.com, and Foundit.in, SimplyHired.co.in, Shine.com, and PlacementIndia.com, etc. These competitors have also claimed their fair share of subscriptions on their respective platforms. Another major issue it faces is the scale of operations and the relevance of this portal. While APNA's app was spreading to 50+ cities, the backend infrastructure and verification processes were lagging well behind; hence, our fast growth could be too fast if some considered it. It has been observed that candidates often opt for Apna when seeking job opportunities to support their livelihood. Likewise, employers also want a pool of candidates for their job postings that meet their requirements. Being a technology organisation, Apna's ultimate long-term goal is to increase the relevance of its existence at both sides, i.e., in helping candidates to find relevant jobs that meet their interests and skills, and at the same time helping employers to find the most suitable candidates faster. Also taking into consideration the exponential growth of Apna's active users, at the tune of (> 22M) and the active jobs posted, which is positioned at (>200K) on the platform, discovering the most appropriate and relevant opportunities becomes a continuous challenge. At the same time, catering to a job feed at a scale that is relevant to users becomes a requirement.

The app is striving to maintain its competitive edge through an extensive expansion strategy. Apna has also launched its operations in Kolhapur, Tiruchirappalli, Udaipur, Belagavi, Ajmer, and Panipat. Apna has established a presence in 64 cities across India.

Apna.com usually operates on a dual-sided marketplace business model. Its working model aims to bridge the gap between job seekers, primarily in the blue- and grey-collar sectors, and employers seeking talent. By leveraging advanced technology, Apna has developed a platform that streamlines the hiring process, enabling job seekers to quickly find work and respond to job opportunities.

Attachments:

- https://s3.ap-south-1.amazonaws.com/stcontent.bslearning.in/global/case_study/536/ApnaAppCaseletBSReviseddocxGoogleDocs.pdf

- https://s3.ap-south-1.amazonaws.com/stcontent.bslearning.in/global/case_study/536/ApnaTeachingnotesReviseddocxGoogleDocs.pdf

Questions:

Question 1: What were some of the key reasons for APNA's initial rapid and successful growth?(10 Marks)

Question 2: What internal (operational) weaknesses became clear when APNA was scaling up?(10 Marks)

Question 3: What influence did external elements like an economic recovery or slowdown in funding have on APNA?(10 Marks)