

Drishtee Kiosks: Connecting India Village by Village.

India's 600,000 villages are home to two-thirds of its people, yet they earn only one-third of the national income. For the residents in rural Indian villages access to government and commercial services is often limited and may only be available through expensive intermediaries. Drishtee is a commercial organisation that has found a way to bring services directly to rural communities by establishing a network of internet-connected kiosks called 'Drishtee Soochnalaya' in remote villages.

Through these kiosks villagers have been able to directly connect with government services like birth registration; complete micro-credit applications and access health information. Local farmers have been able to access information about the daily price of their produce in the markets. Alongside government information the Kiosks, much like British Post Offices, also make available a number of services and products from commercial suppliers. This can be as simple as photocopying documents, or as life-changing as obtaining a pair of reading glasses. The Drishtee kiosks act as agents for other services which are otherwise not available in rural areas including insurance sales, cell phone recharging and digital photography.

Innovative Technology

The local operators connect to a specially designed portal through wireless connected computers or mobile telephones. The portal can be accessed using English or one of several local languages. Kiosks are used as a local point of contact for education and work-related training, particularly training in Information and Communication Technology for women. Courses in English Language and use of computers are co-ordinated through the Drishtee agents. Through internet connection the kiosks have also facilitated 'real-time' direct consultation with medical practitioners in urban areas for villagers who based in remote locations with no alternative method of contacting a specialist.

Developing the local economy

In addition to opening up the local economy through trading, kiosks have provided over 1,500 jobs in rural communities directly for the staff who are trained to run them and operate as franchise owners of their own Drishtee kiosk.

Powerful Partnerships

The Drishtee Company works with many partner organisations including Microsoft, Intel and others. The Company and its founder Satyran Mishra are recipients of a World Economic Forum 'Tech Pioneer' award. The importance of the impact of the work in rural Indian communities was also recognised with a World Bank 'Development Marketplace' grant which identifies and funds early-stage initiatives with a potentially high development impact. Alongside the franchise operation the Drishtee Foundation, an independent NGO, uses some of the profit of the commercial activities for research and education in the use of ICT in rural areas.

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