CNSI’s Adnan Ahmed: “Know what you have to offer””

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ExecutiveBiz ArticleCNSI Co-founder and Chief Strategy Officer, Adnan Ahmed, has seen his business flourish with 13 years of consecutive growth. With one of the current goals to expand their healthcare footprint, he shared with us some of the company’s other priorities for this year, as well as his personal goals. Ahmed was able to share with us his advice on founding a new company and some of the best advice he has received in his lifetime. ExecutiveBiz: Tell us about your role at CNSI and how do you continue to generate new business opportunities?Ahmed: My role at CNSI has transformed, from various different roles, to Chief Strategy officer that I assumed in 2004; and is primarily to look for existing and strategic direction of the company and how we can successfully execute moving forward. A lot of companies often reach a stage of stagnation where we get comfortable in our certain niche area. So the objective is to keep growing certain areas of domain expertise within the company, and try to expand onto that vertically as well as horizontally. So my role is to look at the entire company and look at business areas that we excel in and how we can replicate that success to other markets.As far as how do I continue to generate new business, it is a combination of things; including having one foot on the ground to ensure that we are truly, what I call, “following the

money”, understanding where the markets are going today – in this time of globalization and the uncertainty – and ensuring that we are bringing a unique offering to the table and not a just a commodity. An area that we excel in is healthcare transformation where we work within the payer/administrative side of that business – and from a small project almost 8-9 years ago – we have taken that to four states so far as the next generation Medicaid management solution. This constitutes approximately 50% of CNSI’s annual revenue.ExecutiveBiz: Are there any new markets or emerging markets that you are pursuing at this time?Ahmed: Last year, our primary focus was one to “preserve and protect” our position in the government market; As the federal government increasingly looks to in-source its technology functions, and the state markets too have been riddled with budget constraints, we have had to be innovative in our solution approach. We are leveraging our current expertise in modernizing healthcare to expand into the other emerging areas of healthcare transformation. In addition, we’ve also looked at specific areas for Cybersecurity and its growing importance within newer models of technology adoption – and are leveraging our current successes and thought leadership in Identity and Access Management and HSPD-12 to expand this line of business and deliver on the growing security needs.ExecutiveBiz: You’ve been involved in the healthcare market for a while now, so how do you leverage these experiences in healthcare as you are charting new territories in the recent healthcare market?Ahmed: Genesis in the space truly happened based on our technical expertise. I can’t say we were experts in the healthcare market, but over time the transformation provided us the domain and policy knowledge to bring to market key technical innovations for public sector healthcare. We pride ourselves as thought leaders in certain areas where we have truly transformed the market from where it was previously. Specific to the public sector healthcare space, the world is changing upon us and a lot of times the policies are changing faster than technology can keep up. So we are advising our

government clients and prospects on what it truly means, how things are going to change, and what can the industry do – and not just CNSI – to help them achieve those goals. We are expanding into HIE, HIT, and in the federal healthcare space as well as expanding our current Medicaid footprint with a deeper dive into the technical enhancements to the administrative side, including ICD 10 or HIPAA 5010. So although we call it emerging, these are just necessary areas for this industry to stay ahead of the curve.ExecutiveBiz: As cofounder of CNSI, what advice would you give to someone who is founding a new company?Ahmed: The first thing I would tell anybody is know what you have to offer. Don't be a generalist. Be somebody who knows a particular market or a particular technology. Your value proposition has to be firm and you must know exactly what do you bring to the table when you are going to a prospective client. When we started our company, we got advice from everybody; and although we initially had our focus, we later started becoming generalists by trying to pursue every opportunity that came our way. We quickly realized we weren't getting the success we were originally getting and had to refocus. In today's competitive landscape, where the dollars are shrinking, it is imperative that a business be recognized for a unique offering solving specific problems for its target market.ExecutiveBiz: Tell us your top three goals for this year, personally and at CNSI.Ahmed: Well, let's dive in to CNSI goals. Our number one goal is to expand our current footprint of healthcare to various other markets.Currently, we're in the state Medicaid space and now into the health information exchanges (HIE) space – and we want to take that success into the federal payer market as well as the commercial payer market.Second is expanding our cyber security expertise as well as logical access and identity management expertise into various government entities, in helping agencies get past their HSPD-12 requirements to bridging the gap between physical infrastructure and logical system access. That is a strategic direction for the company to take that banner into the entire

federal government.Over these past 17-18 years of my work life – most of it building CNSI – I haven’t paid much attention to my own personal goals of leveraging my skills and business acumen for the good of the community and the world at large. My personal charter is to promote education and healthcare in some remote areas of Pakistan where I’m originally from, and work with some organizations in the U.S. as well as over there, to expand that personal goal.ExecutiveBiz: Who is your mentor and what is the best advice you’ve gotten from your mentor?Ahmed: I’ve had many different people who have had an influence on me. Whether it was my father in my early years, a professor from the University of Maryland, colleagues from the technology industry, or others in my family, and specifically an aunt who instilled in me social responsibility – a common message in their guidance is that one can’t just live in the business world which is only a microcosm of society and the world at large. So I can’t pinpoint one individual, because going through life is a process, One particular advice that someone gave me, is to try NOT to do everything at once but focus on one thing and do it extremely well. When you try to have too many balls in the air, they tend to fall – when you focus on one task you do it well and people tend to appreciate what you’ve done.ExecutiveBiz: What is your favorite hobby or pastime?Ahmed: I’m an avid cricket fan. Cricket is a game which has been played in the commonwealth world and one that I used to play when I was a kid and when I was in college in the U.S; and I still religiously follow that game.I love to read as well; one of the things that intrigues me most is what is happening around us, and history. I read a lot of history books and try to deduce what’s written today in the current and global events; whether it’s business related or political. The Economist is my favorite magazine.ExecutiveBiz: What is one thing that most people don’t know about you?Ahmed: Well, one thing that maybe a lot of people don’t know about me is that if I wasn’t in this particular industry is that I would have been in fashion design. During my early years of college, I designed shirts with a local designer; and I didn’t have

business acumen then, so I just designed it for fun. This was back in the 80’s. I don’t think a lot of people know about me – which I used to design casual men’s shirts back in the mid 80’s. Don’t go into what kind of designs they were. I would never wear those shirts now – the fad has moved on – but I am sure if will be back.