

A technology agnostic firm



Ethan Kazi
CEO

The Canton Group, LLC

Industry: IT professional services

In a Nutshell: Provides website design, IT consulting and network management for government and commercial clients

Founded: 1998

Size: 30-40 employees

Website:

www.cantongroup.com

Ethan Kazi calls his method of entering the IT field “the immersion technique.” After receiving his undergraduate degree in biology and chemistry, Kazi and three partners started The Canton Group, LLC, an IT professional services firm, in 1998. Because he lacked an extensive background in computers, Kazi took classes in his free time. “It’s amazing what you learn when you don’t sleep much and you do nothing but work,” he says.

That hard work paid off. Twelve years later, The Canton Group – an entirely self-funded operation – offers a variety of IT consulting services, including software development, web systems development, web design, managed application hosting, IT security and network engineering.

“We’re technology agnostic,” Kazi says. “We really look at the solution that needs to be provided to address the customers’ needs independent of the technology.”

A turning point for The Canton Group came in 2002. At the time, the company offered only web systems development, but its customers wanted it to meet all of their IT needs. Kazi and his partners realized they were capable of meeting those needs by providing a complete IT infrastructure for their clients.

“[Our customers] call us; they know it gets done. And we know that we can say it’s going to get done because we can control all aspects of the delivery of that service. We’re not dependent on somebody else for our customers’ success,” Kazi says.

To expand, The Canton Group’s partners had to find employees who had extensive skills and talent in their new service areas. “You find people who can do those areas better than you can,” Kazi says. “And you also have to be willing to let people find their own way, learn from their mistakes. As long as they are learning, they’re moving forward and they’re growing.”

The Canton Group has a “work hard, play hard” culture, though Kazi says the last year has been more about work. As the CEO, he doesn’t micromanage his team. “People know what they can do. But at the same time, you also need to know when to throttle somebody back if they’re working too hard. We have a lot of overachievers, and sometimes you have to sort of force them to take vacations. You don’t want them to burn out. That’s just as important and that’s something we’re trying to do more of,” he says.

But Kazi is quick to admit that he doesn’t always follow his own advice. If he’s not in the office, he’s often at home working. He also keeps up with the constantly changing IT field by reading federal and university publications that highlight emerging IT developments that won’t show up in the federal marketplace for another decade or more.

Whether he’s in the office or working at home, Kazi has a golden rule he follows to keep customers happy: “Do the work as if you’re doing it for yourself and never be satisfied with something that’s not perfect,” he says.



Kazi hikes in Maine with his son.

“The difference between stupidity and genius IS THAT GENIUS HAS LIMITS.” *Albert Einstein*