

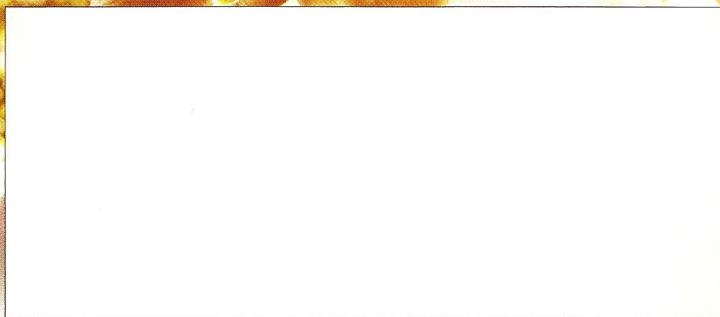
FRANCHISING WORLD

JULY 2015

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FRANCHISING
Building local businesses,
one opportunity at a time.

Q&A with Moni Singh, Founder of STEM for Kids

Moni Singh's training as an engineer has been vital in her quest to ensure the feasibility of her STEM franchise concept.

BY MIRIAM L. BREWER, CFE



Growing up, Moni experienced opportunities that changed her life. She was born in a community where girls and education didn't pair well; the combination was often discouraged. Her determined parents propelled her towards a fulfilling career in the field of science, technology, engineering and math (STEM).

Today, Singh holds an MBA from Duke's Fuqua School of Business and honors earned as an engineering student from Indian Institute of Technology. She has made numerous contributions to corporations, to telecommunications technology, education, and to her community. Recipient of various awards, including the Triangle (N.C.) Business Journal's prestigious Women in Business – Leader in STEM and 40 under 40 awards, she cites that her biggest achievement has been using her passion to create a bridge between industry and education.

In her corporate roles, she created cutting-edge technologies that enable data phones. Her work is also behind cable/DSL data that is found in homes and offices. She transitioned from that lucrative STEM career to dedicate herself to bringing the educational platform to young children in the community. From her experiences working around the world with global corporations, she knew the potential and excitement of STEM firsthand.

Being a woman in engineering, she understood the strength of conviction and motivation needed to succeed in these fields. Stories about college students dropping their science majors because the classes were too hard touched her deeply. Her experiences with answering the numerous "whys" of her own children, then six and seven years old, taught her that young kids are curious about the world and eager to tinker and engage in hands-on activities.

She wondered what if children were given a chance to learn about science and engineering at an early age? Would it make STEM more interesting and not so daunting once they are in college? As an analyst, she was able to support that thought with research showing that students do develop interest in STEM at the average age of eight.

With her conviction and the strong desire to have an impact on the next generation of peoples' minds, she founded STEM For Kids in 2011. Her two-fold mission: make STEM fun and real for children. Over the years, she and her organization have helped thousands of N.C. children in K-12 experience robotics, engineering and computer programming. Singh

has devoted her years of engineering and business expertise to make these engagements realities for kids. Parents, educators and community partners are seeing the difference. One parent had remarked "what a blessing for our kids to have STEM For Kids!"

WHY FRANCHISING?

The demand for STEM talent is growing. These are high paying jobs. Yet, an estimated 1.2 million STEM jobs will go unfulfilled. Singh calls this another "Sputnik Moment" that demands speedy action in inspiring the youth of America to fill the nation's jobs.

When something that important is at stake, speed and efficiency of program deployment are critical. She launched STEM For Kids franchising to broaden the reach of her programs. The franchise model offers the speed to make a real impact.

She cites another important reason to go with the franchise model for expanding STEM. According to the National Science Foundation, under-represented minorities hold only 10 percent of science and engineering jobs despite being more than one-quarter of the U.S. population age 21 and older.

Changes have to take place at the grassroots level to inspire children irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. She invites people of color to come join the STEM For Kids Franchise System. To encourage minorities to become actively engaged in this effort, STEM For Kids provides incentives for ethnic minorities who join this franchise system.

OBSTACLES

Setting up a new business system from scratch comes with a set of challenges. An engineer at heart, Singh has always found ways to ensure the feasibility of her STEM offering and system. Her business prowess enables her to offer viability and desirability.

"Because of the hard work already done in clearing obstacles and devising effective and efficient systems, our franchisees can rest assured that when they join us, they will not be starting at ground zero", says Singh.

The STEM For Kids franchise system is an "asset-lite" business model with low fixed overhead costs. It offers franchisees the ability to tap into multiple and diverse revenue streams. The allocated territories are huge,

up to a million in population density enabling the franchisees to grow in their territories. Robust start-up training, ongoing support, proprietary STEM curricula and delivery methods top off this franchise system. All these attributes are the result of Singh's her team's unwavering efforts in clearing obstacles and creating a streamlined program for franchisees.

"Obstacles are nothing but milestones, indicators of progress." she says. "My business is making STEM fun and real for children. To do that effectively, we leverage collaborative partnering with like-minded organizations. Building such collaboration is progress."

One summer, her organization partnered with an engineering firm, Gilero Biomedical to "make" children engineers for two days – they worked like engineers on computer aided design workstations to design their own plastic spoons. ■



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franchise.org