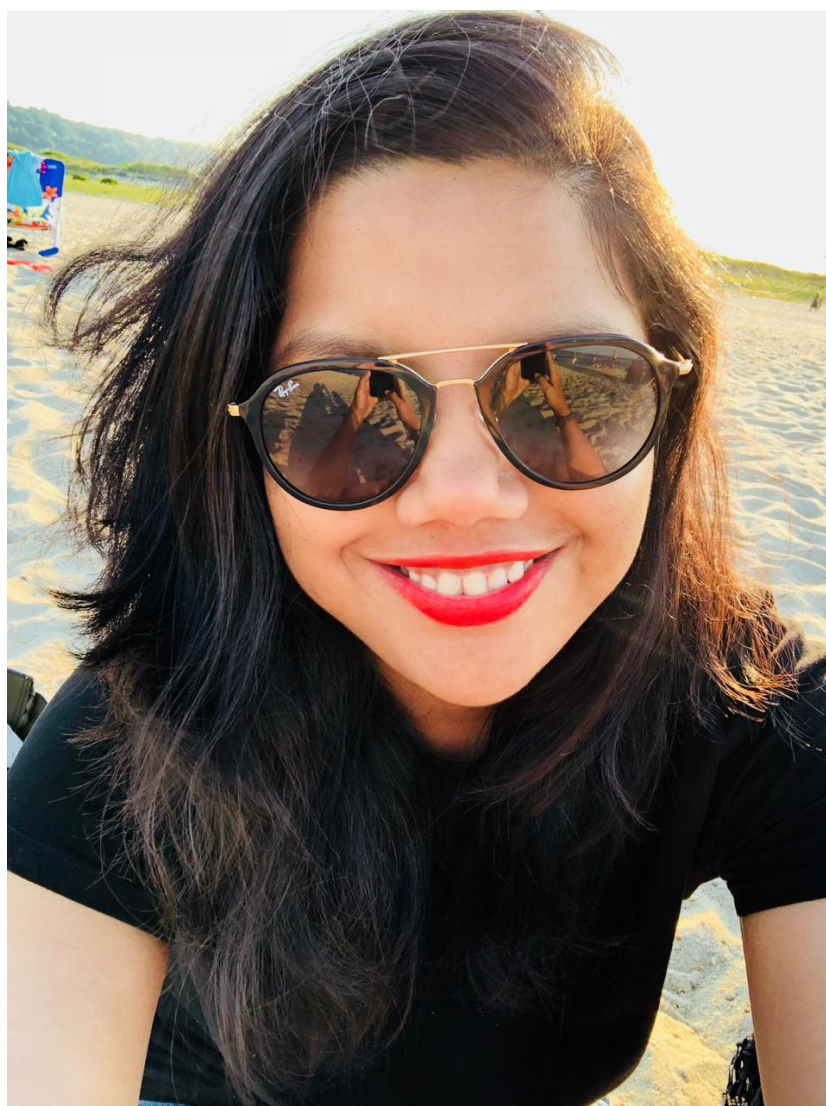




# Ask Me Anything #2

**Neha Rane**

**30th Jan 2021**



Neha is the Founder of Solstreet India and its American counterpart Solstreet USA - A marketing platform for organic & sustainable brands. She is also the co-founder of PAUSE, a yoga influenced wellness company. In addition to her entrepreneurial ventures, Neha is a Digital & Experiential Marketing professional at heart with over 8 years of experience!



**Creators Of Products: What inspired the idea to create a company like this? Did you see a market gap or did you chance upon it?**

**Neha Rane:** While living in London, I used to visit the farmers market every Sunday. That market had small brands that sold really interesting products that were organic & sustainable in nature and that led me to think about how these brands can reach the masses. And that's how I thought of starting Solstreet and creating a marketing & sales platform for small/sustainable & upcoming independent brands.

**Creators Of Products: What according to you is the future of purpose led brands? And does a brand's purpose always need to be egalitarian or can it be more materialistic?**

**Neha Rane:** I think we need purpose-led brands more than ever now. And as long the brand is doing clean business, it should be fine. But also, If the purpose is not matching with the brand value then it may seem like a forced PR gimmick.

**Creators Of Products: What according to you is the most important part of building a new age DTC brand, and where do most people trying to build one go wrong?**

**Neha Rane:** The most important part would be to build an organic relationship with the customer, something that can fuel long-term partnership. Most people go wrong when they try to rush the customer engagement process and just look at sales with the use of digital ads



**Creators Of Products: With independent brands picking up more aggressively, what are the various ways the brand's can market themselves?**

**Neha Rane:** I think independent brands can use their resources in building a real organic relationship with customers by focussing on offline marketing channels/platforms. One could be pop-ups ( what we do ) where they get actual face-time with the customer. We have seen this happen in our pop-ups where founders have built a loyal customer base by being candid about their products, how they create them etc. This also leads to word of mouth which again helps in generating free referrals.

**Creators Of Products: Why the model of solstreet instead of an e-commerce**

**Neha Rane:** We get this question a lot. So currently, we are looking into building an e-commerce model for our independent brands. But this wasn't the case before COVID. I think digital ads are losing the essence of creating loyal customers. And that's where we had seen the opportunity of creating an offline platform where potential customers can get to touch/see/sample the product before buying

**Creators Of Products: As a Founder, how do you split your time (and head space) between Solstreet and Pause? What made you start to pause while you were building Solstreet?**

**Neha Rane:** I was always inclined towards Yoga. I have been practicing it for the past 5 years now. And while building Solstreet ( stressful times in NYC ) I realized how important your mental health is and we don't do much to take care of it. Also, I had seen a lot of interest in Yoga in the west and



saw that there was no big Indian yoga brand there. That's when me and my co-founder Navneet thought that it was time to create a Yoga brand from India with a focus on Mental Health. PAUSE is a part of Navroop Yoga ( <https://navroopyoga.com/> ) which is a 15-year-old company from Bombay itself. And lastly, wellness is a big industry and it's just going to get bigger with time, hence we wanted to get into it at the right time

**Creators Of Products: What was your experience building a marketplace in two different geographies? What do you feel were the biggest learning in the process**

**Neha Rane:** I would say the USA is a tough market, especially NYC. For me, it was tough because I wasn't a local and I didn't live in the US before moving there to startup. Marketplaces are relatively new in India, especially offline ones. It's sometimes difficult for our team to explain the concept to independent brand owners but they are slowly getting it. The biggest learning was understanding the complexity of building business in the US and India. And how important it is to have an early investor on board ( which we didn't have )

**Creators Of Products: What are your favourite ways to validate an idea within a short span of time?**

**Neha Rane:** Create a scrappy version of your idea, test it ASAP and get feedback. And most importantly, if it fails, move on.

**Creators Of Products: What were the challenges in starting your business in India as against in the US**



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**Neha Rane:** Access to early-stage funding is the biggest challenge in India, it's much easier in the USA. The red-taping in India when it comes to funding via banks/schemes is a big time waster.

**Creators Of Products: What was the biggest challenge and learning from the journey of conceptualisation to implementation?**

**Neha Rane:** The biggest challenge was not having enough resources in the USA which were directly related to the fact that we had no early-stage investor in the company. It was self-funded by me and hence it added to more time to execute the concept.

**Creators Of Products: We have a brand which operates in beauty and wellness products for both men and women which directly competes with the likes of MamaEarth and Wow (which now turned out to very giant ) So my question is how can we as brand with limited funds market ourselves digitally efficiently so to create something to gain highest awareness and traction. Also an appreciable ROI. What strategic moves need to be taken?**

**Neha Rane:** Digitally, I would say that you can create useful content for your potential customers and maybe refrain from direct sales type of content (everyone is doing it ).And with beauty, it's hard to change habits. For example, I have used a brand of shampoo for many years, and for me to make that change I have to be really convinced. In that case, the more offline interactions you have with your potential customers and make them try your products the better it will work for you. One more thing, I also fell into the trap of buying Mama Earth by seeing their ads, and the product actually ruined my skin. So with beauty, you have to be very careful with promotions/gigs.



**Creators Of Products: How do you see digital marketing evolving with platforms such as TikTok and Clubhouse gaining popularity? Will this influence the way brands market and share content to a great extent? Would love to hear your thoughts!**

**Neha Rane:** I personally don't like TikTok but it has gained a lot of popularity. The same happened with Snapchat. Brands will have to be on these platforms only because people are there. The basis of these platforms is video marketing and it's only going to get bigger from here. I think in general if brands focus on creating video content, it would definitely give them an edge. And the shorter the video, the better it works.

**Creators Of Products: How to decide on the spend required for marketing of any brand? How do you tie it back with the expected**

**Neha Rane:** We don't usually use any formula. We set a separate budget for different channels and test them out first. Our main spend is usually on creating a relationship with customers rather than digital ads. I would also suggest taking it slow with spends and first see what's working rather than going with any trends.

**Creators Of Products: In terms of the wellness market, how do you think the Indian market is ready/not-ready in comparison to say US/Europe? In terms of awareness/readiness/willingness to buy/pay for services on a regular basis? What do you think would accelerate adoption?**

**Neha Rane:** Unfortunately, in India the importance of Yoga is very less, it's tagged as 'boring', most of the time. While in the west, people love yoga, so much that they created lame things like Goat yoga & beer yoga. Hence for India, we are doing things differently and creating shorter



mindfulness/yoga related sessions ( 15- 20 min max ) so that people understand that yoga is not just about asanas but a long-term lifestyle upgrade.

**Creators Of Products: How do you capture the next trends to include in your brand portfolio?**

**Neha Rane:** For trends you will actually have to spend time with customers and see how the shift is happening. For example, in our case ( since we work with small independent brands ) we are always checking out new pop-up markets, speaking with the attendees, etc

**Creators Of Products: How can one go about their 'no-click search' marketing strategy and improve their chances of getting featured in google's "featured snippet" area for when users ask questions?**

**Neha Rane:** The more aligned your content on the website is the better it can work for you. So make the content absolutely relevant and organic.

**Creators Of Products: What are the top digital marketing trends you are seeing this year?**

**Neha Rane:** I think this year video marketing is going to dominate along with quick easy-to-consume high quality content.

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