

Increasing employment opportunities for rural women in Deoria

Laying a strong foundation of operations and processes for an ambitious idea.

A jar of pickle brings happiness

Post Jagriti Yatra it was my first day in office, ColoredCow team was sitting out in the sun having team lunch. With the opening of a new jar of pickle from Rural Roots, a fresh conversation brewed. This jar was a souvenir from Deoria, Uttar Pradesh one of the 12 locations we visited during Jagriti Yatra to meet social changemakers. With the first bite itself the table brimmed with smiles and praises for this simple, handmade pickle. Having a lot of food lovers in the house this happens! But more than pickle, what got more praises was the story behind it.

Not just pickle but consuming its tasty story

This pickle came from Rural Roots, a food processing NGO that was coincidentally started in 2016 by two Jagriti Yatris(Keshav Parthasarathy and Shagun Setia). Rural Roots is more than just pickle; they are “pickle with a story”. These handmade pickles are prepared by marginalised women in Deoria, who lived below poverty line before finding a source of income through this initiative. The sale of these pickle directly impacts lives of these women and their families and not just that, it tastes amazing!



Garlic Pickle undergoing the cleaning process in Rural Roots

Facing a roadblock with obtaining the pickle

This pickle had nothing mediocre about it, be it the taste or the quality. Everything stood out and that is what left a mark on us. As the conversation went ahead, we decided to order more of these pickles. But due to a rather tricky method of obtaining this pickle, we debated that the distribution method had scope for enhancements which could increase Rural Roots reach by multi-fold. This in turn could largely increase the impact they wanted to create for the women they had employed. We saw a possibility of improving the situation for ourselves and for others. With our usual excitement for problem-solving we thought, why not, let's find a solution.

From lunch table to drawing board

The solution finding moved the discussion from the lunch table to the drawing board for a brainstorming about Rural Roots and the situation. We studied the organization's current structure, their audience and analyzed how they can create larger impact.

Why we did so? Because in that jar of pickle we could see someone's passion towards their cause. Otherwise preparing, boxing and bringing this jar on table from one of the remotest places of our country is no mean feat. That product was full of desire to make things happen and that is something we deeply resonated with.

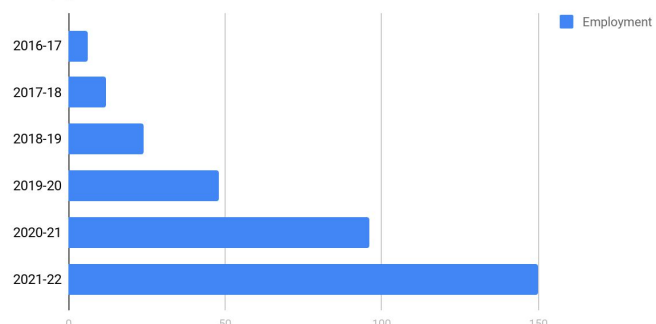
Identifying the opportunity and connecting with the vision

Rural Roots' customers live in metropolitan cities, they are the tech savvy internet inclined people, and to connect them with these far off roots we saw the necessity of a medium. We saw strong potential in Rural Roots and thought of finding a possibility in contributing with our skills. This instinct has developed from our experience of working with other startups and NGOs or maybe it's plainly out of our desire to help in implementing more and more ideas. We initiated a conversation with the Rural Roots team and after a couple of discussions we met Kunal, their CEO to talk more. The possibility of creating a solution needed to be aligned with the vision of Rural Roots to be effective. Like all conversations around creation, this one was full of delight.

Rural Root's ambitious idea to increase employment

Rural Roots is passionate about increasing employment in the region of Deoria. In last 1 year they employed 6 women who started getting an average salary of Rs 1,500 per month (for all women, this salary represents at least a 50% increase over their current household salaries). In next 5 years Rural Roots target is to generate a sustainable employment for at least

An ambitious target like this would need approx. a double growth rate every year

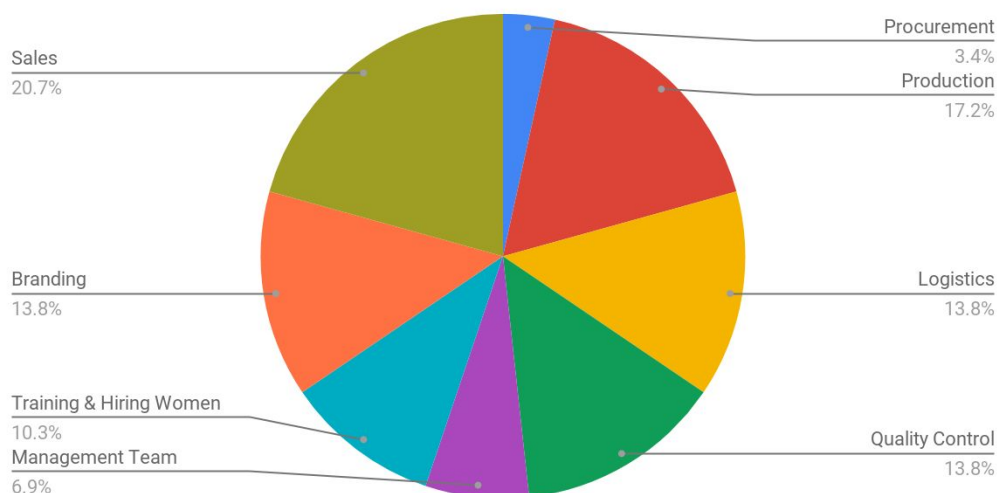


100-150 marginalised women. That is 25 times the current figure. Obviously the sales also need to increase proportionally to employ this number of women. But how will that happen?

Increasing sales & employment through strong foundation

In the first leg of the journey Rural Roots was able to sell these delectable, seasonal homemade pickles in their network through word-of mouth. The sales grew proportional to the spread of word. But now to employ 150 women from 6, they need to strengthen their processes and

To increase sales and execute the cycle smoothly, focus is needed on multiple fronts



generate a greater sale. Plus, to exist in a competitive market like pickles, they need a strong brand identity that helps them create a mark with their stories. For better sales, they can no doubt tie up with retailers, collaborate with big brands, participate in expos, and sell online. But to realize a vision that is bigger than sales, they need to set the foundation right with the various functions involved in achieving it.

Thinking big from the start

Why is it important to lay the right foundation from the beginning discussion? Simply because it is much easier to do things right from the start than to fix them later. There is more vagueness during the start but leaving scope for scaling the model from the foundation helps in improvising along the way.

We discussed a similar thing with Rural Roots. At this stage, they are forming the DNA of their NGO, and this genetic code is permanent. Paying attention in this phase can build the right foundation and they can free themselves to concentrate on bigger challenges.

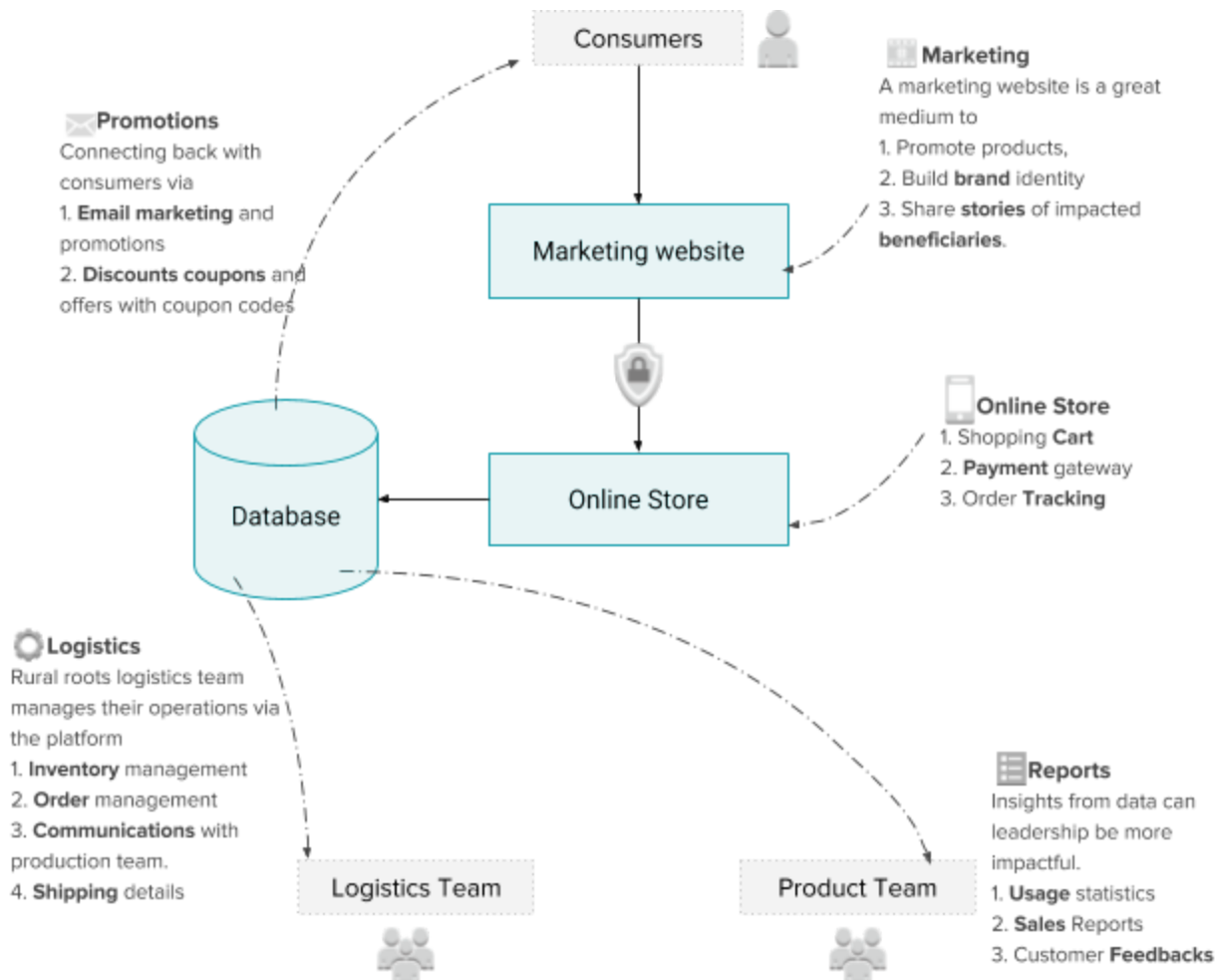
Increasing employment by laying the foundation with tech

During the conversation, Kunal shared his vision of targeting a monthly sale that's equivalent to their current yearly sale. And sales is directly proportional to the impact on empowering the Deoria women. That is an ambitious idea. And like any other successful, ambitious idea the strategy lies in basic and that is core we focused on in the discussion with Rural Roots.

Focus on core,

- The target customers are in metropolitan cities- create a better way to reach them.
- Create a strong brand identity for "Pickle with a story", create a direct channel, a direct connect between these rural women and the customer.
- Tap tech & lay down infrastructure to share the story, buy the product easily and various other operations and management functions involved for the business.
- Freeing from mundane tasks to concentrate on bigger business and socio-economic challenges.

In short, laying the seed of scale from the start, their organisational processes were mapped with the technological implementation.



Conclusion

Rural Root's pickle product opened employment opportunities for the women in Deoria. Bringing more women into this sphere of opportunity is directly linked to the sales and reach of the product. Their remarkable story and product impressed us at ColoredCow. As it so happened, that we faced a challenge with easily obtaining the product. While finding a solution for our challenge through the foundation of tech, we realised that it contributes to their mission. It further opened up other avenues to achieve the vision through tech, which allows to sustain their current model and scale it for a greater reach, and focus on the growth of business and solving socio-economic challenges.