

5 Things You Need To Know To Create a Successful App or SaaS, With Ajay Kaul of AgreeYa Solutions



Stay Future Proof – Our solutions must be future proof. We want to make sure that we don't just complete the transaction with our customers but initiate a long-lasting relationship. As an organization, we stay committed to evolving the product to stay at par with the current industry trends. For example, our SharePoint based product, QuickApps, which used to be an on-premise solution earlier is now Office365 ready and helps organizations in accelerating their transition to the cloud.

As part of my series about the “5 Things You Need To Know To Create a Successful App or SAAS”, I had the pleasure of interviewing Ajay Kaul.

Ajay is a business leader and visionary who has been pivotal to the growth and progress of AgreeYa Solutions, a leading software, services, and solutions company based in Folsom, Calif. As a managing partner of the 1,800+ person team, he has been instrumental in providing strategic direction to the organization, resulting in its outstanding success. Kaul has three decades of experience in building powerful and meaningful solutions for businesses and public sector organizations. His expertise includes sales management, marketing, and strategy, global delivery and mergers, and acquisitions.

Thank you so much for joining us! Our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your ‘backstory’ and how you got started?

I’ve always had a curious mind and developed an interest in reading about new technology from very early on. In fact, I had subscribed to papers and magazines that published news about innovative technologies and helped simplify things. Interestingly, when I started my career, I got an opportunity to develop solutions that made doing business easier. The more I worked on it, the surer I became about what I wanted to do. That’s when I decided to pick a career path that empowered me to create business solutions, work on innovative technologies and create transformational value for my customers. Somewhere along this journey, AgreeYa Solutions was born. More than two decades later, I feel extremely proud of the fact that I have successfully made many businesses simple and efficient in their approach.

What was the “Aha Moment” that led you to think of the idea for your current company? Can you share that story with us?

Back in the 90s, it was the time when IT started flourishing. There were many companies that had started coming up and the customers were fascinated by this new change. The whole idea of automating things, bringing in technology to reduce the manual effort and getting more out of your investment, was the thing at that time. While all this was good, there was still a lot of mystery around the ‘what’ and ‘how’ for the customer. As I was working with an IT organization at that time, I had the opportunity to interact with many clients during this period. All of them unanimously used to say the same thing — they like the idea, but we are not sure of how it would all work. This is when I realized that the customer is very worried at the core, they’re still seeking that assurance and confidence in a vendor. The variety of options and opinions were creating more confusion than confidence.

That was when I realized I need to be their technology consultant and extended partner. I wanted to be the guiding light for my customers and someone who can help them make the right decision after weighing all the options. I don’t want to be just an IT vendor, but a trusted technology partner.

Today, two decades later, we still follow this philosophy. We work with our customers as their extended partners, giving them the best and most optimum solution for the challenge they are facing. Our suite of software, solutions, and services has the right offerings for enterprises of all sizes — from a small business to a Fortune100 company.

Can you tell us a story about the hard times that you faced when you first started your journey? Did you ever consider giving up? Where did you get the drive to continue even though things were so hard?

When we started, there were good months and there were also slow months. Times of instability often discouraged me, but along the way, I learned that businesses would have their peaks and valleys and that you must keep going. So, every time AgreeYa faced a tough month, I used it as an opportunity to focus on new ideas and recharge our approach.

I survive on minimum sleep and just like most business owners, I have had my share of sleepless nights where I laid awake wondering how to make my ideas come to fruition and reach new clients. This constant commitment helped the company secure some high-value projects. Each of these projects not only gave us the financial impetus, but also the learning that we saved, stored and reused.

We kept a razor-sharp focus on building solutions that can help our customers get better at what they do. We created a technology lab within AgreeYa and continued evolving existing solutions, while also exploring new ones. We also did strategic acquisitions of software products to make sure that we are helping our clients throughout their entire technology journey — be it strategic or transactional.

There has been no looking back ever since. The drive to keep moving forward comes from the focus and commitment that you put behind your dream. I've always wanted to make a difference for businesses through technology, and I continue to do so.

So, how are things going today? How did your grit and resilience lead to your eventual success?

Companies are dynamic entities that keep growing. I'm extremely proud to say that we have remained focused on our core values — integrity, commitment, advocacy, respect, and excellence — even after 20 years of being in business.

We have helped many leading organizations solve their most complex business problems and also in meeting their most ambitious technology goals. As an organization, we came across situations and challenges that truly tested us, but our motto of 'building our future

on your success' helped us sail through. We were fortunate to work with some of the greatest minds in the industry, still continuing to do so, that helped us stand out. We were very confident in our abilities and never got worried about conditions or competition.

Putting our customers first, we kept investing in technology and building solutions that make things simpler and better for them. Whether it was building applications and collaboration solutions or providing new-age solutions in areas such as machine learning, artificial intelligence, and cloud, we are continuously working toward excellence. We developed and acquired software that enabled our customers to gain more value from the investments they had already made. It was and continues to be, about the customer and placing their needs first. We believe in delivering on our promise with honesty and integrity, which is what has made us the organization we are today.

What do you think makes your company stand out? Can you share a story?

Today, our suite of SaaS products are used by leading enterprises across a wide array of industries. If I were to mention some of the factors that have led to our success, it would be perseverance and our earnest efforts to deliver nothing but the best product to our customers. We have always stayed dedicated to adding new features to our SaaS products to keep them relevant and vital in the ever-changing technology landscape. Recently, we added an AI-based, auto-healing feature to BeatBlip, while QuickApps (a product that helps in automating business applications in SharePoint, without code) for Office 365 now has a modern UI and supports SPFx web parts.

Which tips would you recommend to your colleagues in your industry to help them to thrive and not “burn out”?

I think patience and the ability to see opportunity in adversity are the biggest qualities for achieving success in the technology space. You will often be confronted with roadblocks along your business journey, but none of them should deter you from running toward your dream. Yes, you must work hard, but you should also be sure not to overwork yourself and burnout. There is a fine line between the two and you should take the time to find that balance.

None of us are able to achieve success without some help along the way. Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story?

I would not be able to name just one person — it really is a team effort. I'm grateful though to many people who helped me along this journey, from teachers, managers, and colleagues, to my family and society. Each one of them has helped me grow into the

person that I am today. The values that were inculcated by my family, the foundation that was laid by my teachers, the mentoring that was provided by my seniors and the support of my friends and Sanjay Khosla, co-managing partner of AgreeYa — without all these positive influences, AgreeYa Solutions would not have been possible.

Another thing that I would like to mention here is that I have always been very fortunate to have been in the right company. My colleagues at AgreeYa are some of the finest technical minds in the industry and above all, fantastic human beings — just being in their company every day is so enriching.

Ok thank you for all that. Now let's shift to the main focus of this interview. Approximately how many users or subscribers does your app or software currently have? Can you share with our readers three of the main steps you've taken to build such a large community?

Our products serve customers across multiple industry verticals, ranging from healthcare and biotech to the public sector and technology. We have more than 500 customers across geographies using our products. Some of our significant current engagements include Baxter, KBR, DuPont, Cardinal Health and Defense Information Systems Agency.

One of the primary objectives is to simplify the lives of our customers and users. So, whether we talk about our SharePoint based products or the ones that we have for testing and debt collection, our mantra has been to make and keep things simple for our customers. The three main steps we've taken to build a large community are:

1. **Ease of Use** — The product should be easy to use so that even a non-technical person is able to use it. This way the users are empowered and business can move faster, focus on strategic planning and not stay stuck in the transactions
2. **Value for Money** — Everything that an organization buys has a cost. There are investments that are already made and that need to be protected. Our solutions need to add value to what already exists, so organizations see both a stronger return on existing investments and the value in the investment they made in us.
3. **Stay Future Proof** — Our solutions must be future proof. We want to make sure that we don't just complete the transaction with our customers but initiate a long-lasting relationship. As an organization, we stay committed to evolving the product to stay at par with the current industry trends. For example, our SharePoint based product, QuickApps, which used to be an on-premise solution earlier is now Office365 ready and helps organizations in accelerating their transition to the cloud.

What is your monetization model? How do you monetize your community of users? Have you considered other monetization options? Why did you not use those?

We have multiple pricing models — a subscription model, plans based on features, or the number of users, and unlimited enterprise plans.

Based on your experience and success, what are the five most important things one should know in order to create a very successful app or a SAAS? Please share a story or an example for each.

- 1. Fill a Market Void:** It is essential to create a product that bridges a gap in the market, while also simplifying aspects of your customer's business journey. If you can attain this and keep your product unique, then you can enhance your chances of success. If you have competitors in the market (we have plenty of them), you need to be clear about your key differentiators. Perform thorough market research, talk to existing customers and other experts in the space to get these basics right. Our path was simple, as we were already working with customers across various industries and had the privilege of interacting regularly with them to better understand their specific business challenges. This allowed us to easily understand what they wanted and develop solutions to address their challenges.
- 2. Prove the Value:** In today's competitive marketplace, your customers want to judge the value of a product before investing in it. This makes the onboarding process very important. Too many products fail to capture market traction because they are unable to prove their worth to prospects. We make sure that every customer understands the true value of our products before investing anything. We offer free demos and 30-day free trials for each of the products, allowing prospects to watch them in action. We have high confidence in the quality and value of the products we have built over the years.
- 3. Listen to your Customers:** SaaS products are built to address the specific needs of your customers, and eventually their own clients, which is why you should take your customers' opinions into serious consideration. At AgreeYa we believe in our motto of "*building our future on our customers' success*". As a part of this belief, we are always earnest listeners and feel privileged when the customer provides insightful feedback. We not only hear their desires but take actions to fulfill them. We consider our customers to be our best teachers, collaborators, and motivators.
- 4. Value your Existing Customers:** Customer churn can hurt your business. It is always wise to try to hold on to the existing customers you possess. Too many SaaS providers make the mistake of searching for greener pastures while turning a deaf ear on their existing customers. To assume that renewals will happen automatically is a big business mistake. You must stay vigilant toward the demands of your customers and constantly strive to add value to their businesses. This is why

innovation is very important. Even the smallest changes in your product can make life simpler for a customer. Developing a good contact strategy is as important as an aggressive marketing plan. We maintain a contact strategy that ensures our representatives are constantly in touch with our existing customers. Our maintenance team also stays steadfast in resolving product issues within the shortest turnaround time, so that our customers face no business disruption.

5. **Stay Patient and Persevere:** In the crowded tech marketplace, your product will inevitably have a slow start and be up against some stiff competition. The path toward success will be slow and at times even frustrating. But it is essential to keep your focus and continue toward your goals. Most of our products needed time to gain acceptance in the market, but we persevered and kept our focus on adding more functionalities to enrich the value of our product. Today, our products have become an essential part of our customers' business processes.

You are a person of great influence. If you could start a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. :-)

I would like to create solutions that can empower differently-abled people and provide them with equal access to information, safety, and security.

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