

Alphalake Ai

Friday 14th May, 2021

Dear Friends,

I was fortunate to travel to India in 2019, visiting the very green yet also populous state of Maharashtra, where we set-up the Alphalake AI development and services hub. Over the two years that have since followed, I've been in almost daily communication with someone in India, as we've worked together building up the business. We're a tight-knit team that's had to overcome our fair share of challenges and work through setbacks, but we've also, thankfully, celebrated many successes together.

As a start-up navigating uncertain times, we've had to remain very agile and adapt as things have rapidly changed around us. A trust and integrity has grown through this time and as we've come through everything, a team has emerged that shares a mutual respect. Values that brought us together in the first place have cultivated and become even stronger.

Alongside start-up life, I am grateful for being afforded the opportunity to learn in such a direct and honest way the different cultures, traditions and vastness of India as a country from people I have come to know and respect greatly.

We're a small team at Alphalake, but one that is proudly international and multicultural. Working out of the UK, India, Australia and sometimes the UAE, we all as individuals have expanded our horizons and learned more about the world from each other. Mainly through the medium of video calls in these troubling times, we've formed a bond that extends beyond our professional relationships.

When the pandemic first hit Europe in 2020, one of my early thoughts was what would happen in the world's poorer nations, such as India, where vast populations, crowded cities and limited healthcare infrastructure would surely be disastrous. It was reassuring to discover, for whatever reason, that the virus was seemingly inflicting less harm on populations such as India, as data were showing the rate of death or severe illness from the virus was less in India than it was in Europe or the US.

Despite lower deaths and hospitalisations, lockdowns have been extremely strict, especially those living in large cities like Pune, Mumbai and Delhi. The country was rightly fearing what a pandemic ripping through crowded, urban populations would do to its healthcare system.

Despite this sacrifice on normal daily lives, however, early hopes that somehow India was being spared from the worst of the pandemic have now been dashed. The strictest of lockdowns, whilst mitigating an even worse situation, have failed to subdue the spread of a now mutated virus that's become highly contagious. Attempts to prevent a rush on India's city hospitals has ultimately and very sadly been in vain. Those early worst fears

have very sadly become reality as a country of 1.3 billion people with an under-equipped healthcare system is now simply overwhelmed.

As this wave of infections has cloaked their neighbourhoods, our team has lived through a state of very strict lockdowns, keeping them indoors for much extended periods of time. My colleagues have for months had to endure being unable to leave their homes except that is to exercise in the small outdoor neighbourhood spaces that are in their immediate vicinity. Even before the most recent surge in cases, the pandemic for people living in India has meant a very different experience than it has for those of us even in the worst hit so-called Western nations.

Even food in India is distributed to homes, so stepping out to buy groceries, which offered a break from being indoors and some semblance of normality for so many, has not existed for most Indian people. Add to this that most live in smaller homes often with multigenerational families and a sense of perspective starts to emerge.

Despite the challenges and as a testament to their character, none of the Alphalake team have ever complained, preferring to instead focus on continuing to do the great work they do. Pride in one's work is a common thread that I've come to recognise and admire in the Indian people as I've worked over the past few years.

Avoidable loss of life

A close colleague, Alwin Fernandes and Alphalake's Head of Global Services, who lives in Mumbai told me last week that his neighbour had died. A lady only in her late 50's, had not died from coronavirus, but as a result of not being able to access medical care after suffering from a stroke. The people around her from what I understand to be a close neighbourhood community had been unable to get a doctor to see her or get her admitted into a hospital. Nor could they afford the extortionate rates some private doctors were charging to see patients. Alwin's neighbour died at home, several days after experiencing a stroke, having received no medical care.

Learning this shocking and very sad story moved me, as it would anyone. But it also taught me the harsh severity of the healthcare situation that India was facing. With approximately 380,000 new COVID-19 cases being recorded every day, the lack of oxygen and emergency care for Covid patients is only the tip of the iceberg. The wider healthcare system is simply unable to cope.

As a team, we've felt urged to do something to help. We decided we wanted to launch a fundraising campaign and that any money raised should go directly towards supporting an NGO working on the ground in India. After some research, the NGO we have chosen to partner with is Khalsa Aid International, an incredible organisation that has, over 20 years, consistently provided humanitarian aid in disaster areas and civil conflict zones around the world. Right now, they have teams distributing oxygen, food, water and PPE across India wherever it is most needed.

Our means to donate cash at Alphalake is limited, however what we lack in size, we've always made up for in energy and passion. Working closely together in the last week, we've managed to organise a fundraising challenge that's a BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal) if ever I saw one. It's been quite amazing how the team has come together to put on such an ambitious event in such a short space of time.

An idea was born

I decided earlier in the week that I would do a sponsored bike ride and simultaneously on the same day Vivienne, Alphalake's Director of Communications, had drafted in our monthly Newsletter. It was clear that as management we wanted to do something. Within a day from our thoughts occurring, most of the rest of the team had volunteered to set themselves sponsored challenges. Discussing what group distance target we should set, Zahra, our Head of Customer Success, asked the question how far our office in India is from our office in the UK. I'm not sure Zahra knew quite what she was letting us all in for, or maybe she did, but from that point on there was, quite literally, no turning back.

We have decided as a team, and with the help of our friends, family and volunteers, to cumulatively walk, run, cycle, swim, row or in the case of Florence, one of our apprentices in the team, roller skate (!), the absurdly far 8,850 kilometres distance that Google Maps assures us is the answer to Zahra's now fateful question.

Given the urgent nature of the crisis in India, we've set only 10 days to complete this challenge!

If you are now doing the maths, like we did, to work out what distances need to be covered and by how many people, you will come to the same realisation as us - we are going to need every bit of help we can get!

We give to you the Alphalake AI Oxython!

To reach this quite mad goal, we are inviting as many people as possible to visit alphalake.ai/oxython to sign-on and participate. Once registered, you'll receive a welcome pack and guide on how to take part, which will explain to share a screenshot of your walking, running, cycling and rowing by emailing them to oxython@alphalake.ai whilst for those who prefer to clock kilometres using gym equipment can take a photo of the LCD screen at the end of their exercise and email this in. All activity will be uploaded to the main activity tracker and event page at www.alphalake.ai/oxython.

Whether a case of walking a little further than normal or running / cycling many kilometres, every step will help us inch closer to Pune. Your activity and/or donations will help us raise money that will directly enable oxygen and humanitarian aid to reach those in India, especially those in the poorest communities, who are suffering so much. All donations will be made via Virgin Money and every penny will go directly to Khalsa Aid International working on the ground, empowering them to simply do more and reach more people through the amazing work they do.

We will be launching a leader board (check back on Monday when it will be live on the event page), so the super-fit amongst us will be able to pit themselves against each other and we'll be announcing who the Oxython Champions are at the end. I myself will clock-up as many kilometres as I can, but I'm looking to the super-fit cyclists and runners amongst you to really step up and do your thing. You know who you are and we're coming for you!

As I write, the Alphalake team has wasted no time clocking up already some very impressive walking, rowing and running sessions. These are already up online, so do please go and check them out! Alphalake will also, as a company, be donating 10 pence per kilometre covered of the 8,850 kilometre target distance. This will go towards our overall donation target that we hope to reach of 50p per kilometre. Donations can be made via a Virgin Money page, which can be found at our event page, alphalake.ai/oxython.

So on behalf of the whole team at Alphalake, I invite everyone to join us as we together take on this most ambitious challenge. If we succeed in covering this vast distance, we will all have achieved something really very special. Together, we'll have formed a bridge, one that whilst figurative and invisible, will exist in our hearts. A bridge that connects us to India, to a neighbour in need of fundamental healthcare, to people receiving oxygen in hospital or at home and to families in need of the hope basic provisions can bring.

So step up onto your exercise bikes people, stand on your treadmills and put on your bike helmets, don your best lycra, slip on your running shoes and lace up your walking boots. And as you breathe deep know that halfway around the world, another human breathes with you.

Thank you!

In health, love and achy muscles,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Olly Cogan". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of "Olly" and "Cogan" being capitalized and prominent.

Olly Cogan
Founder and CEO, Alphalake AI