

Providing Software for Managing and Marketing Trade Shows and Conferences, a2z, Inc. is focused on Sustaining High Growth Year After Year

**Business Services
Event Planning
Trade Shows and
Conference Management**

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**Rajiv Jain
CEO**

BIO:

As the President/CEO of a2z, Inc. Rajiv Jain leads the daily responsibilities of the business and works alongside the staff. Rajiv leads the development of cutting-edge technologies for the events industry, including the first fully web-based exposition floor plan management solution, the first generation of online matchmaking tools for exhibitors and attendees, and both a mobile web application as well as native iOS and Android applications for events, eliminating the re-

quirement for show organizers to choose one or the other.

Rajiv has grown a2z from its humble beginnings in his apartment to an award-winning company that powers more than 700 annual events and over 25% of the Top 250 shows. Rajiv and his company have withstood the sea of change in the events industry and come out as the most comprehensive and easy-to-use tool set available for event management solutions.

Rajiv Jain has been selected as one of the "Top 40 Business Executives Under 40" by the Baltimore Business Journal, and also won the "Howard County Tech Council Edge 40!," given to the leading technology executive in the county. Rajiv has also been named as an Ernst & Young Entrepreneur Of The Year® Award Finalist in Maryland twice.

About A2Z:

a2z, Inc. powers more than 700 events and over 25% of the Top 250 shows every year. We provide powerful web-based tools that help increase and accelerate booth sales. Our clients also realize improved productivity in back office processes; increased connectivity with their membership; seamless integration with their AMS, CRM and financial databases; and an improved event website for their attendees and exhibitors.

a2z has developed three platforms as one integrated solution to help save money, engage attendees and enhance exhibitor satisfaction: Exposition & Conference Management, Networking & Lead Management and Mobile & Social Media.

**Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor
CEOCFO Magazine**

CEOCFO: Mr. Jain, what do you do at a2z?

Mr. Jain: We provide software for managing and marketing trade shows and conferences.

CEOCFO: Would you give us an idea of the items your software can handle?

Mr. Jain: For large size shows from two hundred exhibitors to two thousand exhibitors, we manage all of the parts of the exhibits. For example, managing the floor plan, selling the booth space management software, selling the booth space, managing the financials, invoicing, cash collection, and the quoting and collecting of all exhibitor data. Then turning around and making it all web accessible for attendees to plan for the event. Then we make it mobile accessible for attendees to be able to access and search for the exhibitors information, to create a personalized plan and to schedule a meeting and meet with other people. We also provide the onsite kiosk to attendees to help navigate the show and event.

CEOCFO: Are most companies today using a program to monitor this or is it still not fully accepted, implemented or in use?

Mr. Jain: We have been doing this now for about twelve to fourteen years. Some of the basic parts of our software are now for the most part pretty commonly adopted in the industry. Then there are some of the high-end capabilities like appointment scheduling or making it more effective for attendees and exhibitors

to connect with each other. Those are still being used only by the progressive events in the industry.

CEOCFO: Are there particular types and sizes of companies or events that are a prime focus for a2z?

Mr. Jain: Typically, we work with mid to large size events. We can work with smaller events also if it is cost effective. Otherwise, normally our sweet spots are two hundred exhibitors plus. However, we do go down to about seventy-five exhibitors also.

CEOCFO: Can you walk me through the process. A company comes to you and says, "We are running this event". What do you do from there? How much customization; how much 'out of the box' is involved?

Mr. Jain: Generally, it is all 'out of the box'. The company would say, "Hey, we run this show", or "this event" and "We want to use your services." We would do a demo or two for them and they would sign the contract. We also have a free product where they can just go online and see all of the demos online and sign the contract online. In either case, once we have the signed contract we will take their CAD drawing and all other event information and create a floor plan.. That typically we turn it around in about two to three weeks. In two to three weeks the software the website and everything is set up for them to start managing their exposition conference using our software online.

CEOCFO: Do you work typically with individual companies or do you work with event planners and organizations that sponsor events, or both?

Mr. Jain: Ultimately, our clients are event organizers. About half of them are non-profit trade associations or societies and about half of them are full-profit media companies who have expositions and/or conferences in their portfolio.

CEOCFO: What are some of the differences working with associations? They tend to have some unique characteristics than organizations for profit.

Mr. Jain: I myself, actually before starting a2z, used to work at a non-profit trade association. Therefore, I do know that world. Some of the mindsets are a little bit different. Most of the time their focus is more on creating and providing value to their audience, whoever is a member of their industries. Making money is good, but making money is secondary. Most of the time, their first focus is to create and provide value to that audience.

CEOCFO: Do you typically work event by event, or do you have longer-term contracts or relationships with either group?

Mr. Jain: It really depends on the client. If the client asks for multi-year contract we will do a multi-year contract. Otherwise, we will do a single year contract.

CEOCFO: It is a somewhat crowded field these days. What are some of your strengths and why choose a2z over your competitors?

Mr. Jain: The first part is innovation. We are constantly innovating. In the technology field it is one thing to create a great product at a point in time, but it is quite a different thing to be able to sustain that cutting edge positioning in the marketplace. In our last twelve to fourteen years we have constantly been on the cutting edge. Actually, our marketplace is not that crowded, and old or longer-term. Typically our competitors are not able to sustain themselves and stay fresh. Innovation is the number one reason and reinventing, redefining ourselves, pushing the envelope, and bringing the changes in the industry, which is one part. The second part is, at the end of the day, the value and measurable results that we deliver to our clients is substantially higher than what they would get otherwise; either from in-house system processes, or a competitor or something else. We help them shorten their sales cycle and expedite their sales, improve their cash flow by 60-90 days, and improve their internal efficiencies and productivity by 50%. Those are pretty compelling numbers and that is why typically people buy from us.

CEOCFO: What are some of the newer features to your system? What have you added recently that shows the innovation that does go on at a2z?

Mr. Jain: In December (2012) we had new launches. One is an onsite iPad way finder kiosk. The trade shows, the larger trade shows especially, the attendees want an easier way to navigate across the show floor. For example, find where this exhibitor is and find out that the session is not all

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- Rajiv Jain

that. Typically, our industry had been using either computers or large screen kiosks and there are some challenges in things like that. One of the things we did was we created an iPad-based kiosk. These are ChirpE iPad kiosks. They are extremely fast, state-of-the-art technology. They are up-to-date with the information, and operate in real-time, with all of the systems involved. They provide an amazing experience to the attendee. When the attendee uses the kiosk, does something to the kiosk, and then as they leave the kiosk, they take out

their mobile app, the information that they personalized at the kiosk is all available in real-time on their mobile as well; or when they go to their hotel room to their laptop or computer, all that information is there as well, in real-time. The ChirpE iPad kiosk was one of the launches we did. Another launch we did was a photo booth. Now, this is a very different type of photo booth from which you may have seen. Again, this is an iPad-based photo booth. It is highly portable, but the beauty is it is totally seamlessly tied to social media. The person walks up, takes their picture, writes some captions and things, and in real-time, it will post to Facebook and Twitter; and then the viral or social media component has an amazingly broader reach. We used it at an event with about fifteen hundred to two thousand attendees. Our reach with this ChirpE photo booth was sixty-five hundred people. We reached about more than three times the audience at the event by using the ChirpE photo booth at the event. Also, in the last year or so, we have highly standardized and launched online contract management in booth sales. We have been doing booth sales online for a long time, but now offer full contract management and ability to sell add-ons making it extremely easy for the exhibitors to broaden booth space and online add-ons, find

a contractor electronically, and pay the deposit or full amount online.

CEOCFO: How do you ensure the ease of use?

Mr. Jain: It is the features. It is not that difficult to build a system that has comparable features. At the end it comes with the ease of use and proof is in the pudding. The systems sustain themselves if they are easy to use, and if they are being used by the intended audience. We do go the extra mile and put forth a lot of effort to make sure that the systems are very easy to use by the audience and that is why we have been around in the business for so long, because our systems do get used by people.

CEOCFO: You have made the Inc. 5000 list for many years. How do you continue to do as well as you have?

Mr. Jain: We reinvent ourselves every three years. Every three years, a2z is a totally new company. Our product portfolio is different and our way of doing business is different. We have to constantly reinvent ourselves. We continue to ask what business we are in, push the envelope, and change the scope of business in the marketplace we serve.

CEOCFO: How do you keep up with all of the new technology and how do you decide what is going to stick?

Mr. Jain: Keeping up with technology is just a part of our lifestyle. At home, we would have five, six, seven idevices/Apple devices. It is just that technology is so integrated in our lives. When I look at things for my personal consumption you look at it that way, and you stay up-to-date with what is going on. From a business standpoint how you decide what you invest in or what you do not invest in is where a huge part of success comes up. Not everything shiny is going to be sustainable and I have to admit that I have not been right all the time in my decision on what technologies to incorporate. You have to keep trying. Most of the time we have been successful and sometimes we have not been successful. If you do not try, yes, you are not going to fail, but you are not going to succeed either.

CEOCFO: Why should investors and people in the business community pay attention to a2z?

Mr. Jain: We are an innovative, private technology company. Our fiscal year ends March 31. This year, we are going to have a growth north of 30%. How is this ten year old company to self sustain to have high growth year after year?



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