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# GuitarStreet | Music home delivered

An online marketplace for guitars and other instruments

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Utkarsh Apoorva (left) and Madhu G.B. of GuitarStreet. Photo: Aniruddha Chowdhury/Mint

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## Past life

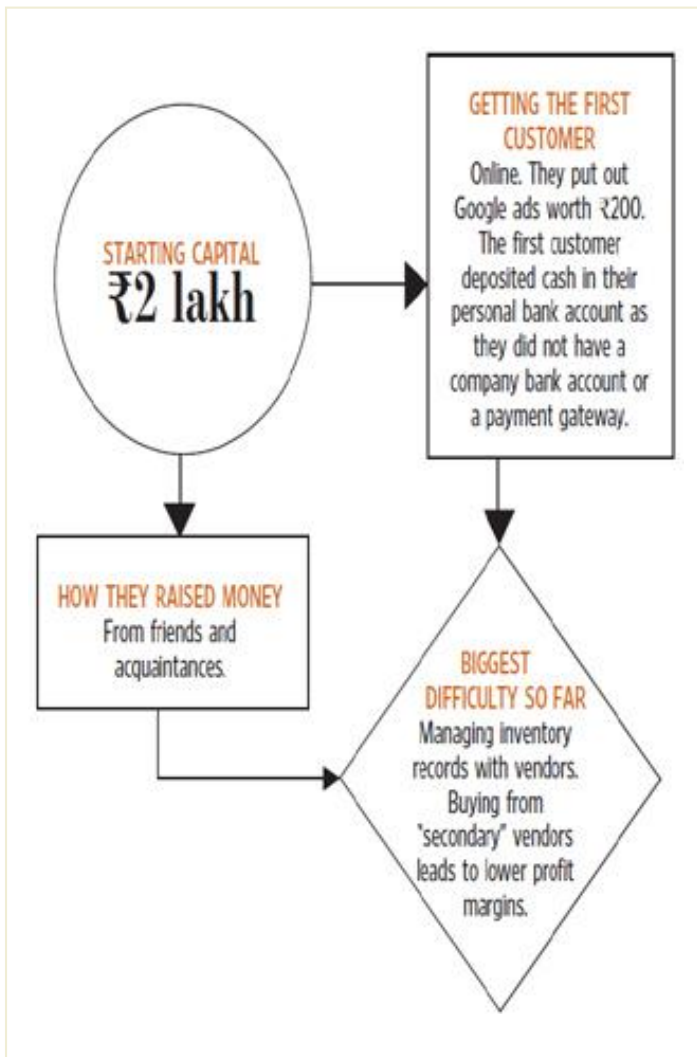
**Utkarsh Apoorva** and **Madhu G.B.** met through a common friend. "We connected on our love for technology and knew we had to work on something together," says Apoorva. While Madhu had done a lot of work on applications in his previous job, Apoorva was running

a start-up called Edulab.com when they met in 2011. “We got together in 2012 and wrote code for about eight products, all to do with e-commerce and how to help existing e-commerce sites increase sales,” says Madhu, who has a bachelor’s degree in computer science from the University of Mysore. Apoorva, an engineer from the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, recalls they had all this code at hand but didn’t know how to put it to best use.

## **Eureka moment**

The duo met **Saket Jalan**, who runs a chain of stores selling musical instruments, on Bangalore’s Brigade Road. “There were a few other ideas that we worked on and then just focused on working with guitars when we met Saket,” says Apoorva, who plays the guitar himself.

While the idea was taking shape, Apoorva recalled the trouble he had when he bought his first guitar, in his second year of engineering. “My father and I went to Chandni Chowk (Delhi) and walked around a lot before we found a small shop with 15-20 guitars,” says Apoorva. His own issues validated the idea behind Guitarstreet.in. “So we said, let’s do it and see how it comes together,” says Madhu. They did not have any backup inventory of products; in fact they didn’t even have a bank account.



## Genesis

They started GuitarStreet in October, doubtful if people would buy musical instruments without touching and feeling the instrument. They got their first order for a Yamaha F310 guitar within two days of going live. “We didn’t have a bank account and the customer was willing to pay into our personal accounts,” recalls Apoorva. They bought the order from a retailer at market price and sold it at a lesser price. “So we made a loss on our first sale,” says Madhu, laughing.

The duo thought that a beginner buying a guitar online might be a rarity. “But later, we saw a pattern. The orders were coming in from smaller towns. People

valued convenience and the range that they got on the site,” says Apoorva.

Within three months, business picked up. They added a blog to their website and launched a Facebook page. They even had offers to attract repeat customers. In April, they broke even.

The company works on a zero inventory model, sourcing musical instruments from suppliers only after an order has been placed, and operate on a “return with no questions asked policy”. “Even if you change your mind and there is nothing wrong with the instrument, we take it back,” says Madhu, adding that as a start-up, they can’t survive if they cut corners now.

GuitarStreet sells about 150 guitars a month. The website also has other musical instruments like drum kits and keyboards, but guitars are the most popular. In addition, they have organized a couple of “guitar trips”, which are advertised on their Facebook page—anybody with a guitar can sign up. “We have a concept called ‘guitar and travel’ in which we organize a trip where beginners travel to a place like Coorg and learn to play

their instruments for two-three days," says Madhu.

## Reality check

In January, they wondered if they would be able to scale up the business with their current model of zero inventory. They looked for investors and found interested parties almost immediately. "In the same month, the site began registering several more clicks, as did the Facebook page," says Apoorva.



They decided to hold off on funding but restructured sourcing to ensure scalability.

## Plan B

"The company has grown organically so far," says Apoorva. They will move into another area of e-commerce if this doesn't work. "We have many ideas," says Madhu,

smiling.

## Secret sauce

One of the key drivers of the site is convenience. "Our business comes from smaller cities or from people who live away from the centre of the city," says Apoorva. The best stores in a tier 2 city will have about a hundred guitars. "More than touch and feel, it's trust that goes into the purchase. They call us to understand if they are making the right choice. As a start-up we also give in to price negotiation," says Madhu.

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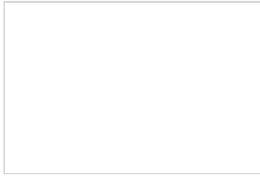
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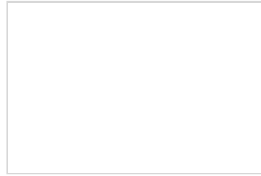
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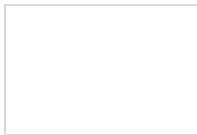
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