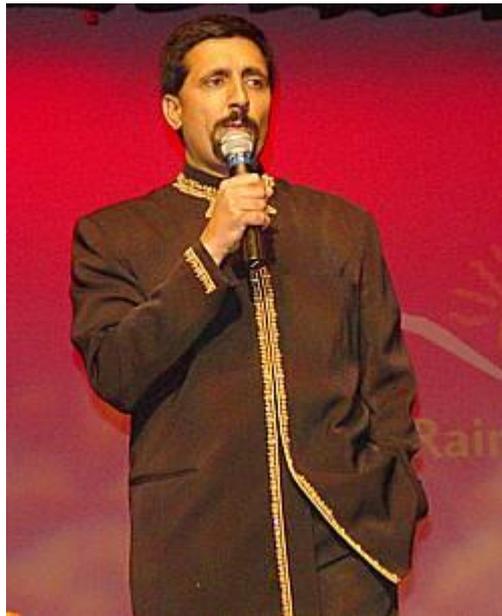


## PROFILE

### Robin Raina : I Have Always Wanted to be Different

He has been voted amongst the top 100 most influential people in the insurance industry. But today, it is his foundation and it's community work that ignites ROBIN RAINA'S passion.

**BY KAVITA  
CHHIBBER**



He comes from a Kashmiri Hindu family, the youngest of four children and named Robin because he chattered like the bird as a kid! His father, a secular man with communist leanings taught him about honesty and integrity: his mother inspired him by her courage and inner strength.

Robin Raina didn't have any lofty dreams-all he knew was he wanted to be different. As a child he was fascinated by the awe a doctor inspired in every one and saving lives seemed a very novel way of empowering oneself.

Instead Robin ended up doing everything but that. Today he heads the very successful Atlanta-based Ebix Inc., an international developer and supplier of software and e-commerce solutions to the insurance industry. He has been credited with redefining and introducing many novel concepts in the insurance industry, including the concept of market making and launching the world's first completely wireless insurance system, targeted to lead the slow moving insurance agents forward. His life has been all about a journey that had many unexpected detours bringing him to America, a place he never wanted to be in.



**Robin Raina inside the Ebix building replicating a Rajasthani village in India.**

Raina did his schooling and college in Punjab and was in the middle of pursuing his dream of a medical career when Operation Blue Star happened. “It created havoc in the University, and the medical school entrance exams got delayed. I ended up studying engineering instead. While in college, I saw the integration between Hindus and Sikhs crumble, and divisions were created. The Sikhs are a very patriotic community and there were wounds inflicted that ran very deep and bled for a long time,” recalls Raina.

He decided to run for President to bring in unity and cohesiveness and was physically assaulted by troublemakers. He still won uncontested and brought the much-needed positivism in the university. “That was a great learning experience for me. I realized that unlike a lot of men, I thought with my heart and not my head. I can say from my personal experience that if you put your heart into anything and do it with passion there is no reason not to achieve your goals. But I was always striving for one thing—that no matter what I do, where I reach, I have to do it my way, on my terms and differently from others.”

Raina took a different route when all his friends were applying to US universities to reach out for the glamour and affluence of the American dream. He decided to do an MBA from IIM Calcutta instead. But in the meantime, while still in college he had started working as a management trainee for a company called PCL (Pertech Computers Ltd, India’s largest brand of personal computers) and had done very well. “In one year I had sold the largest amount of hardware in the country and they had given me three promotions. I realized that no amount of studying at a management school would give me the kind of hands on education I was receiving in this work.”

In 1990, Raina became a manager in PCL and was transferred to Delhi. “I just told the company—give me one focused activity and I will handle it on my own. Their biggest account was with the World Bank and in the first year I ended up achieving single-handedly what their Calcutta and Bangalore office did with the help of 250 people. I then got an offer from Compaq but turned them down. I believe in loyalty and to this day all my employees have stayed with me.”

Then Dell came to India and Raina was asked to help launch Dell. He did and Dell systems became the number one foreign brand. By then Robin says he was beginning to get bored and felt stagnant. It was around that time that the software boom had started in the country and a company called Mind ware was launched. Raina was asked to take charge in Singapore. “In two and a half years we went to \$400,000 in net income and 180 employees, from the \$100,000 they gave me to start operations.”

Then came another detour- a trouble shooting spree in USA when one of PCL'S subsidiaries Altos got in trouble. It was a contract manufacturing concern and one of its major orders had been cancelled. The company desperately needed a 100 million dollar deal to put it back in business and Raina was asked to help. He flew to Charlotte and was welcomed- with raised eyebrows. "I was this young kid with no background in manufacturing, and they were so sure the chairman had accidentally goofed up and sent the wrong man. Even though they knew my track record, they were skeptical. But I had done my homework, and in 6-7 months we got the first \$100 million that we needed with a contract for a 125 million deal from Motorola."

On top of that the tough part was to go to an American company and persuade them to have their products manufactured in India, and prove India was better than the manufacturers in USA and other leading countries like Korea.

"I have realized that whether it's business or personal issues, life is always about relationships and eventually it all boils down to the fact that if you deal with people with honesty, sincerity and integrity and create the quality that you promise, it will get you through the door," says Raina and adds , "India is not very well known for its manufacturing capabilities but we managed to offer them the quality they were looking for."

Robin Raina meanwhile had begun liking America. He also realized he didn't want to stay in manufacturing. He wanted to get into the software business and around that time Delphi Information Systems,( an established public company trading on the NASDAQ) offered him a job, which he accepted. Delphi had just entered the insurance industry and while Robin didn't like the insurance business, he saw possibilities to create key changes.

Ebix creates the software and hardware that goes into running insurance. Robin says he hates the inefficiency and incompetence in the insurance industry. Last year the industry wasted 59 billion in the paper process. "I realized that we led the market designing systems that insurance companies and agencies were using. I wanted to streamline the pricing processes. That's when the idea of a dot.com came to mind and Ebix was created.

I realized if we had to make a mark, we had to again be different. We had to be the ones to define the standards. I also felt that since I didn't have an insurance background, I would bring fresh perspective."

Robin started building from scratch, introducing the concept of market making in insurance and the double concept of "anytime

anywhere” technology. Everything his company did was cutting edge and his objective was to create the tools to simplify insurance. He says he is very proud of these innovations and adds that while market making didn’t set the world on fire, it’s a concept that is here to stay. “I said let’s create a technology where if a buyer wants to buy any insurance, it can happen online, instantly across multiple companies and the consumer gets the best deal without commission. The company will make money on a flat transaction fee. It didn’t matter whether the policy premium was 10 or 10,000 dollars.

When he introduced the “anytime anyplace” concept every one said he was too ahead of his time. “Today everyone has done the same thing and there is not a single competitor in the market that doesn’t have that as part of their services” Raina adds.

Raina decided in 2001 to go back and create a base in India. Talking about issues of poor infrastructure and bribes one has to give to get the job done, Raina says that on the contrary if he had wanted to do what he did in India in the US, he would have had major trouble. “In India people will go beyond their designated hours to accommodate you. People here will stick to the 9 to 5 hours. In 30 days I had bought a building, which was not in the best of conditions and had 30 employees working there. I also designed another state of the art building myself and had it replicate the state of Rajasthan in its portals in 52 days”. All of that without paying a rupee in bribe! Two of the floors in one of the buildings did not have power for 3 years and yet he didn’t budge and now it does. “Today we have 400 employees-the Ebix buildings are equipped with the most cutting edge technology. The building depicting Rajasthan has a different aspect of Rajasthan on each floor, the guards wear Rajasthani gear and turbans and every detail is minutely etched.”

Did he see the dot.com bust coming? And where is Ebix headed?

"I talked about the dot com bubble all along, but while I knew it would happen even I wasn't prepared for the speed at which it happened" says Raina and adds that acquisitions are a critical part of Ebix's present strategy with the company having acquired two more companies worth \$20 million in Australia and Utah in the last six months or so. “Ebix is doing well and is fairly cash rich. Each quarter has been better than the previous one and I don't expect things to be any different in the future."

Raina as you get to know him, seems pretty detached by all his success. He is surprisingly artistic and creative for someone in a dry business like insurance. His eyes light up and he seems very touched, when he talks about legendary singer Manna Dey who he hosted recently. Today, what ignites Robin Raina’s passion, is

far removed from the glitzy world of business success, and the glamour of being voted amongst the top 100 most influential people in the industry.

“Material gains have never meant anything to me. I never wanted to be rich, or make millions. It happened and it made me realize how important it is to give back.” Raina says he was always very affected by the plight of the senior citizens in India and wanted to start a project to rehabilitate those deserted by their loved ones. “I was told however that the infrastructure wasn’t ready for something like that, so I started a foundation three years ago to help underprivileged kids. We have a project to help blind children, and are funding the education of 35 blind children who are all in colleges in Delhi. Another project is to educate the girl child and to watch these children grow and become something in life. We don’t spend anything on administrative work. We offer medical help through the Sunil Dutt and the Nargis Dutt foundation and also through donating a medical ambulance and medical services.”

The foundation and it’s work is so close to his heart that Raina doesn’t think twice about taking 30 days off and being right there in the midst of things to make sure everything is running the way it should. He put in \$100,000 as his personal contribution and the response has been great.

A lot however remains to be done and some of it got accomplished on his recent trip to India. A school has been constructed through the Raina-Prayas project which educates, feeds and clothes underprivileged children and Robin was at hand to formally inaugurate the wooden building in Bawana. On his recent trip Raina happened to see a report on NDTV about 15 young girls ranging from the age of 4 to 7 years, who would go to vehicle workshops lie under cars and collect the dripping mobile oil, which their parents would sell for 15 rupees at the end of the day. “That is very hazardous and eventually can kill the child,” said Raina whose foundation immediately adopted the 15 girls and gave the parents rations in lieu of the 400 odd rupees the girls earned.

While he was talking to the media about various projects a group of journalists were so moved they approached Robin and said that would like to jointly start a project with the Raina foundation and work as volunteers in it.

Another thing that he noticed was fact that women in the slum areas had no sense of empowerment. On asking them how he could help them he was repeatedly told to start a center where they could learn sewing. Through the Raina foundation the first sewing center is being set up in Hapur a village near Delhi and

other centers across villages will follow.

The Raina foundation is bringing singer Shaan next month for fundraising events.

When asked what else is in the works for him, Raina responds, “Well I have bought some land around the Ebix buildings in India and plan to recapture the life in the Indian villages by constructing replicas which will function as the offices on one hand and revisiting Indian culture on the other.” He adds that Ebix is doing very well, but being as restless as he is he doesn’t see himself being the insurance industry’s whiz kid all his life. “I am in the middle of writing two books, one on insurance, the other a work of fiction,” Raina says and adds, “I may get into the entertainment business. But anything I do has to flow smoothly and seamlessly and touch my heart.”

(To know more about the Raina foundation please go to [www.Rainafoundation.com](http://www.Rainafoundation.com))