



We, as women, innovate every day. The only way to stay in the game is to discover smarter ways to do everything. But imagine if your brainwave transformed your community or created a vision for the future. Our campaign celebrates such ideas and the women behind them. We bring you their inspiring stories in every issue. And if you already have a Big Idea or know of someone who has, write to us at femina@wwm.co.in with 'What's The Big Idea' in the subject line. Happy inventing!

PROS AND PROS

DesiCrew created computer-based/knowledge-related jobs in communities where there are no similar jobs even though there are people qualified enough to do them. People are less inclined to leave their jobs, given the improved quality of life and the option of staying with their families. Plus, clients enjoy lower costs as overheads at these centres are far cheaper as compared to their urban counterparts.

ONE WOMAN @ THE CALL CENTRE

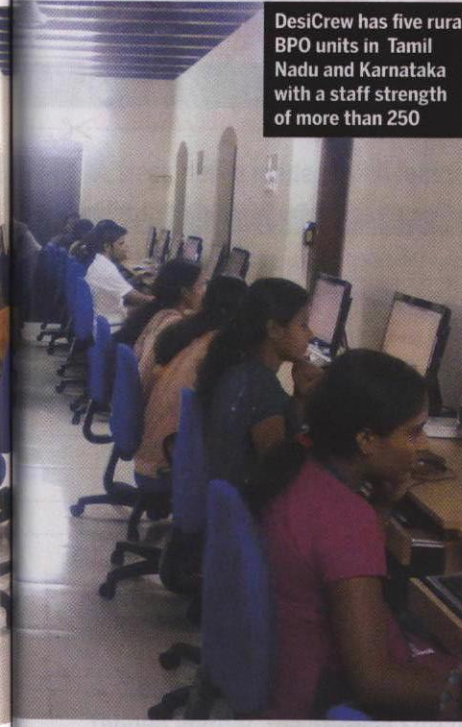
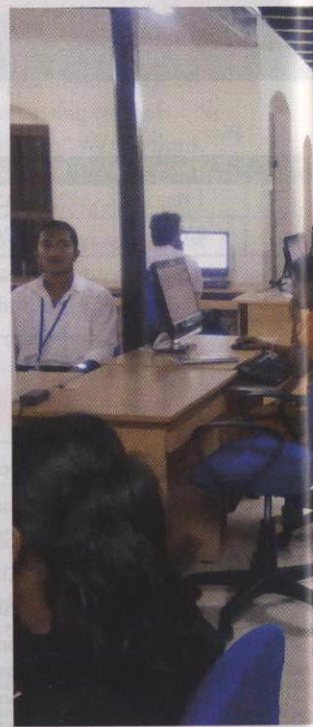
Saloni Malhotra, the founder CEO of DesiCrew Solutions, a rural BPO, believes in taking jobs to the people, instead of people to the jobs. By **Anindita Ghosh**

Saloni Malhotra was only 23 years old when she started a rural BPO that would utilise the educated manpower in rural and semi-urban areas. Her motive? To provide employment as well as prevent migration to cities. She explains, "All over India, educated youth from villages move to cities in search of jobs. However, after finding employment, they discover that almost 80 per cent of their income is spent on living expenses. As a result, they switch to better paying jobs every few months, which leads to high attrition rates. For me, this was a social problem that needed to be tackled. So I started thinking of a way in which we could take jobs back to the people so that they would save more, be loyal and invest their time and energy in the company they were working for."

SETTING UP SHOP

Saloni went about setting up her dream project with the help of a few like-minded acquaintances and support from institutions like IIT Chennai and Villgro. DesiCrew Solutions was born in 2007, the year Saloni turned 25. Today, the company has five rural BPO units in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka with a staff strength of more than 250.

"Our first project had a few hiccups, but we had expected the usual problems about availability of Internet, electricity, manpower, etc." remarks Saloni. "I realised that infrastructure can be arranged if one has clarity and is willing to spend the initial money. All our offices are now equipped with adequate power and Internet connectivity to ensure uptime of 99.5 per cent. Manpower is abundant and we have strong recruitment processes to hire the best. Our main challenge was building trust with the local community, which we did and the quality of resumé's are improving every day."



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Saloni's DesiCrew has made it possible for young men and women from villages to be self-sufficient

HOW IT WORKS

The DesiCrew rural delivery model is a network of micro-centres strategically selected across rural and semi-urban locations. Each centre is professionally run with a 25-seat facility working in two shifts to provide back-end services to global clients. Saloni explains, "Young graduates are recruited and trained in back-office jobs for organisations like large corporates, NGOs and academic institutions. Once trained, they are attached to a process and clients pay per person, per month, or on transactions, as relevant to the process. Our list of clients includes two of the largest life insurance companies in India, two global leaders in the web space and a leading IT services company among others." Micro-centres are located in those territories with a population in the range of 10 to a 100,000.

MAKING AN IMPACT

The increase in income levels has provided basic sustenance and spiked investments in homes and higher education. Employees take great pride in their work and the new skills they acquire at DesiCrew, which has translated into higher confidence levels and greater aspirations for the future. All of these factors have encouraged rural workers to stay rural thereby initiating a trend of reverse migration. "We conducted interviews with employees who had completed two to three years in the organisation and we saw that girls of 24-25 years are running entire households, sometimes earning more than their parents who are farmers. Many are now working at double the salaries at which they started and are in supervisory roles, helping take charge of HR, training, etc.," says Saloni.

DID YOU KNOW?

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) estimates indicate that there are 130 million educated workers in rural India with little or no access to meaningful employment. Their only option is to migrate to cities where jobs are limited and costs of living are too high.

On a macro level, the rural BPO model has potential for greater impact given that approximately 70 per cent of India's population resides in rural areas. If 50 people working in 1,000 towns/villages earn ₹5,000 per month—that is ₹250 million per month being infused into local communities through residents. Compare this to the average monthly household income of these employees, which, without the BPO, would have been ₹1,500 per month.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SAMEER MANGTANI; MAKE UP BY PIVU PALKAR; HAIR BY RATNA RAO