



The Netherlands is rapidly becoming Europe's "place to be". Across this country, the best disruptive ideas are nurtured, encouraged and then scaled into real international businesses.

## StartupDelta Advisor Chintan Shah: "Don't Wait for Perfection"

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VIA: Virendya Battja

He was reading an article on the impact of climate change on a late night flight to London in 2010, when looking outside he saw thousands of street lamps burning in empty streets. Amazed by this waste of energy, Chintan Shah (33) decided to do some research and found that each year streetlights in Europe generate as much greenhouse gas as 20 million cars and that Europe pays over €10 billion euros each year to power streetlights. Struck by these figures, his mechanical engineering mind was triggered and he decided to find a solution to this huge energy waste. Two years later the engineer with Indian roots, founded Tvilight, (<http://www.tvilight.com/>) a start-up that offers smart streetlights. The company's headquarter is located in Groningen. Today it consists of 25 employees.

### Moonwalk on Texel

"My dream was to make streetlights that dim when no one is around and light up when a person passes. I wanted to make street lighting that follows a person like Michael Jackson's Moonwalk," Chintan says. For this he needed to develop a technology that allowed existing streetlights to communicate with each other: dim when no one is around, glow with full power when they detect a person and make sure that a circle of light moves with the passerby. Being a graduate from the University of Delft (<http://www.tudelft.nl/>), Chintan entered his idea in the University's campus competition in 2010. He won the competition and received the means to create a first demonstration on campus. "One of the challenges we faced in developing the smart streetlamps was to develop a sensor that is able to focus on pedestrians, bicycles and cars and that can filter out snow, rain, and birds, as they can activate the lights unnecessarily. It took us two years and many freezing nights to come up with the 'Aha! Moment'," Chintan recalls. He saw that his streetlights on the campus used 80% less energy than regular streetlamps and that they were much cheaper to maintain. Good reasons, two years later, to start his own company Tvilight. Since then, Chintan's smart streetlights are used in several towns in the Netherlands (e.g. Nijmegen and Groningen) and in several other countries worldwide. They are used to light roadways, streets, bicycle roads and airports. "The Dutch island Texel will be the first island in the world with complete intelligent street lighting!" he says proudly.

### Pure Passion

"There are six times more light points than human beings in the world. Imagine if you could monitor & control these lights. Streetlights are everywhere, if you can connect them and add intelligence, they can be a platform for smart cities. Imagine an ambulance that can communicate with the traffic lights and turn them green as it passes. It can save lives! You can add intelligence such as environmental sensing to streetlights. I was recently in Shanghai and people were warned on TV not to go outside because there was too much pollution. But of course people ignored the warning. Environmentally sensitive streetlights can give you data about the specific areas that you need to avoid. Chintan speaks passionately about the endless possibilities of smart streetlights- and it is this passion that you need when you start your own company, he says: "As a start-up you need to do what you are passionate about. Things can go wrong and the energy drain can be very challenging for a start-up. When I started my company I often wondered why I left the profitable job that I had. But I believed in what I was doing. It was pure love, pure passion. I cared for it as if it was my baby. Protect your baby until it's grown!"

### Don't Wait for Perfection



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"As a foreign entrepreneur in the Netherlands, I had a soft landing. I came to the Netherlands to study at the University of Delft (http://www.tudelft.nl/) and this helped me to understand the Dutch culture. If you ask for help as a foreign start-up, people here will help you. I was a bit scared when I had to register at the Chamber of Commerce, but they do all the paperwork for you. That is just brilliant! You can register fast and within two weeks I received all the necessary information. Tax facilities in the Netherlands, like the Innovation Box, are valuable incentives for tech start-ups. Unlike in India, things are very organized and clear here." Chintan did have his own struggles as a beginning entrepreneur. "Cash is king and money runs out faster than you think, especially for tech companies; you have to develop something first before you can sell it. You have to make a marketable product. As a start-up you can't afford to wait until your product is completely finished. If you have a minimum viable product, sell it! Don't wait, even if it's not completely perfect. By doing so you'll also earn credibility with your investors that your product is marketable. When you are developing your product, try to engage your clients in the process. Don't think for your clients but do ask them for advice; they know what they want. This way you'll get early feedback from them and you can adapt your product."

## Making a Connection

Some of the most valuable tips and tricks Chintan received came from other successful entrepreneurs who were also once beginning entrepreneurs. "I recently was at an event organized by StartupDelta. It was an event where start-ups and CEO's from companies like *Google* and *Elsevier* were invited. Speaking to them, I realized that those important CEO's are people who are willing to help you. I asked the CEO of *Thuisbezorgd* (http://www.thuisbezorgd.nl/) some basic questions and we had a connection. He told me he had the same struggles as I when he started. From these guys I learned how to go to the next stage; they provided me access to their network and gave me the right advice. These introductions were so valuable! For me StartupDelta is a platform for making connections. Besides this, with a prominent figure like Neelie Kroes, you can be sure that StartupDelta will have an impact on a structural level, like policy changes, that will be favorable for start-ups."

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