

Flipkart Health+, formerly known as SastaSundar Healthbuddy Limited, stands as a revealing case study in the convergence of technology, retail, and healthcare in India. This venture marked a bold attempt by one of India's largest e-commerce players to diversify beyond traditional retail and logistics and capture a share of the burgeoning digital healthcare market. The story of Flipkart Health+ is not merely about an acquisition or a product launch—it reflects the complexities of navigating India's healthcare sector, the pitfalls of competing in an entrenched marketplace, and the inherent challenges that even global giants face when they enter a heavily regulated and rapidly evolving domain.

The journey begins with SastaSundar Healthbuddy, a Kolkata-based startup co-founded in 2013 by Banwari Lal Mittal and Ravi Kant Sharma. Their mission was rooted in a vision to democratize healthcare access by bridging the gap between urban and rural populations through affordable medicines and digital tools. From its inception, SastaSundar adopted a hybrid approach that combined a robust digital presence with a network of physical counseling centers, referred to as "Healthbuddy" stores. These centers not only served as order pickup points but also acted as localized healthcare advice hubs, allowing customers to interact with trained pharmacists and receive guidance on prescriptions and medicines. Over the years, the company managed to build a vast network of over 200 such Healthbuddy outlets across India, creating a unique phygital model that enabled deeper customer engagement and trust—critical aspects in the healthcare space where reliability and accessibility are paramount.

To support its expansion and refine its service delivery model, SastaSundar raised several key rounds of funding. In May 2017, Japan-based Rohto Pharmaceutical invested approximately ₹33.4 crore (around \$5 million), marking one of the first significant foreign investments into India's digital pharmacy landscape. This was followed by a more substantial infusion in August 2019, when Mitsubishi Corporation invested ₹100 crore (approximately \$14.1 million). These investments not only bolstered the company's technological backbone but also allowed it to scale operations, enhance its logistics capabilities, and improve backend systems—an essential evolution as the company positioned itself to compete with emerging digital health leaders in India.

However, the true pivot point came in November 2021, when Flipkart announced the acquisition of a majority stake in SastaSundar Marketplace Ltd., the parent company of SastaSundar.com. This acquisition was significant for several reasons. Firstly, it marked Flipkart's formal entry into the healthcare sector, an industry that was witnessing exponential growth catalyzed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Secondly, it demonstrated Walmart's broader interest in tapping into the wellness and health tech sectors via its Indian subsidiary. While the acquisition amount was not disclosed publicly, reports estimated the enterprise valuation to be around ₹1,150 crore. The transaction was finalized by April 1, 2022, and the newly rebranded Flipkart Health+ became a Walmart-owned entity, strategically integrated into Flipkart's existing ecosystem.

The rationale behind the acquisition was clear: Flipkart intended to merge its expansive logistics and technological infrastructure with SastaSundar's expertise in pharmaceuticals and healthcare services. With over 20,000 PIN codes already within its supply chain reach, Flipkart saw healthcare as a natural adjacency that would allow it to create value beyond consumer goods, entering the "essentials" category where frequency and trust play a significant role in customer retention. By leveraging Flipkart's backend efficiencies—such as warehousing, last-mile delivery, digital payments, and AI-driven demand forecasting—the goal was to address systemic issues in medicine accessibility and affordability, especially in tier-2 and tier-3 cities.

Following the rebranding, Flipkart Health+ launched a dedicated mobile app with a streamlined, user-friendly interface. The app offered features like prescription uploads, remote pharmacist consultations, order tracking, and integration with local licensed pharmacies. Customers could seamlessly place orders for prescription and OTC medicines, health supplements, and wellness products, with home delivery promised across thousands of locations. Moreover, Flipkart began outlining a broader vision to onboard third-party healthcare service providers for teleconsultations, diagnostics, and lab testing, thereby aiming to build a one-stop digital health platform. In March 2022, the company hired Prashant Jhaveri, a healthcare veteran with leadership stints at Apollo Health and Lifestyle Ltd. and MediBuddy, as CEO. His appointment reflected Flipkart's intent to

build an experienced leadership team capable of understanding the complexities of healthcare regulations, operations, and digital transformation.

Despite these promising foundations, Flipkart Health+ soon encountered headwinds that exposed the limitations of even the most well-funded ventures. The Indian online pharmacy and digital healthcare market, while offering immense growth potential, is fiercely competitive and governed by layers of regulatory oversight. Established incumbents like Tata 1mg, Reliance-owned Netmeds, PharmEasy, Apollo Pharmacy, and Amazon Pharmacy had already spent years cultivating customer trust, building supply chains, navigating regulatory hurdles, and crafting consumer experiences specifically tailored to Indian healthcare sensibilities. These players were entrenched, aggressive, and unafraid to compete on price, speed, and value-added services.

One of the core issues Flipkart Health+ struggled with was service reliability. Customers began to report erratic order processing times, delivery delays, and in some cases, incorrect medicine deliveries—an unacceptable failure in a sector where accuracy can have life-or-death consequences. The problem was exacerbated by inventory management challenges. Medicine availability is a logistical puzzle involving cold-chain requirements, batch control, and expiry tracking, and even minor disruptions can erode customer confidence. Reports of essential medicines being frequently out of stock caused customers to revert to more dependable platforms.

On the technology side, the app and platform infrastructure reportedly suffered from backend bugs and poor optimization. These included glitches in order tracking, payment issues, and unresponsive customer support—all of which diminished user experience and reinforced the perception of an immature product. Operational inefficiencies added to customer frustration, often compounded by the fact that competitors were offering smoother experiences, wider product assortments, and faster delivery times. Some market insiders argued that Flipkart underestimated the technical and regulatory sophistication required to manage a healthcare supply chain, which differs significantly from typical e-commerce operations.

The regulatory environment in India further complicated Flipkart's ambitions. While the legal framework for online pharmacies remains in flux, existing laws require strict adherence to drug licensing, prescription validation, data privacy, and patient confidentiality. Enforcement is fragmented across central and state-level drug controllers, with rules often interpreted differently in various jurisdictions. For a large-scale player like Flipkart Health+, ensuring end-to-end compliance across multiple locations, product types, and service models became an increasingly difficult and resource-intensive task.

The competitive pressures were relentless. PharmEasy's acquisition of Thyrocare, Tata's deep integration of 1mg into its broader digital portfolio, and Apollo Pharmacy's omnichannel dominance meant that Flipkart Health+ had little room to innovate or differentiate quickly. These rivals also offered loyalty programs, subscription models, bundled consultations, and diagnostic services that made customer stickiness a real challenge for newcomers. Unlike retail, where pricing and delivery can be decisive factors, healthcare is a trust-first domain. Flipkart Health+ faced the dual burden of acquiring customers and convincing them to switch platforms—often for essential purchases—amid an ecosystem full of better-established options.

By early 2023, signs of strategic fatigue began to emerge. CEO Prashant Jhaveri reportedly exited the company by July 2023, less than a year into his tenure. Kanchan Mishra, previously associated with Flipkart's business verticals, took over as Chief Business Officer in an interim capacity. Leadership churn at the top level frequently signals internal reconsideration of a business unit's viability and reflects the difficulty of aligning execution with vision. Meanwhile, market intelligence began picking up cues of stagnation: reduced advertising spends, limited updates to the app, and subdued product innovation.

By July 2025, it became increasingly evident that Flipkart Health+ was no longer operational in any meaningful capacity. The official Flipkart Health+ website was inactive, showing either error pages or redirects. The app had been removed from Google Play Store, limiting access for new users and suggesting a formal discontinuation of services. Flipkart's main site no longer promoted or featured healthcare products

under the Health+ branding. Analysts concluded that Flipkart had deprioritized the healthcare vertical entirely, with insiders hinting that the venture was in wind-down mode.

The most definitive indicator came in January 2025, when SastaSundar Ventures Ltd. announced that it had reclaimed the intellectual property rights associated with the SastaSundar brand from Flipkart Health+. In an interview, SastaSundar's chairman B.L. Mittal stated, "The deal with Flipkart is over," and expressed plans to relaunch the app independently. This move confirmed not only the end of the partnership but also suggested Walmart's broader strategic retraction from the healthcare space in India—potentially as part of a global reassessment of its health-related ventures. Mittal also implied that Walmart might have realigned its focus globally, preferring to consolidate healthcare investments in regions where it could operate with more control or established regulatory frameworks.

The rise and fall of Flipkart Health+ is instructive for several reasons. First, it highlights that no amount of capital or logistical prowess can substitute for deep domain knowledge and sector-specific operational excellence. Second, it reveals the pitfalls of assuming that success in one vertical (retail) can seamlessly transfer to another (healthcare), especially when the latter carries life-critical responsibilities and legal liabilities. Third, it underscores the importance of strategic patience in healthcare ventures—short-term ROI pressures often clash with the long gestation cycles of trust-building and infrastructure development required in the health domain.

Ultimately, Flipkart Health+ may be remembered less for its failures and more for the lessons it offered. It stands as a cautionary tale of what happens when ambition meets complexity without sufficient preparation, and a reminder that in healthcare, the real currency is not speed or price—but trust, consistency, and clinical precision.

Ekart: The Backbone of India's E-commerce Logistics and a Strategic Pillar of Flipkart's Competitive Advantage

Ekart Logistics, widely recognized today as one of the most sophisticated and far-reaching logistics arms in India, began as a modest but strategic operation intended to serve the needs of Flipkart during the early days of Indian e-commerce. Its evolution is emblematic of how logistics has transitioned from being a behind-the-scenes function to becoming a front-and-center competitive differentiator in the highly complex Indian market. Ekart's journey mirrors not only Flipkart's meteoric rise but also the maturing of India's e-commerce and logistics sectors. Established in 2009 during the foundational years of Flipkart, Ekart was envisioned as a logistics service provider tailored to the unique infrastructural and demographic challenges of the Indian subcontinent. Back then, the logistics industry was heavily fragmented, inefficient, and largely dependent on unorganized players. There were significant gaps in last-mile delivery, a dearth of real-time tracking, and a lack of scalable warehousing infrastructure. E-commerce companies struggled with timely delivery, high return rates, and customer dissatisfaction. Flipkart, having experienced these hurdles firsthand, realized that the lack of a robust delivery ecosystem was not merely a bottleneck—it was a deal-breaker for customer experience and growth.

Initially, Ekart operated as an outsourced logistics partner to Flipkart but quickly demonstrated its operational effectiveness and potential to transform service delivery in the fledgling online retail market. Recognizing the criticality of logistics as a core capability, Flipkart made the decisive move in 2015 to acquire Ekart fully. This vertical integration was far more than an internal alignment—it was a calculated strategy to gain end-to-end control over the customer journey, from click to delivery. The acquisition gave Flipkart the ability to execute service-level commitments with precision, reduce dependency on unreliable third-party logistics (3PL) vendors, and create a deeply integrated data-driven logistics operation that could scale with demand. The move also laid the groundwork for Flipkart's broader ambitions to become a service-first company, offering not just products but experiences—seamless, timely, and trustworthy.

From 2015 onward, Ekart began its transformation into a logistics powerhouse. Over time, it developed one of the most complex, resilient, and widespread logistics networks in the country. Today, Ekart operates with a logistics capacity that processes and delivers tens of millions of shipments every month. Its fulfillment

infrastructure spans over 70 strategically located fulfillment centers and more than 80 sortation facilities, forming the skeletal structure of its operations. The backbone is further supported by over 3,500 delivery hubs that ensure connectivity between urban megacities, tier-2/3 towns, and even remote rural geographies. This infrastructure allows Ekart to operate with a service coverage of over 15,000 PIN codes—effectively reaching every corner of the Indian map and ensuring that the promise of e-commerce extends far beyond urban centers into the heartlands of India.

In terms of mobility and delivery optimization, Ekart maintains a daily fleet of more than 7,000 trucks—operating in both inter-city and intra-city logistics corridors. The scale at which these fleets operate allows for dynamic rerouting, time-sensitive delivery, and route optimization based on real-time data. Ekart's operations are further enhanced by its air express capabilities, leveraging cargo capacity from 21 commercial airports across the country. This multimodal logistics strategy ensures that time-sensitive orders—especially during festivals, mega-sales, and emergency procurement periods—are fulfilled within 24–96 hours even across vast distances. For instance, air freight connectivity enables Flipkart to guarantee same-day or next-day delivery on thousands of high-demand SKUs in metros like Delhi, Bengaluru, Mumbai, and Hyderabad, while also maintaining sub-96-hour delivery SLAs in locations spanning across the Northeast, deep South, and desert regions of Rajasthan.

Crucial to Ekart's dominance is its heavy reliance on cutting-edge technology and analytics. At the core of Ekart's logistics ecosystem is its AI-powered routing engine. This proprietary algorithm ingests a variety of dynamic inputs—traffic conditions, driver availability, vehicle capacity, weather forecasts, order density, and real-time customer feedback—to intelligently design optimal delivery paths. This not only minimizes fuel costs and vehicle wear-and-tear but also ensures that last-mile deliveries are completed efficiently and on time. Additionally, every shipment is tracked end-to-end via a robust digital infrastructure that offers customers complete visibility from warehouse dispatch to doorstep delivery. These live tracking capabilities are embedded within both the Flipkart and Ekart platforms and are integral to maintaining customer trust. In an ecosystem where delivery expectations are rising and patience is dwindling, the assurance of visibility and transparency can be a powerful differentiator.

Ekart's innovation extends deep into its warehousing and inventory management systems. The company has invested heavily in automation and robotics, especially in preparation for peak events like the "Big Billion Days"—India's biggest digital retail sale. During these events, Ekart's warehouses function at 3–5x their usual capacity, and automation becomes indispensable. Sophisticated systems manage product scanning, binning, sorting, and packaging with near-zero error rates. Technologies like conveyor sorting machines, robotic arms for lightweight item picking, and AI-enhanced demand prediction engines help balance stock levels while minimizing delivery delays. Ekart also leverages RFID technology to automate item tracking, reduce human error, and expedite quality checks. These systems allow it to handle vast product assortments—ranging from fragile electronics to large furniture pieces—with remarkable efficiency.

But Ekart's operational prowess is not limited to warehousing and transportation. A major part of its reputation rests on its customer-centric innovation. A key feature is the now industry-standard **Open-Box Delivery**—where the customer is allowed to inspect the product (especially high-ticket items like smartphones, laptops, and appliances) before accepting and paying for it. This unique approach drastically reduces the probability of fraud, shipment disputes, and post-delivery returns, and significantly enhances customer trust—especially in a market like India where apprehensions about e-commerce reliability still persist among first-time and semi-digital consumers. Ekart has also built a strong capability around reverse logistics, a feature often overlooked but immensely critical. Returned goods are efficiently collected, quality checked, and repackaged—either for resale, refurbishment, or proper disposal. In fact, Ekart operates specialized return hubs for managing damaged and returned inventory, offering refurbishment services, sanitation, quality control, and relabeling, thereby reintroducing salvaged items into the sales cycle and improving margin realization for sellers.

While Ekart was originally a Flipkart-only entity, it has since evolved into a **Fourth-Party Logistics (4PL)** provider—a full-stack logistics solution for a broader ecosystem beyond its parent. SMEs, D2C brands, third-party retailers, and regional logistics players can now tap into Ekart's robust warehousing, trucking,

inventory optimization, and delivery capabilities. Ekart provides services like Full Truck Load (FTL) and Less Than Truck Load (LTL) shipping, warehouse leasing, kitting and bundling, packaging, order processing, and even freight forwarding for cross-border shipments. This shift positions Ekart not just as an internal service provider, but as an independent logistics powerhouse capable of competing with the likes of Delhivery, Xpressbees, and Ecom Express. Its success in this domain has allowed Flipkart to offset logistics costs by monetizing underutilized capacity and further consolidating control over service standards across the marketplace.

In a bold step toward contributing to India's digital public infrastructure, Ekart has also partnered with the **Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC)**—India's government-backed initiative to democratize digital retail. Through ONDC, Ekart provides its logistics backbone to thousands of small retailers and entrepreneurs looking to sell online, ensuring delivery services that were previously limited to elite platforms are now accessible to all sellers, including kirana stores and small traders. This not only boosts the inclusivity of India's digital economy but also helps Ekart scale sustainably while building goodwill in the regulatory and MSME community. By enabling first-mile pickups, real-time tracking APIs, and flexible delivery integrations via ONDC, Ekart plays a central role in leveling the e-commerce playing field.

Ekart's operational data also fuels Flipkart's strategic decision-making. By analyzing shipping times, regional demand spikes, return patterns, and packaging anomalies, Ekart generates deep logistics intelligence. This data allows Flipkart to fine-tune inventory stocking, launch hyperlocal hubs, pre-position goods for upcoming sale events, and optimize seller performance through logistics scorecards. Ekart's ability to collect and act on granular logistics data in real time creates a feedback loop that sharpens not just delivery performance, but also product assortment, demand prediction, and customer support policies.

As of 2025, Ekart stands not merely as a subsidiary of Flipkart but as one of India's most critical logistics platforms—serving as the foundation on which Flipkart's promise of fast, reliable, and nationwide e-commerce rests. Its mastery of infrastructure, technology, and customer-first logistics has redefined delivery expectations in India. From pioneering same-day delivery and enabling furniture installation to managing cold-chain shipments for perishables, Ekart has scaled horizontally and vertically to meet the changing face of digital commerce. Its continuous innovation, infrastructural dominance, and ecosystem outreach place it at the center of India's digital retail revolution.

Ekart's evolution also offers a broader insight into the future of Indian logistics: where automation, decentralization, public-private collaboration, and hyper-personalization will dictate who wins the next wave of commerce. As India marches toward a \$200 billion e-commerce economy by 2030, players like Ekart will not just be enablers—they will be the architects of that growth.