Utah Business

Tech Trailblazers: Pioneers who led the way for Utah's rising tech industry

By Judd Bagley October 16, 2017

The tech industry is literally reshaping Utah—from new construction and snarled traffic in Utah County to new education initiatives and pathways. While the industry now dominates the state's landscape and politics, its emergence and strength is due to early innovators who laid the foundation for its current success. Here, we highlight just a few of those tech pioneers who helped put Silicon Slopes on the map.

This year's Tech Trailblazers feature is the second iteration of an annual feature.

Bhaskar Ragula and Sanchaita Datta

Often in business, everything comes down to one well-timed meeting. In the case of FatPipe Networks, that meeting happened in 2003, when Bhaskar Ragula, half of the husband-and-wife team that founded his company, walked into a room full of AT&T vice presidents to offer them a simple solution to a vexing problem.

In those days, data carriers who dominated geographic regions played games meant to preserve their control over the market.

"When you go to New York City where Verizon is the boss, they don't like anybody else coming in because they want to keep all the customers to themselves," Ragula explains. "Verizon kept AT&T from setting up another line of service to an existing customer from another area. Verizon would give them the runaround

for months and then program it such that it was hard for the customer to use two data lines from two carriers."

What Ragula offered AT&T was a simple solution, made all the more attractive by virtue of it being software, not hardware-based.

"We invented a technology where you can take a line from AT&T and a line from Verizon, and we can combine it into one single data pipe using routing software, and that made a huge difference," he says.

The product of that meeting was the Software-Defined Wide Area Network (SD-WAN), which has gone on to fundamentally change the way large enterprises move data internally over large distances.

The SD-WAN also produced 11 patents and solidified FatPipe Networks' enduring relevance in a notoriously competitive niche of the global tech ecosystem.

Ragula was raised in Chennai, India, coming to the United States in 1981 to pursue his academic interests, which were extensive, covering everything from mining operations and engineering to high finance. Upon completing his doctorate, Ragula took a teaching position at the University of Utah.

Meanwhile, Ragula's wife, Sanchaita Datta, was working on her PhD in electrical engineering when she launched

What would become FatPipe, quickly attracting the attention of such noteworthy investors as Tim Draper. While she had the technical side covered, the new enterprise needed help on the business end.

"That's when my wife said why don't you look at the finance side of things?" Ragula says. "So I was just the floozy who was helping her out. As time went by, I realized I could probably get into data networking. As someone on the periphery, I could ask challenging questions."

Eventually, Ragula resigned his tenured professorship in favor of the business world.

Are there lessons from finance and mining engineering to be applied to high-speed networking?

Ragula thinks for a moment before responding confidently.

"It's all about flow. In mining, you make money by following the ore, understanding the system and removing inefficiencies. In finance, you succeed by following the money and understanding the system and removing impediments," he says. "Just as in high-speed networking, you must understand how data flows through the system and make it as efficient as possible. Our business is all about moving data and adding value through a complex system." – JB