In an exclusive interview with Hello Entrepreneurs, the CEO and Co-Founder of Infocepts explains his journey from incepting the company in 2004 to the latest trends in Data Analytics and AI

Shashank Garg

explains how the power of data can solve business challenges

Q Take me back to 2004… you're starting Infocepts with just 10 people, did you always see this scale coming, or were you just figuring it out day by day?

A Honestly? Mostly figuring it out. Rohit and I had just left MicroStrategy. We had conviction, we had each other, and we had this one crazy belief: that data would run the world one day. We started in Nagpur with a small team and zero glamour. Our first office was less 'Silicon Valley startup' and more 'we found a table and plugged in laptops.'

What we did have was a clear focus. Data and analytics. That's it. No scope creep, no chasing every shiny trend. That discipline paid off.

The funny thing is, if I had a perfect AI-generated forecast of where Infocepts would be today, I probably would have been too scared to start. Ignorance, in entrepreneurship, is sometimes your best asset. Today we use AI to predict everything for our clients. Back then, gut and our conviction was our only model.

Q You work closely with Fortune 500 CXOs, honestly, what's something they say about AI or data that sounds good, but you know they don't fully get yet?

A Oh, this one's easy. "We're building an AI strategy."

I hear it in every second conversation and boardroom discussions. It sounds sharp. It lands well in earnings calls. But when you peel it back, what they really have is a PowerPoint with the word "AI" in 48-point font and a pilot project that's been in "pilot" for 12-18 months.

The thing most CXOs still miss: AI is only as smart as the data feeding it. You can't buy the fanciest AI model in the market and pour messy, untrusted, siloed data into it and expect magic. What comes out will be confident gibberish delivered at machine speed.

Data foundation first. AI on top. In that order. Always.

The good news is that the smartest leaders are starting to get this. The ones who ask me 'how clean or structured is our data?' before asking 'which AI tool should we buy?' Those are the ones winning.

Q Everyone talks about being 'data-driven' these days… but from your experience, where do companies actually get stuck in real life?

A The gap between 'data-driven' on a slide and 'data-driven' in a Monday morning meeting is enormous.

Here's where companies actually get stuck. First, they drown in dashboards. We've seen clients with 400 dashboards and nobody opening most of them. At Infocepts we call it being "data-rich but insight-poor." It's like having a treasure chest but no key. All that gold, just sitting there.

Second, data ownership turns into a turf war. Finance won't share with Operations. Marketing has its own numbers. Everyone's right and everyone's wrong at the same time.

Third, and this is the big one: they use AI to automate bad processes instead of fixing the process first. You end up with a faster version of the wrong answer.

The companies that get unstuck are the ones that stop asking 'what does the data say?' and start asking 'what decision are we trying to make?' That shift sounds small. It changes everything.

Q Growing from 10 to 1500+ people is no joke, was there ever a moment where you felt like, "this could break if we don't fix something now"?

A Several moments. I'll give you the honest version.

There was a point when we crossed 300 people and I realized I no longer knew everyone's name. That hit me hard. Culture, at Infocepts, was never a policy. It was always personal. It was the late-night conversations in the Nagpur office, the team that stayed back to fix a client crisis, the way we treated each other. How do you bottle that and scale it?

We had to build systems. Not to replace the culture but to build on it. We leaned on data, actually. We started tracking engagement, team health, delivery quality in ways we never had before. We used tools to spot attrition signals early. We used data to keep the human element alive. That's kind of poetic for a data company.

The honest advice: when you feel the culture starting to fray, don't wait. Fix it before it becomes a headline on Glassdoor.

Q For someone young listening to this… maybe a student or early professional, what should they really be focusing on if they want to build a career in AI and data?

A Stop trying to memorize tools. Tools change every six months. What you

Q I'm curious, what's one project or moment where you saw data completely flip a business decision on its head?

A I can't name the client, but I'll paint the picture. Large retail company. Leadership had already decided to shut down a set of regional stores. Investment case was closed. Resources were being reallocated. Goodbye stores.

We were brought in for a different engagement. While we were building out their data foundation, we noticed something odd in the numbers. Those 'underperforming' stores were actually anchor purchase triggers. Customers who browsed those physical stores ended up buying significantly more online within 48 hours.

The stores weren't failing. They were feeding the digital funnel. The data just wasn't stitched together to show it.

They didn't close those stores. In fact, they opened more.

That's the moment I stop and tell every sceptic: AI and data don't just improve decisions. Sometimes they save you from catastrophic ones. The model caught what the gut missed.

know today in AI will be outdated by the time you finish reading this answer.

Learn to think. Learn to ask the right question before you open a laptop. Learn business context. The best data scientists I've hired weren't the ones who could write the cleanest Python. They were the ones who could walk into a business meeting and understand what actually mattered.

Also: build your data intuition early. Get comfortable being wrong and then using data to figure out why. That loop of hypothesis, test, learn is the most important skill in AI. Machines are getting better at everything except knowing what question to ask. That's still a human job.

And one more thing. Be curious about business outcomes, not just models. If you can bridge data science and business impact, you will never be unemployed. Ever. That's a promise.

Q You mentor startups as well, when you meet founders early on, what's that one signal where you instantly feel, 'okay, this one might actually make it'?

A It's not the idea. Ideas are cheap. Everyone has one.

It's not the deck either. I've seen beautiful decks built on terrible thinking.

The signal I watch for is how a founder handles a hard question. Do they deflect? Do they oversell? Or do they pause, say "I don't know yet, but here's how I'm finding out," and then show you the data behind their thinking?

That intellectual honesty combined with relentless curiosity is rare. When I see it, I lean in.

The other thing I watch: how do they talk about failure? Every founder has had something not work. The ones who've learned from it and can articulate what the data or the market told them: those are the ones I back.

Frankly, the best founders think like data scientists. They form hypotheses. They run experiments. They don't fall in love with their first answer. That's the AI mindset applied to building a company.

Q You're into running and fitness too, does that mindset spill over into how you lead? Like, do you approach business challenges the same way you approach a marathon?

A Completely. Running taught me more about leadership than any MBA curriculum.

In a marathon, the first 10 miles feel easy. Miles 18 to 22 are where the real race begins. Business is exactly the same. The early wins are exciting. The hard yards come when the market shifts, when a key client churns, when a competitor gets funded and you haven't. That's the test of character.

Running also taught me the danger of sprinting too early. I've seen startups burn through cash and people trying to 'go big fast.' They hit the wall at mile 20 with nothing left. Pacing is strategy. And then there's the data side of it. I track every run. Heart rate, cadence, recovery time. I use coaching tools to optimize training. If I'm not learning from the numbers, I'm just running circles. Same philosophy at Infocepts. We are obsessive about measuring what matters.

Orange City Runners, the NGO I started in Nagpur, has now put over 5,000 people on running tracks. And I'll tell you: the moment someone runs their first 5K and realizes they're capable of more than they thought, that's exactly what I want every Infoceptian to feel in their career. Data, discipline, and a good pair of shoes. That's the formula.

Q And looking ahead… what's something big coming in AI and data that people are still underestimating right now?

A Agentic AI. By a mile.

Everyone is talking about chatbots and copilots. And yes, they're useful. But the real shift coming is autonomous AI agents: systems that don't just answer questions but actually go execute multi-step work independently. Imagine an AI agent that monitors your supply chain, detects a disruption, sources alternatives, runs a cost simulation, and recommends action all before your operations team has finished their morning coffee.

We're not far from this. In many enterprises, the early versions are already running.

The underestimated part is the data infrastructure required to make this work safely. Agents need trusted, governed, real-time data. Without that foundation, autonomous AI doesn't become powerful. It becomes dangerous. Confident and wrong, running at machine speed, with nobody to catch it.

The companies investing in data trust and AI governance today are the ones who will actually benefit from agentic AI tomorrow. The others will be cleaning up messes.

That's the race we're helping enterprises win at Infocepts. And we're just getting started.

Q And at last, what are you doing this National Tech Day? Any new initiative that you are planning or something new please let us know…

A National Tech Day feels especially meaningful this year. Because the tech story in India isn't just about code anymore. It's about intelligence: artificial, collective, and applied.

At Infocepts, we're using this day to deepen our commitment to something close to my heart: making AI and data skills accessible to the next generation of Indian talent. We're expanding our internal AI upskilling programs to include community outreach, specifically targeting young professionals in Tier 2 cities like Nagpur who often don't get the same exposure as their counterparts in the metros.

We believe the next great AI idea won't come from a corner office in a tech hub. It might come from a curious 23-year-old. Our job is to make sure they have the tools, the training, and the mindset to make it happen.

And of course, I'm running in the morning. That part never changes. Because even on National Tech Day, the best ideas still come at mile 4.