

Cultivating a Love of LEARNING

Smart Kidz Club's curated collection takes a digital approach to learning



Surinder Sharma, Founder, Smart Kidz Club

The only child of a first-grade teacher, Surinder Sharma found comfort in books at an early age. "Books were my constant companion," recalls Sharma, who grew up in New Delhi, India. She passed that love on to her first son, who was reading Harry Potter in first grade.

But by the time Sharma had her second son, she noticed that children reached for electronic devices more often than books. "They were playing games," she says of her children's peers. "The interest in reading paper books was waning."

To inspire kids to read and learn, Sharma and her husband, Harjeet Singh, started Smart Kidz Club in 2013. The Bear-based company's digital library, designed for elementary school children, includes narrated and illustrated ebooks. There are no ads, videos or animation.

The collection caught the eye of the NFL Alumni Association's Caring for Kids initiative, which seeks to bring books to underserved and underprivileged children. The association's Read to Lead campaign helps parents support children's literacy and addresses the learning gaps exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In July, Smart Kidz Club and the Association partnered to produce the Read to Lead app.

Sharma and Singh are no strangers to the publishing industry. After moving to the United States when Singh was in graduate school, they started Spearhead Global, specializing in academic publishing projects. The company expanded to include CD-ROMs, apps and test-prep engines. "Print publishing was shrinking, and publishers were moving more and more into the digital world," Sharma says.

Initially, Smart Kidz Club was a passion product. Sharma wanted to instill a love for learning at an early age. "We wanted to develop something so young kids could learn on their own devices," explains Sharma, the company's CEO. "We were making software engines for other companies. Why don't we start something for young kids?"

Singh has technical expertise, and Sharma handles the creative, including the app design, illustration and author contacts. "We make sure the content is of a superior quality. Kids need to know more about this world and reflect the diversity," she says.

Initially, the content was on both the web and mobile devices. Parents, however, preferred to use mobile devices, perhaps because online connectivity can be unreliable. By 2020, the library shifted to a mobile-only offering.

There are about 500,000 subscribers, who have options. Parents can choose the budget-friendly Read to Me app or the advanced Premium Library app with flashcards, quizzes, math, puzzles and interactive activities.



In response to the pandemic, Smart Kidz Club developed a classroom app to connect teachers, parents and students. However, that app is only available abroad, where distributors have existing relationships with schools. It does not matter that the books are in English. Learning that language is a top priority in other nations, particularly in Asia. Smart Kidz Club will provide translations on an individual case basis.

Since Smart Kidz Club has a global reach, Sharma appreciates the many Delaware services that support business, including Global Delaware, the state's international economic development initiative. "Delaware, in terms of the ease of doing business and being a small state," she says, "is a great place to be."

As for the future, Smart Kidz Club adds new content each week, and the library will continue to feature books with a multicultural view. "There's so much diversity in everything — animals, plants, culture, people," Sharma says. "The more children expose themselves to the world, the more likely they will grow up to be tolerant adults."

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