



Aron Dutta

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Aron Dutta lives life at a breakneck speed that comes naturally to a lifelong racer of bicycles, motorcycles, and cars. With the ability to absorb knowledge quickly and apply it across multiple disciplines, Dutta sped through school on scholarships, plunged into technology work with the United States Department of Defense (DoD), and then made a sharp turn into the world of Wall Street to become one of the original developers of the computerized trading mechanism that runs the world's financial engines today.

Dutta, born in Calcutta, India, grew up in the Brooklyn, New York melting pot that he says taught him how to swiftly adapt to new environments—a talent that serves him every day. He was an early aficionado of BMX, building bicycles from scrap parts and racing them. This led in turn to motocross racing and building fast cars. Dutta began working at an early age to support these expensive hobbies, taking on jobs as diverse as short-order cook and working in a pool hall. In high school, Dutta was the president of the local chapter of Distributed Education Clubs of America, which gave him the opportunity to work as an entry-level manager in retail, learning about business from the ground up.

Dutta started his first company while attending Polytechnic University (now part of New York University), where he studied electronics and electrical engineering. The company, called Distributed Information Systems, focused on building high-end, high-speed workstations and networks for CAD/CAM and CAE applications. But before he graduated, another opportunity opened up at the United States Department of Defense (DoD) as a research and development associate, a position geared toward earning a Ph.D. on the job. This appealed to him on several levels; in addition to earning a Ph.D. without going through the usual progression of undergraduate and graduate coursework, Dutta had long thought about becoming an astronaut, and DoD seemed like a way to fast-track that ambition.

At DoD, Dutta worked on weapons and fire-control systems—low-latency, real-time systems—creating the foundation of his later work on Wall Street. “At DoD, I really learned the meaning of ‘mission-critical’ and ‘real time,’” Dutta says. “If DoD hadn’t decided that it needed fewer pilots [becoming a pilot was a prerequisite advantage at the time to becoming an astronaut], I’d be an astronaut today!”

Dutta had already been delivering speeches and presentations, and this brought him to the attention of Salomon Bros., which recruited him for an advanced technology team charged with architecting platforms for real-time trading and global distributed network and systems management. Working with new industry partners such as Cisco, Sun Microsystems, Teknekron Software Systems (Tibco), and Sybase, Dutta and his team developed the first digital trading systems.

After three years with Salomon, Dutta felt he needed to round out his business acumen. He joined Booz Allen Hamilton to reinvigorate a capital markets high-tech strategy and implementation practice. Mentored by five senior partners, he learned the consulting craft on the job and was quickly promoted, becoming a principal in just 18 months. “I consulted with the exchanges, bulge bracket institutions, and service providers, and I also got to work on Booz Allen’s business strategy. I began to see that you have to look not only at the business model, but you also have to craft the online and offline experience for customers and partners, and then be able to build it quickly. I was able to do a lot of work around Internet banking and capital markets, and this is when I was recruited by venture capitalists for a startup called Genuine Internet that was being considered for funding—it was later re-named Viant.”

As a cofounder, Aron wore several hats as Viant's [VIAN:NASDAQ] corporate vice president of strategy and general manager responsible for New York, Chicago, Boston, and Dallas markets, Dutta managed relationships with clients such as American Express and JP Morgan, among others. He also created Viant Incubation Services, a spinoff developed to cocreate a new business model for the music, entertainment, and gaming industries.

Eventually, Dutta left Viant to join a fellow cofounder in another startup, Scient (SCNT:NASDAQ), competing with their old firm in the area of building and nurturing digital businesses and extending the company into the foray of e-business innovations. As senior vice president, corporate strategy and development, and head of the global enterprise markets business unit, Dutta was accountable for 80 percent of Scient's revenue.

By this time, Dutta was running on all cylinders, sleeping only about three hours a night, and traveling constantly. At this critical juncture in his life, he was stricken with a severe case of Lyme disease. From his hospital bed, he watched Scient falter and file for bankruptcy. During this enforced hiatus, Dutta had a lot of time to think, and he decided to create a different kind of business once he regained his health. He founded Ambika Group LLC, a merchant banking and strategic advisory services company focused on web-services technology and software as a service (SaaS). Running his own company allowed Dutta to gradually reenter the capital markets, taking on more projects as his health improved.

Working with many of the new companies working in trading capabilities, market data, security, transaction, and trading systems led Dutta to realize that he wanted to be involved in determining how this could be applied to next-generation business models for the capital markets. This is what led him to the Cisco® Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG).

"I've been a technologist and an operator in the capital markets. I've consulted to the trading companies. I worked with the platform players and the technology vendors that supply them. I had the opportunity to see the market structure, the people, and the business models, and I had the privilege of helping many companies use or develop technology to transform the economic system around opportunities in the capital markets," Dutta comments. "Eventually, I wanted to be a part of the next cycle of innovation—and the best place to do that is with Cisco."

With the Cisco Internet Business Solutions Group (IBSG), Dutta collaborates with the global capital markets. He is responsible for thought leadership geared to financial and capital markets, looking ahead to see how trends will develop and determining how they will impact Cisco's financial services customers. He helps Cisco, its customers, and its partners develop new business models to meet the world's rapidly shifting economic landscape, identifying emerging ecosystems and investment and growth opportunities.

Dutta hasn't lost his early love of racing and building things. Both his son and his daughter are avid motocross riders (his daughter learned to ride a motorcycle before she learned to ride a bicycle). In 2009 and 2010, Dutta ran the Gumball 3000 Rally (which he describes as "both an international car rally and a life-altering experience"), and won the Monster Energy Drink "Unleashed the Extreme Monster" Trophy in 2010. He is an active member and president of the Indian Riders Group of New Jersey, the largest chapter of riders and brand ambassadors of Indian Motorcycle Company.

Someday, Dutta says he will start another company—making grilling sauces. "There have been many meetings around Aron's grill on the weekends to talk to entrepreneurs about the next trading strategy or the next investment capitalization structure. There's nothing more stimulating to the imagination than good food, good fun, and good ideas with great friends," he says with relish.