

Cover Story



# COMVIVA

Leveraging Innovation to Drive Technology Uptake

Manoranjan Mohapatra  
CEO

“

We are experts at innovating, identifying promising new technologies and killing irrelevant ones

”

**“W**hen the going gets tough, the tough gets going.”

While talking about **Comviva**, this adage best fits. Fighting against all odds, crossing hurdles and standing out amidst the rapidly changing industry landscape, Comviva ensures it stays above the clutter to serve its clients better.

As compared to its peers, the telecom industry has witnessed multiple changes, primarily owing to significant technological upheaval in a very short timeframe. This is especially true for India, where the industry has dedicated itself to changing customers’ lives.

Comviva’s story is thus interesting, especially in the context of the industry’s various high-and-low points. The company’s story is one of struggle and survival, ultimately to emerge as a stalwart industry leader. At the company’s helm is **Manoranjan Mohapatra**, the chief executive officer, who has steered the company towards success amidst turbulent waters.

#### The Initial days

Initially, finding a foothold in the Indian telecom market was quite a challenge for the company. Its start in 1999 was rough, as it was competing with brands like TCS, Satyam, and Wipro, et al. However, the company’s flexible attitude and stubborn adherence to the target opened new vistas. It then proceeded as incubation within the Bharti Group, with the aim of leveraging the IT boom spearheaded by Sunil Bharti Mittal. Comviva has come a long way since then, driven by its zeal to make a difference. Comviva merged with CellCloud Technologies Limited in 2002 and in 2005, obtained venture capital funding; Sequoia Capital and Westbridge supported by Cisco, were roped in as investors, and thus began its success story.

#### Finding a Middle Ground

During its startup phase, the brand faced severe financial issues. Reminiscing about the company’s very first milestone amidst financial difficulties, Mohapatra comments, *“The turning point was when we sold one of our products to Airtel. It was a significant sale, through IBM and the project spanned 10 years. We made a few million dollars, which was a significant sum then and that helped to accelerate our growth.”* Though the company initially

started with Airtel, it worked with numerous other companies too.

The second hurdle was failing to do business with brands like *Vodafone, Idea and BPL, all of which were close competition to Airtel.* This, decision Mohapatra shared, was taken years ago. *“We had to start focusing outside India. It was a bigger and more open market. On one hand, it was a big challenge at that time, but on the other, it was a blessing in disguise. The first deal we cracked was in South Africa in 2004-2005. This provided us with a solid foundation in Africa. Today, almost half of our revenue comes from Africa and a nearly 20-strong team is handling the multiple projects. We are considered as a leader in mobile solutions and are working with all leading telecom groups like Airtel, Vodafone, orange, MTN etc.”*

## ADDING INCREMENTAL VALUE TO THE CUSTOMERS CONSTANTLY IS THE MANTRA TO SURVIVE AND SUSTAIN WITH THE UNIQUENESS

#### Providing the Best Solutions

Commenting on the company’s approach to the business, Mohapatra says *“We are experts at innovating, identifying promising new technologies killing irrelevant ones. We encourage our people to take initiatives, back them financially and let them make mistakes. However, if an initiative fails to gain ground, we don’t linger on it unnecessarily an, instead, opt for something different. These attempts have always turned out fortuitously for us and have kept us in good stead in the marketplace.”*

The company’s latest offering, ‘Infinity’, is deemed to counter the global price drop in the mobile internet and data



industry. In this scenario, operators have access to a vast amount of subscriber data, which is not being monetized. Infinity is thus expected to cater to both sides. To stay ahead of competition, the company works within the framework of the GDPR, and data secrecy. .

Comviva is also developing an offering in the analytics space. Manoranjan speaks, *“We will be looking at data for distribution and for telecom retailers and would offer incremental value, to customers.”*

#### How Comviva Stands Out

Comviva has, through various efforts, set a benchmark in the industry. Mohapatra explicitly expresses that there are three factors which create a difference, -flexibility, excellent service and the ability to innovate. Comviva not only caters to South Africa but also Ghana, Chad, and Cameroon and various other places where other companies have only a negligible presence. They are a trusted partner across multiple geographies, ranging from small countries like Cyprus with 250,000 people and big countries like Nigeria, with 180 million people.

*“Customers trust us to not cater to their present requirements, but likely future ones as well. We thus believe*

**“**We encourage our employees to take risks; we even encourage making mistakes, as we believe that one cannot innovate without it **”**

*in a business model which enhances customer engagement. Everything we execute internally is aimed at making a difference. The mantra is, “If it is good for the customer, it must be good for the employees”. Whenever we are in a dilemma, we examine the likely impact on our customers and accordingly take a call”* says the CEO.

#### Welcoming the Entrepreneurs

The CEO claims that the basis for any business is the diligence, attention to detail and fulfilling the customers’ requirements. Equally important is the culture that one must build in the organization. He says, *“You can have great strategies but the culture can kill it. There is a famous saying that ‘culture can eat strategies for breakfast’.”* So, it is important to encourage the appropriate culture at the workplace. The second is to be unique. He advises *“Don’t make a cost optimization process the business model to win the market. If you can do it, someone else can do it better and cheaper. The business model should provide something that is yet to be introduced to fill the gaps in the market and to excel in it. However, the product must have incremental value and has to be a continuous and spontaneous process.”*



EXPERIMENTS  
HAVE ALWAYS  
KEPT US IN GOOD  
SITUATIONS AND  
GOOD SPIRIT IN  
THE MARKETPLACE



The company is active on the corporate social responsibility (CSR) front as well. The Tech Mahindra Foundation has adopted several schools and participates in various CSR programs. Mohapatra himself takes the initiatives by direct involvement in social acts on behalf of the Comviva family. The brand works for the welfare of children, in terms of education, hygiene and wellbeing and Mohapatra loves to visit the kids, spend time with them and teach in service schools. He also influences such activities and encourages direct participation by his teams and employees too. He believes in philanthropic services and takes part in numerous social works-such as helping the less-privileged. . He even says that social work doesn't end just by delivering a cheque, rather it begins there.



I DON'T BELIEVE  
STAYING OFFICE LATE  
IS EQUIVALENT  
TO WORKING  
HARD, IN FACT,  
I HOLD AGAINST IT



### The Torchbearer of the Legacy

Manoranjan Mohapatra, chief executive officer, istaking Comviva’s legacy and repute to a whole new level. For his extraordinary contributions, he has received many awards and recognitions from India and abroad. Comviva is possibly the only Indian company which has received three GSMA awards over the last five years.

He defines himself as a simple man with a simple lifestyle. He is an ardent lover of books, a sports enthusiast who has played cricket, football, golf, and hockey. At the same time, he believes in a great work-life balance. He is of the opinion that if one cannot take care of their family and job, they won’t be able to prove their potential at work too. He comments, “I don’t believe that staying late in office is equivalent to working hard. In fact, I hold against it”.

### When Employees are the Assets

The employees follow the footstep of the CEO and are involved in acts of public service too. Comviva is one of the few companies that works towards a healthy work culture. The most impressive factor of the company is appreciating its employees’ good work and offering the freedom to do something different and unique. “We encourage our employees to take risks; we even encourage making mistakes, as we believe that one cannot innovate without it,” says Mohapatra . The brand spends a significant amount of money on innovation and lets people explore and experiment with new things.

### Marching towards Better Days

The CEO is always focused on the company’s future prospects and aspirations and says “We have carved a

very large market for ourselves and are focused on how to add incremental value for our customers. We are constantly focusing on creating something new so that they can either reduce the cost or increase the revenue on a year earning basis.” The second one is foreseeing the market, “We always look to see which way the market is booming and find ways to constantly evolve in newer areas, from content to recharge, to mobile payment to analytics. We are aware that 100 per cent of our revenues come from telecom operators and are moving towards continuous growth.” The team of managers at the company, including the CEO, is able to take up these targets, stay focused and achieve the same, while delivering to shareholders and customers. Thus, “The future plan is profitable growth, but more importantly, to add incremental value to customers.” [E](#)