

BUILDING INDIA'S DIGITAL BACKBONE: SANDEEP DONDE ON MICROSCAN'S FIBER EXPANSION, OTT DISRUPTION, AND THE FUTURE OF CONNECTIVITY

From pioneering fiber networks to driving OTT innovation, Sandeep Donde has been at the forefront of India's digital transformation for over two decades. As the Founder and MD of Microscan, he recognized the potential of fiber optics early on, shaping a company that not only delivers high-speed, reliable internet but also powers one of India's fastest-growing OTT aggregators, PlayboxTV. In this conversation, Donde shares insights on Microscan's expansion beyond Mumbai, its competitive edge in fiber networking, and how PlayboxTV is reshaping content consumption. He also discusses the role of AI in user engagement, the challenges SMEs face in adopting fiber solutions, and how India's 5G revolution will redefine the connectivity landscape.

Sandeep Donde, you founded Microscan in 1999—what was your vision then, and how has it evolved?

From the very beginning, I wanted to build something of my own, though the exact path wasn't clear. With fiber optics as my domain, I saw its potential to transform connectivity. In 2000, an opportunity in fiber splicing set everything in motion, shaping Microscan. Over time, the vision expanded from just deploying fiber to building a high-speed, reliable network that powers businesses and homes seamlessly. That vision led to founding Microscan.



SANDEEP DONDE

Founder & Managing Director, MICROSCAN

Microscan has expanded its fiber network beyond Mumbai to Kolhapur and Goa. What were the key drivers behind this expansion?

Mumbai's internet market became increasingly competitive, with multiple ISPs operating in almost every building. To scale sustainably, we had to look beyond the metro cities. The real opportunity lay in areas with low internet penetration,

where reliable connectivity was scarce. Kolhapur and Goa fit that profile perfectly. Our expansion was driven by the need to bridge the digital divide and provide high-quality internet services to smaller cities that lacked strong, dependable providers.

How does Microscan differentiate itself from competitors in the fiber



networking and internet services sector?

Microscan stands apart because of its expertise in fiber networking, 24/7 operations, and an unwavering commitment to uptime. Unlike many providers that struggle with consistency, we deliver committed speeds with near-zero downtime. Our strategic partnerships with major CDN players like Akamai, Google, and Microsoft ensure that content is closer to the end user, resulting in faster and more stable connectivity. Combined with our extensive fiber network, this gives our customers a seamless internet experience.

PlayboxTV has grown into India's 4th largest OTT platform. What sets it apart from other OTT services?

PlayboxTV is unique because it aggregates multiple OTT platforms into a single app, saving users the hassle of juggling multiple subscriptions. With PlayboxTV, users get a unified entertainment experience across devices like iOS, Android TV, Fire Stick, and Android boxes. A single subscription allows seamless streaming on both mobile and TV. Additionally, PlayboxTV enhances content discovery by recommending shows and surfacing free content, making entertainment

simpler and more accessible for users.

How does PlayboxTV leverage partnerships with ISPs and cable operators to enhance customer experience?

We see ISPs and cable operators as partners, not clients. They are our brand ambassadors, playing a crucial role in expanding PlayboxTV's reach across India. We support them with system integration, 24/7 customer service, and marketing materials tailored to their needs. Our dedicated customer support ensures quick issue resolution, fostering a

INTERVIEW

strong ecosystem where happy customers lead to happy partners. This collaborative approach has been instrumental in making PlayboxTV India's 4th largest OTT aggregator.

What role does AI or data analytics play in PlayboxTV's content recommendations and user engagement strategies?

AI and data analytics are central to how PlayboxTV personalizes the user experience. By analysing viewing history, demographics, and user interactions, our AI-driven system recommends content tailored to individual preferences. It continuously refines its suggestions based on user behaviour, helping people discover new shows and movies they might otherwise miss. AI also segments users with similar interests, optimizing content delivery and improving engagement. The result is a more immersive and satisfying entertainment experience.

What challenges do SMEs face in adopting fiber networking solutions, and how does Microscan address these pain points?

For SMEs, last-mile connectivity remains a major challenge. Many businesses struggle with unreliable networks that can't support their growing digital needs. Microscan solves this by ensuring fiber connectivity reaches directly to offices and buildings. We offer a robust, fiber-first infrastructure that guarantees stability, ensuring businesses get enterprise-grade internet without disruptions.

How has cloud migration, DevOps, and cybersecurity become integral to your offerings through Microscan Communications?



With increasing cyber threats, businesses need more than just internet connectivity—they need security and reliability. That's why we established

Microscan Communications, focusing on SOC (Security Operations Centre) and NOC (Network Operations Centre) services. These solutions help businesses safeguard their networks from cyber threats while ensuring seamless cloud migration and DevOps integration. By offering these services, we provide a comprehensive IT infrastructure solution beyond just connectivity.

With India's growing internet penetration and 5G rollout, how do you see the fiber network industry evolving in the next 5 years?

The fiber industry is set to grow exponentially. The rise of OTT platforms, data centres, and government policies requiring data localization will drive massive demand for fiber infrastructure. Additionally, the expansion of 5G will require extensive fiber backhaul, as small cells need high-speed connectivity to function effectively. With several new subsea cable landings planned in

Mumbai and surrounding areas, data consumption will skyrocket. Microscan is well-positioned to capitalize on this growth with its extensive fiber network and strategic locations.

Are there plans to expand Microscan's footprint to other regions in India?

Yes, we are actively expanding our presence beyond Maharashtra. We are entering key markets like Chennai, Bangalore, and Delhi to establish a nationwide fiber and NLD (National Long Distance) network. Our goal is to be a pan-India service provider, ensuring seamless connectivity across major business hubs.

What are the next big milestones for Microscan and its group companies?

The next big milestone is integrating our fiber network with India's subsea cable ecosystem, enabling high-speed global connectivity. We also plan to develop small edge data centres to support the increasing demand for cloud and enterprise solutions. Additionally, we are focused on enhancing utility-based fiber networks to further improve digital infrastructure across India. ■