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UC San Diego Alum Defining the Future of Movies with New Mobile Ticketing Platform

Ameesh Paleja, a former Amazon exec, is CEO of Atom Tickets, which counts Disney, 20th Century Fox and Lionsgate as investors and was recently launched in San Diego

Ameesh Paleja, a 2001 University of California San Diego graduate with a bachelor's in computer science and engineering, is revolutionizing the movie industry with Atom Tickets, where he serves as CEO and co-founder. Recently launched, Atom Tickets is a first-of-its-kind theatrical mobile ticketing platform and app, allowing moviegoers to skip lines by preordering tickets and concessions, and invite their friends without having to pay for their tickets via its social invitation features.

“Going to movies with a group of friends can be a hassle, between picking a day and show-time, finding a theater, and a lot of times, one person has to buy tickets for the group which can be expensive,” said Paleja, an accomplished engineer and technology executive who has held positions at Microsoft and Amazon. “So our product is designed to make that process easier. We are taking a more modern, thoughtful and customer friendly approach.”

Paleja was an executive at Amazon.com where he focused on building software and services like Prime Instant Video, Amazon's Appstore, Cloud Drive, and the Kindle product line. He then became the founding employee of Amazon's digital R&D facility in Southern California, where he oversaw more than 550 employees.



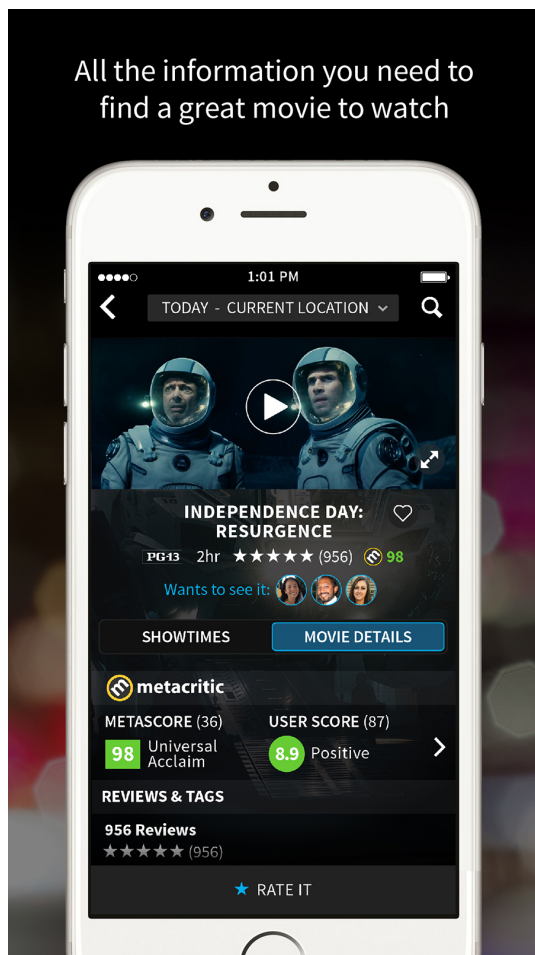
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Paleja founded Atom Tickets with Matthew Bakal, a former Lionsgate executive who is their start-up's executive chairman. In 2014, the two set up shop adjacent to the Lionsgate movie studio headquarters in Santa Monica.

Atom Ticket's momentum has surged in the past year, as the app recently launched throughout Southern California (including Los Angeles, Orange and San Diego Counties). It is already available and doing well in other parts of the United States.

The company will expand to 1,000 theaters – or 15,000 screens - by the end of the year, having secured partnerships with Regal Cinemas and AMC Theatres, the country's largest cinema chains. The app now covers 50 percent of the theater industry.

Paleja says the company is aiming to be available at all theaters across North America, taking on entrenched companies Fandango and MovieTickets.com, which handle ticketing for 27,000 to 29,000 screens each.



Screen shot of the Atom Tickets app

Unlike Fandango and MovieTickets.com, which were founded in 2000, Atom Tickets offers personalization, recommendation and advance ticketing for social connections along with more convenience, according to Paleja.

“Those companies are media companies attacking the ticketing problem, we are a tech company attacking the ticket problem, so that is the fundamental difference,” Paleja said. “Before we started Atom Tickets, we found that there hadn't been a lot of innovation in digital ticketing in the last 15 years, so we saw a huge opportunity for disruption.”

Earlier this year, the company raised \$50 million in capital with contributions from Lionsgate, 20th Century Fox and The Walt Disney Co.

The support is designed to bolster movie attendance, as some 5.5 billion cinema seats go empty every year, according to Paleja. In addition, the technology is designed to increase movie-going among younger demographics that often get their entertainment from

online streaming. People aged 18 to 24 bought an average of 5.9 movie tickets last year, the lowest per capita attendance rate for that group in at least five years, according to the Motion Picture Assn. of America.

“Most of my background is in digital streaming,” said Paleja, “There is certainly a time and place for that, but people still like going out—and going to the movies is one of the most egalitarian forms of entertainment for all ages.”

Atom Tickets is designed to make movie-going simple, said Paleja, who holds 16 patents. In addition to preordering tickets and concessions, users can coordinate and invite friends (via Facebook or their contact list) to the movies without having to pay for them. The app also provides reviews, trailers and synopses. The free app is available in both Google Play Store and the Apple App Store.

If users are unsure of what to watch, there is even a feature on Atom which allows them to “rally” friends with a poll, and the app tallies the best option for the group. Friends can also select a seat next to friends in auditoriums that offer reserved seating. The Atom Tickets app provides moviegoers with incentives for returning users, such as discounts and giveaways.

Atom Tickets began its efforts by testing its system in Tennessee and Ohio. Attendance levels and concession sales increased by more than 10 percent, compared with similar theaters over the same period that didn’t use the app, Paleja said.

A Solid Foundation from UC San Diego’s Jacobs School of Engineering

Paleja says much of his success as both an engineer and recruiter can be attributed to UC San Diego.

Upon graduation from UC San Diego, Paleja started his career at Microsoft. “When I got in the workforce, the engineers at Microsoft were incredibly talented and I can say the Department of Computer Science and Engineering at UC San Diego’s Jacobs School of Engineering prepared me well to handle myself with that crew of engineers,” he said. “I grew in my career and because of that solid foundation I got from UC San Diego, I was able to outshine a lot of my peers.”

Paleja later joined the team at Amazon.com where he focused on building software and services that allowed the company to sell digital goods that didn’t come in little brown boxes.

“There is a really strong desire to recruit from UC San Diego,” he said. “As a hiring manager, I have been in more than 1,500 interviews and UC San Diego has some of the best grads. I owe UC San Diego a lot. It put me on the spring board to my career and I have had a lot of great UC San Diego alumni help build out my team for various organizations, including Atom Tickets.”

Paleja says Atom Tickets is currently 100 percent focused on movies, but that the app has the potential to also cover sporting events, concerts and more.

“We have big plans for the company,” he said. “It has been a lot of hard work, and it’s great to see everything fall into place.”

Atom Tickets is available at ArcLight, AMC and Regal Cinemas throughout San Diego County. UC San Diego affiliates receive a \$2 discount when using the app at La Jolla’s ArcLight theater if they type in “UCSD” at the checkout screen.

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