2015 India Special Report

Description: Lots of classified markets are hot. India is the hottest.

Billions of dollars of investment have flowed in during the past 18 months.

In four of the five classified categories, there's an open battle for supremacy. Only in recruitment, where 18-year-old Naukri has a first-mover advantage and a well-managed, long-term approach, is there an outright leader.

Big-name investors abound. Softbank, Sequoia, EBay, Tiger Global Management — the list goes on and on. One classified site, Quikr, landed $300 million in investments in a 13-month period during 2013 into 2014.

Profits? Few and far between. Most sites are in the “investment phase,” meaning they're losing money by design. Several sites we profile here were profitable briefly, but management elected to increase spending (typically, but not always on marketing), to try to gain long-term or even permanent category dominance.

The Indian classifieds / marketplaces field has two other unusual characteristics:

— Newspapers are still growing. In classifieds and in general. Circulation is up, revenue is up, reader/consumer interest is up, and print classifieds are up in some places, down in others. Print in India is not dead. It's not even dying. It's got a lot of legs left. Two of the biggest media groups, the Times of India (Bennett Coleman & Co.) and HT Media, publisher of the Hindustan Times, were smart enough to develop and run top-tier classified sites.

— You may have noticed we referred above to “five” categories rather than four. In India, matrimonial classifieds are a major category, alongside cars, homes, jobs and “stuff.” They differ from dating sites; they are growing steadily, and no one yet can claim to be the leader. Or, actually, all three top tier sites claim to be No. 1. It's a fascinating story. (Example: What's a “love marriage”?)

In “marketplaces,” e-commerce sites that include listings, SnapDeal and Flipkart are going head-to-head, with Amazon and its interesting site Junglee growing fast too.

SnapDeal in August raised $500 million in a funding round that valued the company at $5 billion. In July, Flipkart was valued at $11 billion in a funding round of $700 million.

This special report was prompted by our clients' interest in knowing a lot more about the Indian market, and our need to take a deeper look. It's not comprehensive, but it's a great overview of one of the most fascinating classified/marketplaces we see anywhere in the world.

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