

8,000 people have signed up for the service. Interestingly, since its inception, the site has attracted more men than women -- of its 8,000 members, 2947 are women and 4,999 are men. Why's that? "I think a lot of women thought that if the man doesn't want dowry, there must be something wrong with him! But most of our male clients are qualified professionals from the IT industry or medicos who feel strongly opposed to the dowry system," says Naresh.

For the founder, the service is far more than a business venture. "It is my way of doing my bit to eradicate dowry. The dowry system is still a major challenge. It's the leading reason for domestic violence in India even today. Most daughters-in-law are tortured or killed by their husbands or their relatives only because they didn't bring enough dowry," he says, a fact that is validated by police statistics that indicate that one case of cruelty is committed by in-laws every nine minutes.

Social businesses need a business model too

Building a business for a cause is a slow process. Although he invested Rs 1 lakh to seed the business, this outlay did not provide for advertising. So Naresh says that he has relied a lot on the help of friends and acquaintances to spread the word. He believes that as word of the site spreads, that and its 'paid-for' service business model will generate profits.

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To take a look at the site's business model, idontwantdowry.com allows those who are opposed to dowry to list their profiles and browse profiles for free. However, only paid members have the privilege to contact a listed profile. Subscription charges are Rs 500 for a period of six months. In fact, when we asked Naresh if he would consider generating more revenue by hosting advertisements on the site, he pointed out that that would be inappropriate on a site offering a paid service. Of course, he could choose to host ads on 'free' members' profile pages.

In addition, to reach out to people in rural areas who are unlikely to surf the Web to find a suitable mate, idontwantdowry.com offers a cheaper classifieds listing (costing Rs 250 only). This entails the subscriber calling a customer service helpline to share a telephone number to facilitate contact and, of course, the profile, which is listed on the site.

Another idontwantdowry.com activity is the arrangement of 'Swayamvarams' or offline matrimonial meetings held at convenient venues, where registered members can interact face-to-face with prospective brides and grooms.

Being innovative, generating profits

Thirty months on, the site has crossed the break-even point. Naresh expects the site to make money from its fourth operational year. He is patient about waiting for the site to prove its profitability, as he points out that it is, after all, about changing peoples' mindsets. Interestingly, although members have said no to dowry, he shares that they still pay close attention to a potential mates' social caste and religion. Evidently, changing mindsets takes time!

Nevertheless, the fact that there are no similar services to idontwantdowry.com and no offline marriage bureaus dedicated to arranging matches without dowry, goes in the site's favour. The business is undoubtedly a novel endeavour, made even more special by an allied site quitdowry.com that functions as an interactive portal for members and others to voice their experiences and thoughts about the dowry system.

The proof of the pudding, as they say, lies in the eating. At 35, Naresh is still unmarried (by choice). We ask him if he would use the site to find his match. "Why not?" he quips, "After all, I endorse idontwantdowry.com's tagline 'I want just u, I don't want dowry!'" 