

Deployment, Freedom, and Assurance

Manoj Agrawal, Group Editor, Banking Frontiers and Hari Padmanabhan, Chairman, Uncia Technologies, had a fireside chat at the recent “Kinetic Lending” Unconference held in Mumbai. Edited excerpts:

Manoj Agrawal: The company name UNCIA is unique but also rather puzzling. What does the name stand for?

Hari Padmanabhan: This is version 4.0 of my entrepreneurial journey. I asked myself - why are we doing one more? To evolve the answer as a team, we engaged with a coach, with a view to relate to the new journey and see a common rationale for what we're doing. What came out was that we really want to leave a legacy for the future - a company being built to last long after we are gone. We spoke with our customers and came up with 3 basic tenets based on emotions that customers experienced when they interacted with us - Inspiration, Freedom, and Belonging. We then had to come up with a name that captures all three.

Serendipitously, I stumbled upon a YouTube video featuring a French wildlife photographer whose lifetime ambition was to capture the elusive snow leopard on camera. His perseverance, backed by a National Geographic-funded expedition, finally made it possible. The snow leopard lives in very tough terrains, climbs to very high altitudes just to get on top, and thrives in severe conditions. It's extremely strong, rugged, and robust, yet phenomenally agile and lightning fast. To top all this, it has a very pleasing countenance.

All this capture how we think about our products and user experience - ruggedness with agility and working in a tough (financial services) business environment. So, the name resonated very well with us. UNCIA is the Latin for Snow Leopard, and it is also the name of an ancient Roman coin. Since we deal with money, it all came together nicely, and that's how the name UNCIA came about.

Nice story...thank you. What deep insights or powerful insights about the software industry helps you navigate your own career over 45 years?

I started my career at IDM, which



Fireside Chat: Manoj Agrawal engages with Hari Padmanabhan, Chairman, UNCIA, about his journey in the software industry, his insights, his purpose, the role of AI at the company, and more.

was the erstwhile IBM when it left India in 1978. There I got the fundamental construct of creating a product company and all my life has revolved around creating product companies. The other lesson I learnt from the IDM story was that though the company had everything going for it, it lacked strategic thinking. This taught me that you really have to think future forward.

You are a leader in the industry and every leader works for a purpose. What is your purpose? How did you choose that purpose?

Over time, I discovered the purpose. The best way I could express it is being able to “Take you home early”. While technology has evolved dramatically, some things have remained the same. Fundamentally, it's about streamlining processes to make them quicker and more efficient, so that you can enable a CEO and his team go home early. In fact, we ran a campaign long ago featuring CEOs on yachts and golf courses, highlighting how our product empowers them to enjoy more leisure.

UNCIA website mentions 6 things prominently. Three of them are pretty straightforward - reliability, security, and pricing. Please enlighten the other 3 -

deployment, freedom, and assurance.

This is very close to our heart. When we looked at what we are doing, we asked ourselves how do we make a significant impact. Fundamentally what we and our customers have consistently experienced is substantial implementation challenges. How can we eliminate this? That became our starting point. Long story short, we have a supply chain finance product that went live with our first customer in 41 days. In another case, it took 57 days, and the additional time went in data migration. What we have seriously worked on is how we can capture and codify the implementation process. We have come to a point where the base level has been created and more experiences will continue to enhance that.

Is AI doing coding at UNCIA?

Coding... yes, to some extent. We definitely use AI tools to write the initial code. But that is not the final code that goes into our products. It's only a first cut. However, our development centre at IIT Madras Technology Park is working on developing an AI driven credit assessment model. We will talk more about this when its ready to market.

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