

2014 BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Customized Patent Solutions Provider of the Year, USA



To be named Customized Payment Solutions Provider of the Year, USA by Acquisition International is an "honour," Khawaja says. "I'm very honoured. But without the support of my team, and our customers, I wouldn't have got here. "It's a statement," he says, "that we're doing something great. That we're providing outstanding services."

- Andy Khawaja (left), CEO - Allied Wallet



International Staffing Firm of the Year, USA

The award is recognition of the company's focus on the highest quality of service. "Ours is a value-based culture," he says. "And we want to ensure that anyone who has an interaction with us walks away with a positive experience"

Matt Briand, CEO -

**Brendan Flood, Executive Chairman -
A.J. Cervantes, Vice Chairman and President -
Staffing 360 Solutions**

Energy Firm of the Year, Mexico

"It feels great. It's a story of hard work over 50 years, and the commitment of everyone in the company."

**- Octavio Berrón,
CFO - Fermaca**

Most Innovative Digital Agency of the Year

"The reaction at Olson has been one of elation. We're thrilled and humbled by the recognition. This award recognises the power of activating communities on behalf of brands."

**- John Partilla,
CEO - Olson**



Customized Payment Solutions Provider of the Year - USA

AlliedWallet

Allied Wallet provides a state-of-the-art payment gateway to optimize online transactions. Acquisition International caught up with the company's globe-trotting CEO Andy Khawaja to ask him what the company has been working on to be named Customized Payment Solutions Provider of the Year, USA, and what plans he has for the future.

A survey conducted by Parade Magazine reveals that nearly 85% of internet users are also frequent online shoppers. Only 61% of these users felt that their personal information was safe.

12 years ago, Andy Khawaja saw this as an opportunity to build the e-commerce experience around safe and secure payment technology.

Allied Wallet provides a secure online payment system, similar to PayPal, as well as peer-to-peer transfers and smartphone card payments. With Allied Wallet, CEO Andy Khawaja, who is often referred to as the "messiah of e-commerce" for the advancement and foresight he's offered to the industry, aims to ensure all consumers and merchants that their transactions are safe, as long as Allied Wallet is the service provider. He has grown Allied Wallet by employing an elite staff of processing veterans and innovative thinkers to uphold security, deter fraud, and assure users that their financial information is safe.

Today, thousands of merchants worldwide today place their trust in Allied Wallet, which has processed over a billion dollars globally in 164 currencies.

Allied Wallet has over 53 million users around the world. Earlier this year, the company acquired one of the largest Chinese payment processors in Hong Kong, CloudAsia. The move will give Allied Wallet more access to consumers and local banks in all regions of Asia including Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia and mainland China.



Allied Wallet has also opened an India base in addition to its UK headquarters overlooking Trafalgar Square in London and offices in the US, Germany, Hong Kong and Macau.

Another exciting recent development came this year when Allied Wallet was licensed to issue MasterCard and Maestro cards in various regions of Europe.

MasterCard has strict regulations for any financial institution that seeks to issue payment cards. But upon review, Allied Wallet has been deemed a licensed issuer of MasterCard or Maestro cards, servicing various regions of Europe including the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and Spain.

This issuing licence will allow Allied Wallet to issue payment cards to its members, giving them the opportunity to spend the money saved in their "eWallet" (which lets you store, send, and receive payments from anywhere you have internet access) at any storefront that accepts MasterCard or Maestro.

Khawaja, a Lebanon-born US citizen, is a born entrepreneur. He spent over seven years travelling around the world, trying to convince banks to work with him, he says, and it was his own struggles as an entrepreneur with a big dream of operating globally that led to him creating Allied Wallet.

Many of Allied Wallet's clients are entrepreneurs with big dreams, who want to build global websites which require transacting globally in multi-currencies, and without a conversion fee. But banks often don't understand the nature of e-commerce businesses, or the potential that entrepreneurs have to transact, create jobs and pay tax to contribute to the economy, Khawaja says. Banks won't take a chance on online entrepreneurs – they don't understand entrepreneurs' sites, he says. "They don't understand their business. When a new startup business comes along, they often don't get a chance from the banks to open their doors and conduct business."

It was this sense of frustration that inspired him to create Allied Wallet, Khawaja says. To illustrate this commitment to helping startup businesses get off the ground by allowing them to accept payments online, he says Allied Wallet devotes 70% of its time to encouraging new businesses to use Allied Wallet to process online payments.

Khawaja's rise to the top has been astonishing. Born in war-torn Beirut, Lebanon, he moved as a child to Europe. From there he moved to the US where he went to college and worked in a string of jobs including in a supermarket and flipping burgers in a fast food restaurant.

Fact File



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Andy Khawaja



“I don’t believe in bad luck, I just believe in one thing: that if you give up then you’re a loser. If you get knocked down, then you learn from it. You must always be moving forward.”

But even such menial jobs were formative, he says, as they put him face to face with customers. “I love to understand what people need, what makes them happy or upset,” he says. It gave him an understanding of what customers need, what they like to buy.

He went on to open a men’s fashion store in Los Angeles, which expanded into a chain. Soon afterwards he moved into online commerce.

A major issue in payment processing is, of course, security. Khawaja has built an online security system which offers level 1 PCI compliance, a secure service which hosts credit card numbers and other fragile information. Level 1 PCI is difficult to obtain, and offers the best security possible. Everything Allied Wallet does is stored on site, in multiple locations across the world.

Data is encrypted using tokenisation (the process of substituting a sensitive data element with a non-sensitive equivalent, or token, which has no extrinsic or exploitable meaning or value). This makes it impossible to get into the server because everything is turned into numbers and letters. Khawaja says he has learned a lot from examining other companies, notably rival PayPal, about the issues facing online payment processors – how to avoid being the victim of hackers, for example.

As for what clients should be looking for in a payment processor, Khawaja says “Someone who’s always ready to answer questions,” he says. “Someone who understands their business structure.” Customers should have access to support 24/7, he says. “Lots of payment processors have maintenance periods,” he says, “but they never give an honest answer about when it will happen and how long it will take,” adding that Allied Wallet is always frank with its customers about scheduled maintenance periods.

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“It’s a statement,” he says, “that we’re doing something great. That we’re providing outstanding services.”

Allied Wallet has an “outstanding” working culture, Khawaja says. This year, the company was rated one of the best places to work

by Great Rated!, a division of the Great Place to Work Institute Inc, the global research, consulting and training firm that identifies, creates and sustains great workplaces by developing high-trust workplace cultures.

Allied Wallet showed superior workplace culture in areas like professional development and training, company atmosphere, benefits, and rewards, with 96% of its employees saying they enjoy special and unique benefits by working for the online payment processor, citing free team lunches every Friday, on-site massages, and awards of up to US\$25,000 for adoption costs.

“We never call our team “employees,” says Khawaja. “The team are like family.” At other companies, like PayPal, he says, employees are known by a number, rather than their name. At Allied Wallet, he says, staff don’t have to arrive or leave on time, and can take breaks as and when they like. As long as they get their work done, Khawaja doesn’t mind. “We don’t want staff to be on the clock, because that’s what leads to stress,” he says. “We want an environment where you can think outside of the box. Allied Wallet is about being creative.”

Looking toward the not too distant future, Khawaja says the next big thing in payment processing will take the shape of a reloadable keychain, already in use in Japan, and completely fraud-proof. Allied Wallet is now working on bringing the first similar system to the UK.

As for challenges facing Allied Wallet, Khawaja says there are none. “We’re winning the race,” he says. “We’re the master in global processing. Today, we’re changing the future of transactions.”

Khawaja and Allied Wallet have thus far been highly successful. But how does he define success? “It’s when you start to achieve your goals,” he says. “But don’t let it get to your head, because it’s also about maintaining that success tomorrow.” A business can’t be successful if it isn’t growing, he says.

“I don’t believe in bad luck,” he says. “I just believe in one thing: that if you give up then you’re a loser. If you get knocked down, then you learn from it. You must always be moving forward.”

