



Stay Connected with Gecko

Gecko is a multipurpose device that takes you a step closer to the Internet of Things, a world where everything is connected. Connovate Technology, its creator, has more such products up its sleeve.

BY SANGITA THAKUR VARMA

This Gecko is not a lizard. It is a bluetooth low energy (BLE) device that works as an appcessory (an accessory with smartphone app), to make your smartphone even smarter. “The product Gecko, I can say proudly, is my idea and dream to show the world that India can produce innovative products,” says its creator Bahubali Shete, Founder, CEO & Managing Director, Connovate Technology Private Limited. It is with companies like Connovate that India is marking its presence on the Internet of Things (IoT) platform. The frenzy around IoT is reaching an inflection point across the world. As the crescendo around connected devices builds up, we are inexorably moving towards a world where we are destined to live with almost everything connected—objects, animals, plants, people, etc. The space in India too is poised for bigger innovations, with the country coming up with a framework policy on IoT. Vision Digital India is a further boost to the rapidly evolving IoT space, offering immense opportunities to businesses.

To stay relevant in the Web 3.0 space, it is imperative for entrepreneurs to constantly innovate. IoT is a field that requires smart thinking. It was in this evolving global scenario that Bahubali Shete, a serial entrepreneur, entered the IoT fold. “In November 2012, I seeded the idea of a new startup in the IoT space,” he says. A 1988 batch graduate from BVB College of

Engineering, Hubli, Shete spent the initial years of his career working in the field of industrial automation. However, he always felt the entrepreneurial itch. This led him to “try his hands at entrepreneurship skills” in these early years with three startups. Shete then went on to work with Kirloskar, Tata (Nelco) and Philips in the first 12 years of his professional life and then proceeded to Ireland and the USA to work with Moog Inc on electro-mechanical actuators and they built the world’s first Class D All Electric Flight Simulator. On his return to India, Shete initially led teams for Storage and DSP (digital signal processing) in Tata Elxsi before jumping back into startups. He worked as Director and CTO in Galaxy Intelligentia, where they built the world’s first patented technology in robotic valet parking. Now backed with 26 years of experience in the industry, Shete planned his own venture.

Shete also called in three other industry veterans to join the startup. One of them was a customer, Rajeevkumar M, a post-graduate engineer. “Since 2008, he was associated with me as a customer and went on to become my partner when I invited him in 2012. Rajeevkumar brings with him excellent CE (Conformité Européenne) product management skills and 14 years of experience in the manufacturing ecosystems of China and Hong Kong. He added great value in the Gecko manufacturing setup,” says Shete. The other partner, Kirankumar Rajarao, was

a classmate in engineering and had worked in India and Africa with RPG, Videocon and other such reputed organisations. “He comes with great insights in operations and his experience in Africa with Sundaraparipurnan Varadarajan (my fourth partner) in greenfield startups was an added advantage in setting up operations for our enterprise,” Shete remarks. Varadarajan is an engineer and a cost accountant and brings to the table a new angle of thinking in startups from the financial point of view. He too has worked with some of the best companies, like Ashok Leyland, in senior management positions and essays an advisory role for the partners.

Connovate was launched as a design engineering and product solutions company with the aim to become a globally recognised name in connected devices. With its focus on the entire ecosystem for connected devices, the company primarily specialises in design and manufacturing of all components required in the field of wearable smart devices, personal wellness gadgets and smart home control and automation solutions. In the technology domain, its expertise includes devices, embedded applications and cloud and mobile applications space. Wearable technology has taken the world by storm since its first *avatar* in the form of a calculator watch in the 1980s and Connovate is a rising star here.

When Connovate rolled out the multifunctional piece Gecko, India took a small step in the IoT space but it heralded big news for smartphones—they could now do a lot more with this coin sized gesture control peripheral. Connectedness is not built into Gecko, rather it is equipped with an accelerometer that can be connected to a smartphone via low energy Bluetooth. You can get a control on your life with Gecko through the accelerometer-bluetooth-based tags. It also enables gesture control and triggers to the smartphone. Gecko Tag was one of the first few products rolled out in the IoT space by the company on its BLE platform. “The application of Gecko Tag is the first of its kind with affordable technology,” says Shete proudly. Given its multiple applications, it is not surprising that the device has been received well in the iOS (Apple users) space. Though Shete accedes, “We had our own share of issues due to lack of support in Android, however, we are definitely witnessing a good volume pickup despite problems in Android app as people like the concept and the product.”

Shete explains the many applications of Gecko, “You can trigger smart actions on your phone like music control, selfie, etc.; tag it on to valuables like bags, keys, laptops to track and find them; put it on a pill box and make sure that you get a reminder as well as an alert if you miss a medication; tag it on your door or window and get an alert when someone moves them (within bluetooth range of course); trigger your DSLR camera remotely within bluetooth range from your smart phone; tag it on your luggage and get an alert when someone moves it while you are waiting for the transport, or get an alert when the bag arrives in bluetooth range while you are waiting in the baggage claim area.” But this is not all. Gecko is so versatile that it can be adapted to the user’s requirement. You just need to use your imagina-



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connected...this solution will enable our customers to roll out connected devices...”

—Bahubali Shete, Founder, CEO & MD, Connovate Technology

tion. The hand-held device has a removable coin cell battery, TI CC2541 SoC, with one year battery life, a buzzer and LED light for alerts. The small wonder is packed with four gestures that provide the user control over his things. Tagged to Gecko, your stuff and your beloved are now under your power, safe. Gecko makes you relax.

The company however is not just into making Gecko. Shete elaborates, “Connovate has been working on multiple products. Gecko Tag is just one of them. Our second product which had great commercial success is a Baby Monitor from Motorola in USA. This was developed as a service to Hubble (at that time Connovate’s customer and now a company that took majority stake in Connovate because of it). We also have another GPS enabled smart product which will be rolled out by our customer in India. We have a B2B product based on iBeacon technology from Apple and it is picking up very fast and we have a great product roadmap with SDK (software development kit).”

All of Connovate’s products are aimed at both self-brand-

Stay in Control with Multipurpose Gecko



Turn up the Volume
Use Gecko gestures to control the music playback.



Be Warned, Intruder!
Stick or tag Gecko on your door or luggage. If anyone opens the door or moves your luggage, Gecko alerts.



Never Miss your Pill
Set up Gecko as a Pillbox, set the medication schedule and the emails/phone numbers where you want the alert. If the pillbox is not used on time, Gecko sends alerts.



Never Lose, Always Find
Tag Gecko on your key chain or wallet or slip into your purse. Set up Gecko for tracking on your App. You will get alerted when Gecko and your smartphones are moved apart. If you still lose it, let Gecko World find it for you. It's that easy!



Say Cheese & Click
Set up Gecko as camera trigger. Plug your Gecko to DSLR camera using the DSLR cable (order separately). Tap the camera icon on the Gecko page to trigger focus and shutter on your DSLR. Alternatively, use Gecko to trigger the smartphone camera. Select front or rear camera as well from your Gecko gestures.

ing, and white labelled solutions for other original equipment manufacturers (OEMs). “We already are on the verge of signing a couple of major OEMs for white labelled products,” informs Shete. As regards the market for Connovate’s products, Shete emphasises its reach. “From the start we were very clear that the global market—US and Europe apart from India—are our target geographical markets. We are in the home automation market segment and will focus on that. With our iBeacon kit and machine to machine (M2M) SDK, we are targeting OEMs as another major segment,” he says pointing to the expanding market of Connovate. Currently, the company is busy working on innovations around the home automation and M2M space. “We are rolling out our own product in the home automation space under the Hubble brand. We are also rolling out M2M SDK for OEMs to make their products connected products/IoT ready/IoT enabled,” says Shete. M2M SDK is a great solution from Connovate and the company has worldwide partnerships with a major telecom company for M2M with BLE plus cellular technology. Shete shares the company’s future plans saying, “I am very confident that this solution will enable our customers to roll out connected solutions very fast in the market.” Another of the company’s products, Connovate

Weigh Smart, is just the right pick for the health conscious. A digital health case, it comes with a smartphone app for free and is packed with a built in BLE technology. Available for both Android and iOS smartphones, the device records the weight and the BMI index and sends it to the connected smartphone everytime the user climbs on the weighing scale.

It is a measure of this barely two-year old startup’s success that in October this year it was acquired by Binatone, the Hong Kong based consumer electronics company, which was one of its major clients. According to media reports, this was one of the first deals in the hardware space in recent times and marks the start of India’s startup journey in the IoT space. Binatone with 1,500 stores in the US and 1,000 in Europe will be providing shelf space to Connovate’s products. Connovate merged with Binatone’s subsidiary, Hubble Connected. In November 2013, it had run a highly successful crowdfunding campaign on the crowdfunding platform Indiegogo and was flooded with preorders from US, UK, Germany (7,500) and India (500).

IoT is the buzzword right now and still taking shape. Major giants like Apple, Samsung, Amazon, Google and Microsoft and in fact everyone is in the IoT race. Connovate surely is on its way to becoming a leader with its innovative products. ■

(Based on interview & secondary research)