A Genie of Modern Times

Desperately Seeking Dhaka is a growing online community where people from every walk of life can post their queries and expect an answer from fellow members. As DSD will be a year old on the June 16, 2014 with over 29,000 members and growing, *the Star* takes a look at the forum to see what makes it different from the rest.

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"DS (Desperately Seeking) for a second hand Samsung Galaxy," "DS swimming classes in Dhanmondi," 'DS for an online site to watch TV series." Sounds familiar? In the face of our ever increasing demands, Desperately Seeking Dhaka (DSD) seems like a blessing to the Facebookers of the capital city. Starting from a single flavoured cake to a whole bakery, whatever your query might be, just post it on the wall of Desparately Seeking Dhaka and wait for a few minutes. Voila! You will find hundreds of people participating in your thread trying to address your query.

The concept behind DSD had existed long before but in a different fashion. Remember reading those personal sections in newspapers that began with "desperately seeking"? The idea has now moved to the internet where people can disseminate information more easily. "I would always visit Desperately Seeking Bangkok, where mostly expats seek information, as there are not many English speaking locals there, which makes communication quite difficult," explains Nazia Tariq the initiator of the group. "I felt that such a group for our city, for all, could be very useful and the limitations that life brings in where interactions between people are restricted because of not being at the right place at the right time, could be eliminated. That is how the concept of DSD was born on the 16th of June, 2013."

Initially Nazia started the group with her Facebook friends and family and their friends and family and then slowly it expanded to include everyone. That's how desperate people were for the site. The main objective of DSD is to pool information and resources so as to make them easily available to the people of Dhaka. On DSD, people can also sell their personal belongings starting from apartments to pens and pencils. "DSD is free of politics, religion and guns," claims Nazia.

You might ask how difficult can running a Facebook page be? Very difficult, we would say. A virtual community that is open to everyone, one where people talk, seek information, sometimes argue, and given the fact that we are blessed with a great number of spammers, running such a diverse mixed bag community is almost like managing a physical community . In order to maintain the group, certain policies have been outlined and restrictions have been made, which a very small percentage of people find very difficult to follow. But those people are usually blocked out of the group as they only cause negativity, Nazia informs us. "The challenges are dealing with people who disrespect other members, makes posts for fun or out of boredom, internet bullies, and trouble makers joining the group with intent to stir up some kind of a conflict," says Nazia. "Most of the time we admins just delete such posts and block such members, but sometimes we need to intervene and as a result, my inbox is left with nasty messages, mostly involving sexually harassing comments as I am a woman and that's the first form of abuse faced by women worldwide."

But the people who want to dupe others over DSD, here is a bad news for you. DSD has members from the Dhaka Metropolitan Police, RAB and the DGFI who can monitor posts and take necessary steps when required. So pranksters, you've been warned!

Whatever difficulty is coming in Nazia's way, she is embracing it as a challenge in a path to achieve something bigger. "A few people have asked me to change the group from open to closed, to filter out the 'type' of people that get to be members, and so on, but I have always made it clear that my goal is to be 'inclusive' not 'exclusive," says Nazia. "It's a long road but the elitists need to change their attitudes. This is only possible when everyone realizes that opportunities exist for all and it's up to each individual how they utilize it, whether they utilize it at all or abuse it."

Nazia along with other admins have invested a lot of time and effort into Desperately Seeking Dhaka. They have made sure that the group is registered and trademarked, and the policies get updated as the group grows.

In the last one year, the DSD family has become bigger, and the number of people who are benefitted through this group is huge. "A lot of people post seeking blood donors, and have been helped and are very grateful. Employers post job openings and people have found jobs and been very happy with the results," says Nazia. "When these people thank me genuinely for creating the platform and helping them and making their lives easier, I feel like I have done something right."