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Sree Sreenivasan on being named New York City's chief digital officer: 'Exhilarated and grateful'

[World \(/category/world\)](#) [Asha Mahadevan \(/author/asham\)](#) Aug, 02 2016 04:10:54 IST

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Sreenath "Sree" Sreenivasan has a new job.

The social media guru, who made headlines when he was laid off from his post of chief digital officer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City six weeks ago, has now been appointed as the chief digital officer for New York City.

NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio announced on Monday that Sreenivasan will work to increase access to City-led technology initiatives, will reach out to the tech community and be in charge of digital policy citywide.

"With Sree Sreenivasan's wealth of experience, I am confident that he will work to promote transparency, access and progressive values with our digital tools, helping spread access across the five boroughs," the mayor said in a statement.



"I am exhilarated but also grateful," Sreenivasan told *Firstpost*, in his first interview after the announcement was made. He accepts it will be a challenge as he'll now be a part of an organisation of more than 300,000 employees and deal with the needs of eight million New Yorkers. "What happens in New York has an impact on the world as people pay attention to what happens in NYC," he said. "There is a lot of importance to what we do as we'll be setting standards that will help other cities."

(<http://www.firstpost.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Sree-Sreenivasan-Photo-credit-Tanya-Malott.jpg>)

He has started making plans about how he'll accomplish his task. "New York City has already been very digital," he said crediting the two previous chief digital officers, Jessica Singleton and Rachel Haot. "I see my role as chief digital officer as more of a chief listening officer. I want to listen to ideas for the city."

He said that the last few years have proved that the world is digitally connected and he will also be looking at the use of technology in other countries. "India has a lot to learn about technology and its metropolitan areas have a particular obligation and need to get technological infrastructure right. Technology can change lives. Millions of people can be let in if it is deployed in the right way, but millions of people can be left out if it is deployed in the wrong way," said the man whom *GQ India* named as one of 30 Global Digital Indians in 2011.

Sreenivasan, 45, was one of the early movers in the digital age. Over the years, he built a reputation as a tech maven adept at using social media and he passed on his knowledge to students at Columbia University. When Sreenivasan joined the Met in August 2013, he ended a 20-year-stint at Columbia. He was a faculty member at the journalism school before he became CU's first chief digital officer. After a year in that position, he moved to the Met to become its first chief digital officer and lead the venerated museum into the social media age.

When the Met laid him off in June this year, it came as a shock to the online community. But Sreenivasan took this as an opportunity to try something different: he reached out to his online community about his job loss and asked them for suggestions on how he can spend his time. He received more than 1,000 suggestions. The innovative strategy not only led to a great deal of positive press (<http://qz.com/711943/sree-sreenivasan-how-to-spin-getting-fired-from-your-high-profile-job-into-a-delightful-digital-campaign/>) but also to this opportunity.

"I was telling people I need help," he said. "I got this job because the folks at City Hall saw my notice about being available."

Of course, that also had its own downside. Sreenivasan said he didn't really expect to get a full-time job this soon and he has not had time to go through all the 1,000+ suggestions or try any of them out.

Sreenivasan, who is currently on a speaking tour in India (<http://SreeTwitterTour.com>), will start his new job in October. In his spare time, he'll be busy studying. "I have to learn about city government, about municipal governance," he said. He admits he doesn't have much knowledge about that area, just like he didn't know much about the art world when he joined the Met. But he sees this as a challenge more than as a case of having taken on more than he can handle. "That moment will probably come later," he said. "If you aren't nervous, aren't worried, there's something wrong. That anxiety is what makes you successful."

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