



## Chess Facilitators' Marketing Strategy

**The Preamble:** It started as a pipe dream of a mother who spends virtually 100 days in a year with her son in chess tournament halls.

Chess, especially for children, is an intense competitive activity. Peer pressure and pressures to achieve good results and trophies, ever pushing parents coupled with school pressures often makes conscientious parents wonder whether what they are doing is correct.

What is scholastic chess for kids? Is it pain or pleasure? Do they really enjoy the pressures in pursuit of glittering cups? Are they getting enough out of their childhood and will they enjoy their adolescence with their friends as much as we did in our time? Are we parents, doing the right thing in pushing the kids into this ocean? Never ending stream of questions with few answers.

Add the fact that, contrary to popular belief, scholastic chess is a terribly expensive pursuit, to the recipe. What is served is unadulterated confusion.

When a solution was available, introspection of a mother turned into a full blown passion. It was up to us to give it a good shape and make an organisation out of an idea.

**The Answer:** Well, not exactly. Part of the answer is more like it. Improveyourchess.com was a chance discovery. Suddenly, chess training became a pleasurable activity for promoter's son. At least, less monotonous. She wanted to make it available to everyone at an affordable cost and did not want to stop there. She wanted to develop a community and promote camaraderie among chess players. Chess Facilitators was born.

**The Arrangement:** Chess Facilitators have tied up with improveyourchess.com to be the Indian Hub of the premier chess training web site and we were hired to

- ❖ Devise the marketing strategy and prepare the business plan
- ❖ Explore Synergy, if any.
- ❖ Devise and implement the web plan

**The World Chess Environment:** Chess world is unbelievably huge. It has a highly objective rating system based on performance and strength of players. Climbing the totem pole is progressively difficult. Consider this pyramid. Approximately 400000 players are registered with world chess organisation FIDE



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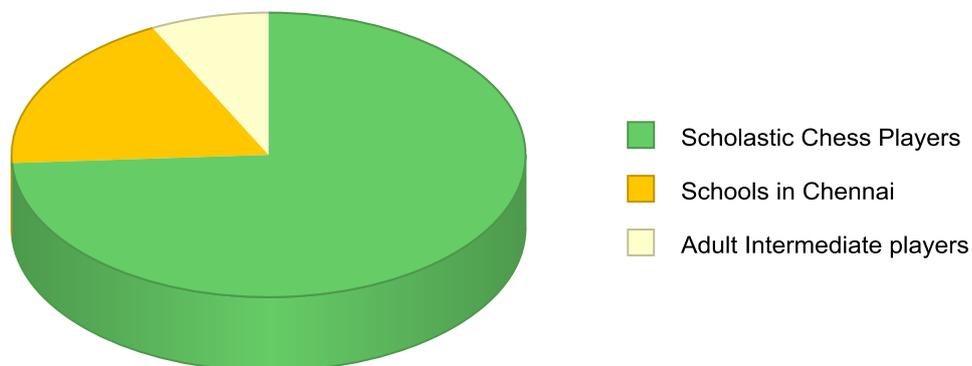
There is a huge market at the bottom of the pyramid. This is the market every player in the market wants to woo. Book publishers, online training sites, online chess playing sites, tournament organisers, coaches and trainers .... Everyone wants have a piece of this cake.

**The Indian Chess Scenario:** Chess scenario in India is quite vibrant. There are more than 60000 unique individuals who participate in at least one tournament in India. Out of this at least 50000 can use chess training.

**The Potential:** Our inquiries with [improveyourchess.com](http://improveyourchess.com) revealed that the membership to the site is next to nothing. We did a limited survey to find out the position of competing sites. Except chess playing site (this is not a training site) ICC no site boasts of any membership.

**The Segmentation:** After detailed study, analysis and brainstorming we decided to concentrate of scholastic chess segment and discarded the rest of the segment for the time being. Consider this pie diagram

Market Analysis (Pie)



There are various reasons why we zeroed in on this segment. Chess wise (apart from synergy) following are the reasons.

- A typical scholastic chess weekend tournament in India attracts more than 450 entries
- Tamil Nadu State Chess Association has nearly 4000 members. Nearly 3000 of them are less than 16 years of age.
- New Delhi City has 700 registered players. 400 of them are below 15 years.
- State of Gujarat has decided to introduce Chess in the curriculum of Schools and have started training teachers to teach chess at schools.
- [http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/sports/gujarat-to-promote-chess-in-schools\\_10048009.html](http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/sports/gujarat-to-promote-chess-in-schools_10048009.html)

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- Anand-NIIT initiative has taken chess to rural schools. Effect of this will slowly, but surely, be felt in tournament circuits.

Apart from sheer size there are other qualitative reasons why we chose scholastic chess as the thrust market segment.

- Exuberance and confidence of youth and their love for things new in life and peer pressure.
- They are the decision makers while someone else writes cheques!
- Parental anxiety to provide cutting edge differentiation for their wards.
- Parent's need for comparison. They wouldn't want their children to miss out on anything, even though, they cannot afford what is best in class.
- Product offered makes life of coaches easier, initial scepticism notwithstanding.

**And there is one other important reason**

**The Synergy:** Scholastic chess players are normally intelligent and the parents would want more and more from their kids. Tying up with educational training sites and having a simultaneous marketing effort makes lot of sense.

At the moment this information along with our web plan is privileged. We are not discussing them in this case study. We may be able to expand it at a later date.

**The Problems:** The major problem is the company's strength – the prime mover advantage. Internet culture as far as chess is concerned is nonexistent in India. Google Trends makes an interesting study. "Chess" gets 46000 hits in Google alone. If you benchmark it to India (World=1), India is less than 0.02. City level drill down results in "Not sufficient searches" even for Chennai. The birth place of Viswanathan Anand, the reigning world champion and chess capital of India! So, it is obvious that SEO alone is not going to fetch the desired results.

Second major problem is that the important players such as coaches and administrators are not Net Savvy. Quite a few State Chess Associations do not have a web site and the available web sites leave much to be desired. Coaches influence parents and they still by and large rely on photo copied chess books. They might even feel threatened by the new arrival. Especially the marginal ones. Like any other field chess coaches can also be classified as Good, Bad and Ugly. Carrying them along is another major challenge.

Finally, the reputation or lack of it of the promoter. A passionate mother turned entrepreneur who wants to make a difference, on her own cannot break ice. Contrary, is much more believable.

**The Solution:** The solution should obviously address the problems. Ideally, the solution should

- ❖ Make the chess administrators feel comfortable to the point of endorsing the venture.
- ❖ Make the coaches at the lower end of the spectrum get convinced that this membership will not replace them.

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- ❖ Create web culture among the chess community so that the venture becomes a [Blue Ocean Strategy](#).

Solution worked out by us was little unconventional.

- ❖ First, we chose a reputed and organised chess academy operating in the lowest block of chess player pyramid – T.Nagar Chess Academy. Demo was given, their students were asked to train in the system promoted by the company and give feedback. Our strategy was to make an academy as the business associates in some form and be our client's Ambassadors. So convinced were they, they readily became a major player in the venture. They have devised a training schedule for their students based on improve your chess dot com. It was a home run.
- ❖ Promotion was restricted to a small hand out that announces the web site address and asking them to visit the training site. Creation of Web Culture – An all important step towards creating Blue Ocean Strategy.
- ❖ T.Nagar Academy, makes it a point to give informal demos in tournament hall. Getting the children to peep in and getting their curiosity kindled. No direct sales pitch. They have to visit the web site decide about joining. Only direct sales pitch involved is alleviating the doubts of coaches and appointment of convinced coaches as resellers.
- ❖ In stage II, a major web site is being launched, which will have community space, blog, forum, slow chess server and an internet coaching interface using the web software that is being developed.

Initial response was overwhelming. Planned target was achieved. Stage II is being implemented now. We have permission to publish the complete story of one year operation in April'2010. Do visit us again.

Why don't you visit <http://improveyourchess.in/indexin.html> if you are interested in chess?