



**Microsoft Unlimited Potential
Case Study: Transforming lives
with technology**





Transforming lives with technology

A quiet transformation is taking place in Ranti, a village dominated by caste and class hierarchies, in district Madhubani, Bihar, India. A novel initiative by Microsoft and Drishtee Dot Com Limited has cut across all caste and class barriers to link Buchchi Devi, the wife of a daily wage labourer, and Sandhya Devi, the wife a PhD scholar, in a unique bond.

Both women, who are skilled Madhubani painters, will share space on the same platform despite being on opposite ends of the socioeconomic spectrum. This platform will give them equal opportunity to access new markets to enhance their earnings with the help of information and communications technology (ICT). "This is the uniqueness of our e-commerce program. When you buy a painting through our online store, www.drishteehaat.com on the Internet, it is not just art that you buy. You buy a story and help to bring about positive changes in the lives of the main characters of the story," contends Satyan Mishra, CEO, Drishtee Dot Com.

Buchchi Devi, the 35 year-old mother of five children, had never imagined she could emerge out of her hand-to-mouth existence. But after she met Benod Paswan, Drishtee kiosk owner in Ranti, hope bloomed in Buchchi Devi's heart. "My husband earns just Rs 50 (US\$1.20) as a daily wage labourer. Sometimes when he doesn't get work, there is no money to buy food for the children. So I also need to earn to keep all of us alive. I have not been able to sell any painting for anything more than

Rs 200 (US\$4.70) through the middlemen. But now I have the chance to earn at least Rs 500 (US\$11.70) from each painting after registering with the Drishtee kiosk," says Buchchi Devi.

And for Buchchi Devi and others like her, this opportunity brings not only money but also the ability to compete and interact with artists from the higher castes and share a marketplace with them. In India's hierarchical social system, this is a degree of dignity and empowerment that these artists had not even imagined they were entitled to, much less achieve.

Ten kilometers (6.2 miles) away, in village Jitwarpur, the opportunity to register with a Drishtee kiosk has changed 18-year old Gudiya's life. The youngest artist to register with Drishtee



Microsoft
Unlimited
Potential™ **UP**

has already won a state award for her creative Madhubani paintings. But Gudiya has a dream. The first girl in her community to complete high school, Gudiya wants to study further. But she does not want her family to bear the financial burden. "My dream is to become a lawyer. Drishtee is giving me the opportunity to fulfill my dream. I am going to learn the computer so that I can use technology to make better paintings. This will help me to earn at least double of the Rs. 3000 (US\$70) that I am earning now. It will enable me to fund my studies," reveals Gudiya.

In fact, Gudiya's association with Drishtee and the resulting economic empowerment has given her confidence such a huge boost that she wants to make her own decisions. So, although



her family wants her to get married, Gudiya is determined to continue studying. Her father reminds her that the higher her educational qualifications, the greater will be the dowry that he will have to give for her to get married, but Gudiya is confident she will be able to save some of her own money for her dowry.

Artists are excited that they no longer have to haggle with a middleman, nor do they have to make any financial investments. All they need is skill and a little training on how to use ICT tools like the Tablet PC. The Tablet PC, which can be used even while sitting on the floor, needs no keyboard or mouse. Drawings and paintings can be made directly on the touch screen with a special pen or stylus. In addition to funding, business input, and technical advice on designing the portal, software to operate the Tablet PC is a Microsoft technology innovation that will help make it easier for artists to customize and adapt designs in an electronic format.

Once the painting is made and the agreement between the artist and Drishtee is signed, the rest of the procedure is quite simple. The Drishtee kiosk owner selects the paintings and sends photos of them via e-mail to the Drishtee headquarters in Delhi. These images are then showcased at the Drishtee online store at www.drishteehaat.com, which has been designed in collaboration with Microsoft. Then begins negotiation of bulk orders from all over the world.

At present, of the 30 Drishtee Soochanalaya or Information Kiosks delivering ICT services and related information to the community in the district, only two have initiated the e-commerce

In addition to funding, business input, and technical advice on designing the portal, software to operate the Tablet PC is a Microsoft technology innovation that will help make it easier for artists to customize and adapt designs in an electronic format

The buyer also benefits because he is assured of getting a good quality product. In addition, a buyer can even customize the product that he wants to purchase by selecting the theme and colors of the paintings, frames and packaging.

venture. One is in village Mangrauni and the other is in Ranti. The third kiosk that will provide e-commerce services soon is in Saurath village.

The primary reason for the success of the e-commerce partnership is because the entire transaction is transparent. "Since the painting and its price can be viewed on the Internet, the artist gets to know the exact sale price of her painting within hours of its sale," contends Drishtee Dot Com CEO Satyan. "This is the power of ICT. They also know the exact sum of money that they will receive, since their agreement states that they will receive one-third of the price at which the painting has been sold.



The buyer also benefits because he is assured of getting a good quality product. In addition, a buyer can even customize the product that he wants to purchase by selecting the theme and colors of the paintings, frames and packaging. This level of customization enables the buyer to get the maximum out of a product and adds extra value to his purchase."

The kiosk owner also profits from this e-commerce transaction. He receives 10 percent of the price at which the painting sells. But this is not the only incentive which drives Benod, the kiosk owner in Ranti village, to register as many artists as he can. "Over 60 percent of the artists in Ranti belong to the economically disadvantaged class of Harijans. They need to increase their sources of income. The Tablet PC will give them an opportunity to learn about new computer technology and how it can help them to improve their skills," says Benod.

Change is in the air in Madhubani. It can be seen in the modernization of the traditional style and content of paintings. It is reflected in the new confidence among the economically and socially vulnerable as economic empowerment helps them to rise above caste and class barriers. If Raj Kumar Paswan and his bedridden wife Lalita Devi of village Jitwarpur have mustered the courage to paint themes traditionally thought to be drawn only by high-caste artists, it is because of the respect their art has received from art connoisseurs—both national and international—thanks to ICT. Raj Kumar's only regret is that had ICT come into their lives earlier, his mother, who was not allowed to paint because of her caste, would have also realized her dream.

Microsoft[®]