

# Naveen Jain: A Visionary for the 21st Century

By James Zebora, Principal, The Dilenschneider Group, Inc.

**EDITORS' NOTE** Naveen Jain is an entrepreneur, philanthropist, and a technology pioneer. He is founder of Moon Express, Intelius, and InfoSpace. Jain is a trustee of the board at the X PRIZE Foundation and of Singularity University. He is also a member of Pacific Council on International Policy. He has been awarded many honors for his entrepreneurial successes and leadership skills including "Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year", "Albert Einstein Technology Medal", "Most Admired Serial Entrepreneur", "Light of India Award" by Times Group, and "Top 20 Entrepreneurs" by Red Herring.

**COMPANY BRIEF** Intelius ([www.intelius.com](http://www.intelius.com)) is a leading Web services company that uses proprietary big data technology to make it easy for consumers to manage their online identities and communicate with their families in a trusted network, and for businesses to hire trusted employees. Continually ranked among the top 100 commerce sites on the Internet, Intelius' award-winning products and services include identity management, online reputation management, and talent management.

NAVEEN JAIN IS WALKING AND TALKING ON HIS MOBILE phone and it's hard to keep up – physically and mentally.

This 52 year-old technologist, serial entrepreneur, social engineer, and philanthropist may be one of the most influential 21st century leaders that you've never heard of. It's likely because he is moving too fast to allow fame to catch up.

He recently debuted a lunar lander being prototyped by Moon Express (one of his many companies) for today's next-generation race to the Moon. The venue was the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California, where a gathering of government types and potential customers and investors heard him explain how, thanks to Moon Express, the Moon will soon be viewed as "just another continent".

But the end of the event brings more time to consider other incredible visions in areas as disparate as biology, education, neuroscience, medicine, and new ways to use the Internet to benefit all of those fields and more.

"The guy just never stops thinking, dreaming, imagining. He only sees possibilities, not barriers," says noted Harvard fellow and entrepreneurship guru Vivek Wadhwa.

The roots of Jain's passion and creativity lie in his impoverished childhood in rural India where daily existence presented then-insurmountable problems.

His father – a civil servant who refused the commonplace practice of accepting bribes – instilled integrity and honor in his children by example, even when it resulted in poverty. Jain and his siblings took their lessons in country classrooms where the dirt floor also served as the chalkboard. Against the odds, he gained acceptance to and graduated from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), one of a handful of globally acclaimed Indian academic institutions.

For as long as he could remember, Jain dreamed of a better life in America. The PC revolution underway during his studies at IIT provided him with a way to make his dream a reality. In 1983, he came to the United States on a business exchange program.

While a Microsoft executive in the 1990s, Jain helped bring to reality the greatest paradigm shift since the Industrial Revolution. He



Naveen Jain, Trustee of X PRIZE and Co-Chair of Global Development and Education (above) and enjoying weightlessness with the ZERO-G experience (right)



is listed on three Microsoft patents and was key to the development of MS-DOS, Windows NT, and Windows 95.

In 1996, he launched InfoSpace, which quickly became the leading provider of information on mobile phones. "I knew the power the Web could put in the hands of everyday people with smartphones, even in those early days of the Internet," recalls Jain.

Wall Street agreed and InfoSpace exploded into the public equity markets, soaring to a market capitalization of \$32 billion. The company's fortunes sagged when the Internet bubble burst at the new millennium, and InfoSpace shares, like those of other Internet and technology companies, plunged. "Losing billions of net worth on paper didn't bother me," says Jain.

But opportunistic lawyers sued in the aftermath of the stock downturn claiming that the drop in their portfolio was to be blamed on the management team. Jain denied these unfounded allegations. The U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission agreed with Jain and asked the court to dismiss the lawsuit. Independent experts also concluded that Jain had not done anything wrong. InfoSpace insurance company settled the litigation out of court to avoid continued distractions and the case was dismissed. Jain saw his honor and integrity suffer a first-ever public beating in the local Seattle business press.

He determined from that point on to devote an ever-increasing portion of his energy and talent to affecting positive change in the world.

In 2003, he left InfoSpace to launch Intelius, one of the first companies to offer public records information to consumers. Again, Jain correctly identified a coming trend where new data storage and data-mining technologies would allow individuals and businesses to manage their online identities, communicate with others inside a trusted network, and hire trusted employees. Eight years after its founding by Jain, Intelius is a profitable success with 350 employees and over \$150 million in annual revenues.

With similar results at Moon Express, Jain is moving closer to living out a childhood fantasy. Some would say his improbable road to success has been a fantasy fulfilled.

As a boy in impoverished rural India, the shining disc in the sky intrigued him – what secrets did it hold and how could they be discovered? As an adult and scientist, he knows beneath the surface of the moon lie vast stores of essential and valuable rare Earth metals. A modern-day gold rush to access those riches is

in full swing and Jain finds himself at the head of it.

But as he vowed to do, Jain allows his commercial ventures like Moon Express and Intelius only to dominate a portion of his time and talent; the rest he devotes to making a positive impact in the world using innovation and entrepreneurship. He currently serves as a trustee on the board of Singularity University and the X PRIZE Foundations, two nonprofit organizations who are using technology and incentive prizes to solve many of the grand challenges facing humanity.

In addition, Jain is a committed philanthropist who generously gives to dozens of local and global charities including Intrepid Fallen



Heroes Fund, United Way, Children's Hospital, YouthCare, Hopelink, Treehouse, and Bellevue LifeSpring, University of Washington, and many young entrepreneurial nonprofit organizations. "God has been kind to my family," says Jain. "So now it is our duty to give back to the world and make philanthropy a calling on par with our business ventures."

He takes joy in helping his children set out on their own entrepreneurial and philanthropic journeys. Daughter Priyanka, 17, is the founder and president of iCAREweCARE.org, a social network that connects philanthropically minded high school and college students with local opportunities to give. The United Nations Foundation named her a "Teen Role Model" and "Teen Advisor".

Son Ankur, 21, is the founder and chairman of The Kairos Society ([www.KairosSociety.org](http://www.KairosSociety.org)), a global nonprofit that fosters connections and offers fellowships to young entrepreneurs around the globe.

Former U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Vice-Chair William Owens serves on the Kairos board (along with Boeing CEO Phil Condit

and other business and social luminaries). "Seeing Naveen's kids give back so enthusiastically and put their entrepreneurial smarts into crucial causes at such a young age is a testament to how well he has instilled in them the duty to serve," says Owens. "I give all the credit to Naveen as a role model to them and as a tough-love parent who not only showed them the way but instilled in them the strong and sincere desire to make positive impact in the world."

To encourage the application of technology to cure global disease, in May of this year, Jain funded a \$1-million award for the "Digital Doctor" competition. The prize will go to the first team to build an easy-to-use, tablet- or laptop-based system that can accurately diagnose regional diseases afflicting billions of people in developing nations – problems he witnessed firsthand in his youth.

Jain also wants to develop products and methods that radically improve education through applied neuroscience. To date, the marriage being neuroscience and education has not yielded demonstrative results, something Jain says he hopes to remedy.

Leading technology thinkers also speak highly of Jain and his vision. "Naveen has a rare combination of energy, optimism, and vision. He is an incredible 'can-do' thinker. This is why he has been

such a successful entrepreneur," says Peter H. Diamandis, the CEO of the X PRIZE Foundation and a space entrepreneur himself. "Naveen envisions the ideal future and is willing to invest his time and hard-earned resources to bring that future into existence. He's also willing to jump in and back entrepreneurs with big dreams, helping to guide them across the chasm from concept to reality."

If these dreams weren't enough, Jain shares one more what-if: "Imagine," he enthuses, "if through synthetic biology we could engineer a bacteria that would produce a clean replacement for fossil fuels? We could both fight global warming and stabilize the world's energy supply. The breakthroughs in that field have been amazing. It's something I've been thinking about a lot lately," he says.

But considering that this dreamer began his life as a poor child in India and found his way to America where he would become one of the most successful and influential futurists in western culture, it would be foolish not to pay heed to the miracles he plans. ●