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Library goes HIGH TECH

This enterprising software engineer decided to open her own library and developed an online interface, Easylib.com

SANGEETHA CHENGAPPA

BENGALURU

What prompted a software engineer with IBM in the US, to give up the fast track to start her own walk-in, log-in library back home in Bengaluru? The simple answer — her sheer love for books. Having been gifted her first library membership at the tender age of five, Vani Mahesh started with picture books and slowly graduated to comic books and novels.

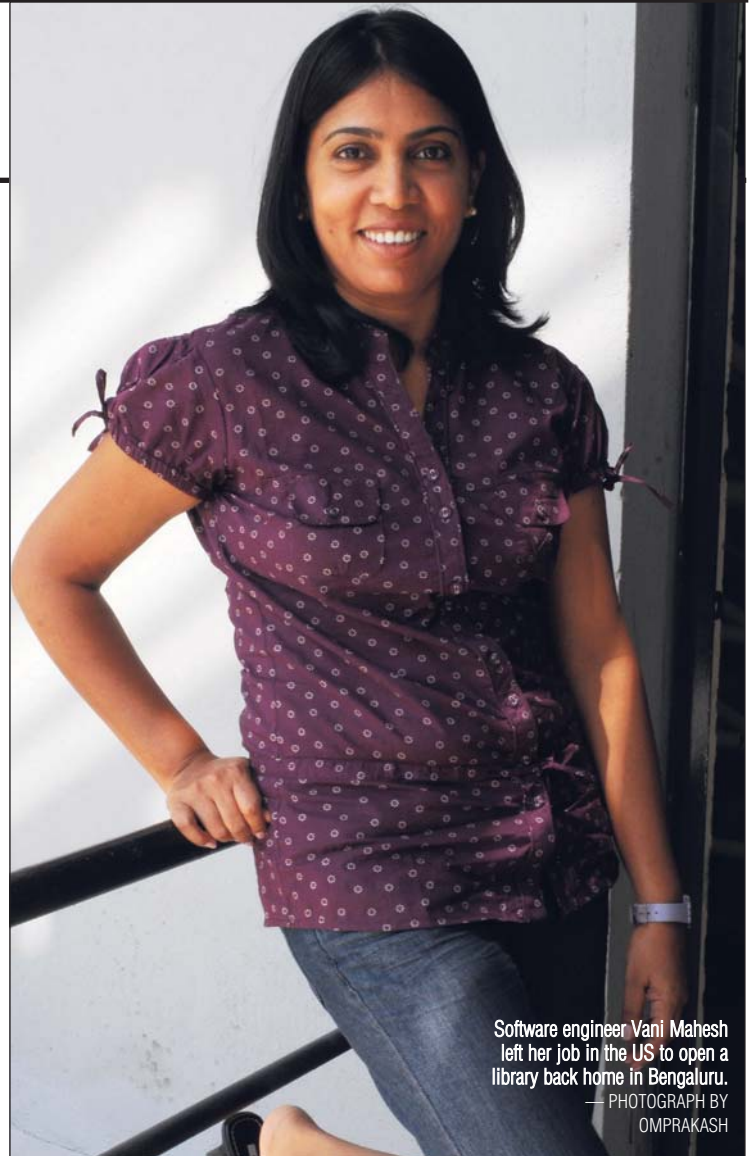
A voracious reader, she recalls devouring around 35-40 books during her summer vacations, besides her daily dose of reading. "I would pick up a book on just about any subject and thoroughly enjoy going through its contents. I started getting choosy about what I read soon after my twelfth birthday. Later, when all my peers

started preparing to get into either engineering or medical college, I would often ask my Mom whether I could start my own library if I didn't make it to engineering college" reminisces Vanishree.

After completing engineering in Mysore, she got married and moved to the US where she embarked on a Master's programme in Computer Science. While working on a research project focussed on emerging web technologies, Vani was fascinated by the immense possibilities of the Internet. At a time when only a few research and academic institutions knew how to use the Internet, she was given the opportunity to build a web page for a professor at Georgia Tech, Atlanta.

In 2000, Vani and her husband decided to head home to Bengaluru and while her husband joined Infosys, she started working on a public online interface for a private library system. "I had already registered the website www.easylib.com soon after I quit IBM in the US. It took me all of eight months to build the library system software, which is not just about cataloguing and categorising books but enables browsing, reserving, wait-listing and includes book reviews, online recommendations and account details of all the members" said Vani.

The two-storey, library building was constructed on a plot of land which the couple had bought as



Software engineer Vani Mahesh left her job in the US to open a library back home in Bengaluru.

— PHOTOGRAPH BY OMPRAKASH

an investment in Koramangala a few years ago. EasyLib.com was launched in July 2001 with 100 members and 3,000 books and today boasts of 18,000 books with 2,500 corporate and individual members.

"I started the first Internet-enabled circulating library which delivers books anywhere in Bengaluru, but it was almost 12 months before I began making any money from it" said Vani. The library offers books in three categories — fiction, non-fiction and children's books — each of which have multiple sub-categories. For instance, there are picture books for tiny tots, and a separate set of books for young readers from 7-10 years and

young adults from 12-15 years. Vani employs seven youngsters to help her run the online/offline library and takes pride in the fact that she offers quick service. "If you reserve a book before 4pm, it is delivered to you the very next day. Currently, 500 books are reserved daily" she smiles with pride.

Her advice to Gen Y: "Be passionate about one thing in your life and convert that passion into your profession. Believe in it and watch it blossom into a successful business." Opting for Engineering turned out to be a blessing in disguise, because one has to be multi-skilled in order to be a successful entrepreneur, concludes Vani.

Find yourself the right advisor

LINDA STERN

With the stock market in shambles and a discouraging global economic picture, there are those who are abandoning do-it-yourself money management and seeking financial advice.

Their timing is excellent. That's not just because all things economic have gotten more complicated, but also because the financial planning industry has gotten better. Here's how to choose the right advisor for you.

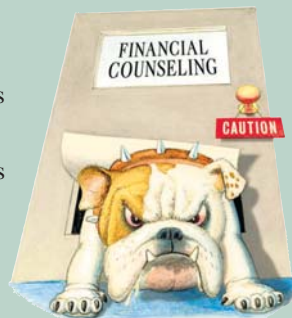
1 Compensation counts. Advisors who are paid commissions have an inherent

conflict of interest; they are paid by the companies that sell the products they are telling you to buy. Sure, some of them are decent products. But you have to ask a lot of questions, such as: How much are you being paid to recommend this fund? And: Are there less expensive funds that would do the same job?

2 Competence counts, too. It's not all

about the fees. There are plenty of honest, unconflicted, and not very talented advisors out there. Look for a good certification.

Beyond the certificate, it's good to find someone with a stable work background and at least a couple of clients willing to vouch for them. **3** Comprehensiveness is important. Fee-only planners have their conflicts too: If you pay them a percentage of the assets they manage, they will want to manage more and more assets. They



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may even skew their advice toward keeping you in a high-debt lifestyle so they have more money to invest. A solid financial plan will cover your debts, your properties, your insurance and your taxes as well as your investment picks. It's good to have a soup-to-nuts checkup the first time you start working with a planner.

4 Finally, look for compatibility. Talk to three or four advisors before choosing the one you'll work with. Make your choice on the basis of whom you like and who works with other clients who have similar financial situations to yours.

— Reuters

Take a loan to save tax

TARACHAND WANVARI

BENGALURU

Avail tax benefits against your housing loan EMIs, says the bank's advertisement. So, how does this work?

EMI stands for Equated Monthly Installments. This installment comprises both principal and interest components of each installment. The EMI calculated by the lender depends upon the loan amount, the interest rate charged for the loan and loan tenure.

During the initial years, a larger component of the EMI comprises of interest than the principal, but as the end of the loan tenure approaches, the principal component of the loan increases.

Under the Indian Income Tax Act (IT) of 1961, resident Indians are eligible for certain tax benefits on principal and interest components of a loan.

Under Section 24, interest repayment of Rs 1,50,000/- per annum qualifies for tax if the loan is taken to purchase or construct a self-occupied house, a deduction of Rs 1,50,000/- is allowed if the purchase or construction is completed within a period of three years from the end of the year in which the loan is taken. The Rs 1,50,000/- limit is specified for only one self occupied property. Benefits for the entire interest amount paid can be claimed under Section 24 of the IT Act in case of a loan against a second property.

An added benefit under Section 80(c) on repayment of principal amount to the extent of Rs 1,00,000/- per annum is also available on the loan for the first self occupied property subject to compliance with conditions stipulated in the IT Act. In the case of a second property, there are no benefits of principal deduction under Section 80(c).

Section 80(c) provides for a deduction of up to Rs 1,00,000/- to an individual or a Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) for (i) making investments in certain savings instruments (ii) incurring expenditure on tuition fee and repayment of housing loan.

Consult your tax consultant.

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