

How research assisted the rollout of a mobile agriculture information service: the day Peepli went [live]

Knowledge is power. It can help you transform the way you live and the way you do business, and can help you to reap benefits that you never thought possible. A small bit of information can enable you to take informed decisions in a proactive manner and save yourself the agony of various losses: time, money and so on. The client discussed herein is the world's leading provider of intelligent information for businesses and professionals. It wanted to empower the mass of the Indian population – the agricultural community – with basic information on weather, commodity prices and crop advice. The question was 'How feasible is this?' To answer this, the client partnered with IMRB International nearly five years ago. The research project was long drawn out and completed in varied stages, starting with checking the acceptance of a paper concept through a house-to-house survey of farmers, converting the same to a tangible offering upon acceptance and testing the same through central location testing, where all farmers were collectively given a demonstration of the product, their reactions recorded and, finally, a working model developed to be tested in real time by a select set of farmers to bring the finishing touches to the product. The client still touches base with subscribers through IMRB International, to garner post-usage feedback, satisfaction with services being provided and to discover any other thing that could be done better. From providing the service in one state, the client has progressed to successfully providing the service to 13 states in India. The service has enjoyed unprecedented success and is estimated to have been taken up by more than two million farmers through its usage and sharing in more than 15,000 villages. The decision-enabling nature of the information has had a direct impact on the livelihood of the farmers, enabling them to lead a better life through increased incomes and reduced losses. Individual farmers claim to have reaped significant return on their investment, achieving up to INR200,000 (US\$4000) of additional profits, and savings of nearly INR400,000 (US\$8000) by using this service, which costs roughly INR250 (US\$5) for three months.

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