



Feature

MAGAZINE | APR 02, 2011



**Washed Out:** Anshul Gupta with brother Ankur (left) has made a business out of a daily chore. He's washing Delhi's laundry.

THE BIG IDEA

## Airing Dirty Laundry

Two Delhi brothers put a new spin on the traditional dhobi.

VEENA VENUGOPAL

### Designing Profits

- **Start up capital:** Rs 60 lakh, approximately.
- **Funds:** Raised from within the family.
- **Initial challenge:** Finding the right equipment.
- **USP:** First of its kind service in the capital.

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Where most of us would see only dirt and grease stains, 24-year old Anshul Gupta saw a business opportunity—in a pile of laundry. In November 2010, he launched Quick Clean, India's first Laundromat in South Delhi. In January this year, with his second outlet, he has taken on the dirty laundry of Delhi University's north campus too.

As a chartered accountant with an MNC in the US, Gupta was stuck by how convenient laundromats were, and began pondering the viability of setting up a chain in India. He roped in his brother Ankur, an engineer, to evaluate the equipment, while he worked on the financials and marketing. The survey he commissioned to study demand patterns indicated a gap in the laundry options available in urban India—the local *dhobi* or the dry cleaners. So, for starters, Gupta decided to target a clientele that did not have washing machines or the services of a domestic help—college students and young executives living on their own.

Getting the laundromat machines is a problem, as is getting clients to handle the equipment properly and not overload it.

### Plugging In

It wasn't easy going, though. "It took us eight months to decide on the equipment. There are no official suppliers in India. You will find commercial laundry machinery, but we needed machines that are operated by coins and cards," Gupta says. They settled on machines from Czech Republic for the pilot project. "But we won't be using the same machines in our next outlets. We are looking at the actual Laundromat machines. We're speaking to people in US and Europe to get them," he says. Next, the brothers had to finalise the location—not easy, given the rentals in Delhi. Finally, they settled on a place in Satya Niketan in south Delhi.

On the day of the launch, about 300 people walked in, thinking it was a retail store for washing machines! "Some 20-30% people knew what Laundromats are, so they were excited when we told them we were starting the service. The others were curious, and many became customers," he says.

Quick Clean charges Rs 150 for the use of a single machine and dryer, in which you can wash a 5kg load (dry weight). You have to hang around while your clothes get washed and then move them to a dryer. If you are too busy, there's also a drop-off service. For Rs 250, you can drop off the laundry and pick it up washed, dried, folded and ironed.

College students, who were early adopters, have helped create a buzz, through posts on Facebook and on blogs about the service. The Quick Clean outlet has, in fact, become a bit of a 'hang-out' joint, especially since Gupta has equipped the outlets with free wi-fi, TVs, hip music and magazines so they enjoy their wait. Most customers use the service thrice a month on average. "We also have young couples with babies in the neighbourhood. They come every three days or so," Gupta says. Quick Clean is opening three more outlets soon—two in Delhi and one in Gurgaon.

### Challenges

Educating the customer has been a bit of a challenge. People tend to use the machines like commercial washers. Since they are paying by the load, people overload the machines. But, Gupta cautions, this is sensitive equipment and has to be handled delicately. There is also a risk that the clothes will bleed colour and end up ruining the whole batch. To counter this, Anshul has hired laundry assistants who help customers sort their clothes.

Gupta is now looking at the franchisee route to expand. He already has enquiries from several people. "A lot of people call me and say they have been wanting to do this for the last 10 years but haven't been able to manage. It might look simple from outside, but it is a difficult business technically," he says. The duo is working out the franchise arrangements. The cost of being a franchisee will depend upon the area of the outlet and the number of machines. Word-of-mouth publicity works best for this business, Gupta says. And why not, it gives the term 'washing your dirty linen in public' a whole new meaning!

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