


Powering Up Dell

CMO Karen Quintos lays out a fresh branding campaign for courting IT success

BY TODD WILKINSON PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHEW MAHON



Karen Quintos, seated in front of Dell's customer-inspired patents, is successful because of her affinity for listening to and engaging with the company's billions of IT users.

For Karen H. Quintos, the energetic senior vice president and CMO at Dell, "The Power to Do More" is bigger than a global brand platform and holds more promise than any shiny new gadget proclaimed to be the next "it" machine. Very simply, she regards those five words as both an internal "organizing principle" for the company's creative philosophy and an external "aspirational value" that today extends across every customer touch point around the world.

"It's a statement that reflects the wants and needs of our customers — no matter what role technology plays in their lives," Quintos explains. "This branding campaign is very different from anything we have done in the past, and very different from what other technology companies are doing. It's different because instead of focusing on technology products, we're featuring how people use technology in their environments to accomplish goals. And they're folks whose real stories you can relate to."

To get a sense of the protagonists, think CIO, a neighborhood school teacher, a structural engineer, a parent, student, or small business owner — all ambitious individuals seeking Dell's know-how to accomplish tasks vitally important to them. "But it's about more than people doing their jobs well so that their companies and interests can prosper," Quintos points out. "Our customers want us to help them achieve outcomes that are meaningful and personally fulfilling."

Seeking an Edge

At a time when economic uncertainty is forcing society to reevaluate priorities, Dell's new campaign is an attempt to connect with customers at a higher aspirational level, Quintos says. Yet, The Power to Do More also resonates with those seeking economic efficiency, cutting-edge analytics, stress-free convenience, and time saving as a way to bolster the bottom line.

These are heady times for the Austin-based tech giant. It's almost hard to believe 27 years have passed since Michael Dell founded his personal computer company in a dorm room at the University of Texas. After riding the PC craze on the back of a cultural revolution and becoming one of the largest and most influential

information technology purveyors in the world, Dell, like most of its peers, has more recently battled to maintain a dominant edge.

Circumstances such as declining market share and sagging consumer spending have forced Dell to become a broader, more dynamic company. To drive future growth, Quintos says, the company plans to spend \$1 billion this year alone creating opportunities in cloud computing, virtualization, intelligent data management, and security.

The new U.S. branding campaign went live in early July, soon after Dell executives delivered an upbeat forecast at the company's financial analyst conference. In Austin, Quintos presided over a panel discussion featuring some of Dell's high-powered customers — IT executives from mega-retailer Target, Lopez Foods, and Salesforce.com, among others.



FROM TOP: Michael Dell, founder and CEO of Dell; the home page and focal point for The Power to Do More campaign.

IT industry analyst Rob Enderle, who has tracked the fortunes of Dell and its competitors for years, attended the Austin event and blogged these observations: "For me, what makes a winning vendor isn't the technology or even the price — and we often forget this — it is the quality of the relationship.

"Sitting in the audience listening to these IT executives praise Dell, not so much for Dell's products, but for Dell's approach and particularly Dell's people, warms my heart," Enderle added. "They felt that the reason they were loyal to Dell was that the relationship ... was more like a partnership where Dell's skin was tied to the success of the result."

A key to Dell's resilience, observers say, has been its ability to earn — and maintain — customer loyalty across a variety of sectors. Says Quintos: "If customers don't view your brand as one that is relevant to what they want to do and achieve, then they certainly won't be loyal."

Finding Its Purpose

For more than a decade, Quintos' ability to nurture customer affinity has made her a rising star in Dell's senior management ranks, first in North America and then as a global brand strategist. She says her friend Jim Stengel, the former global marketing officer at Procter & Gamble, has been influential in helping Dell realize the importance of purpose in driving business growth.

"One of my all-time favorite things Jim said to me was that the power of purpose is not a marketing or sales idea. It's a company idea. Purpose drives an entire organization and it answers why the brand exists," Quintos recalls.

In the days following Dell's campaign launch, Stengel Tweeted a ringing endorsement to his legion of followers: "Great to see Dell building on its momentum and sharing its purpose to a wider set of people."

The Power to Do More is at the center of a carefully orchestrated strategy to redefine who and what Dell is. The branding is not only a declaration of Dell's ability to continually evolve the capabilities of its customers, but also an essential way to control the brand in today's fiercely competitive environment. Quintos cites an old cautionary saw: "Define your brand or someone else will."

The Power to Do More does indeed have a purpose. As the American economy reeled in 2008, Dell used the subsequent downturn as an inflection point to dig down deep and assess how the company could achieve its greatest impact in a dynamic, ever-changing landscape, Quintos says.

"We had long been a hardware provider, but customers were asking us to solve their problems, not just sell them products. We knew what our role once was, but we had to decide what it should be today and in the future," Quintos says, noting that Dell's new identity is as a full-service IT solutions and services company poised to lead again. "As a global marketing team, we realized we needed to express our new role to those asking us to help them do more." »

KAREN QUINTOS' 5 BEST PRACTICES FOR ACHIEVING PROFESSIONAL (AND PERSONAL) SUCCESS

1. DEFINE YOUR BRAND OR SOMEONE ELSE WILL. Controlling your brand is essential in today's business environment. It's a competitive necessity and an aspirational stepping-stone for achieving your goals.

2. BE TRUE TO YOURSELF AND YOUR VALUES. Let that principle guide how you represent your personal brand, how you make decisions around your career, and how you interact with those around you. This will help distinguish you every day, in whatever field you choose.

3. BALANCE SIGNIFICANCE WITH SUCCESS. I believe that we spend our first 40 years trying to be successful — and our next 40 years trying to be significant. But remember, you don't have to wait to try and make a difference.

4. PRIORITIZE YOUR LIFE OR SOMEONE ELSE WILL. This certainly comes with time. As you evolve and get to know what's important to you, speak up. I believe the reason I've succeeded as a business leader, wife, and mother is because I've always had my priorities clear, and I'm open with others about those priorities.

5. EMBRACE CHANGE. There has never been a time when more change has happened than right now. To reach customers in the communities they inhabit, you have to observe and listen. By doing that, you will find the points of connection to reach them in a way they find personally meaningful.

A Promising Start

To glean essential insights, Dell asked 9,000 existing and prospective customers what they valued and wanted from an IT provider. The company also conducted market research to better understand competitive trends in the industry and created indices to assess how thought leaders and other cultural influencers perceived the brand. Dell then began to put the architecture of its rebranding in place.

The company piloted The Power to Do More branding campaign this past March in Germany. Quintos says the results were so promising Dell moved forward with a full-blown, multiphase campaign in the U.S., and it's now up and running globally. The campaign is a 360-degree approach involving traditional advertising, social media, and live promotional events — all of which tie back to www.thepowertodomore.dell.com.

"We have a strong brand heritage that has always been grounded in our customers," Quintos says. "When Michael [Dell] started the company, he had this amazing idea that technology could help people everywhere reach their full potential."

Dell achieved early breakthrough innovations by being the first to sell built-to-order PCs directly to customers. The Power to Do More platform is inspired, in part, by Dell's undying belief in Americans with pluck. "Michael and all our leaders are absolutely committed to encouraging smart risk taking and the start-up mentality within Dell as long as we can directly tie these initiatives to the business and what we're trying to help customers achieve," Quintos points out.

Given the kinetic nature of technology, there is seldom a moment to rest on a product's laurels. What remains resonant with customers, Quintos says, is not the shine of a new gadget but the bond forged with customers as they implement a new product or system and need a little hand-holding. In Enderle's mind, "Dell's recent success is largely the result of Dell focusing on being a better Dell."

Finding Its Inner Voice

In the same way that Dell celebrates its enterprise with customers, the company also tries to nurture fearlessness and an uncommon creative atmosphere within its own ranks, Quintos says. Dell has invested in platforms like Salesforce.com's Chatter to promote idea sharing and collaboration among employees

around the world. Customers large and small, she says, benefit from Dell's enormous reservoir of solution-oriented approaches.

"We've learned a lot throughout the journey of brand evolution," Quintos says. "To those marketers who find their companies in a similar place, remember that instinct and your inner voice are great places to start; they both tell you that something needs to change. But to really get to the heart of how to change, you should embrace the data because that's what ultimately proves those instincts right."

Quintos believes the best kind of marketing happens organically, peer to peer, through word of mouth when referrals come unsolicited. It's an area where Dell continues to invest a substantial amount of resources.

One of the essential tools Dell uses to track brand value and inform its marketing is the Net Promoter Score. Even though branding efforts are geared primarily to support financial and business goals, the Net Promoter Score measures the likelihood of existing customers recommending Dell's systems to friends and colleagues. "It lets us measure our progress throughout the lifetime of our relationships with customers — far beyond a single sale or ad click-through," Quintos says.

Dell also uses a variety of other receptacles to collect feedback. A simple and highly popular example is Dell YouBooth, which functions much like the old-fashioned photo booths found in malls and arcades but captures video. Set up at trade shows and customer events around the world, the booths yield valuable suggestions and insights, which are quickly assessed by management and used to improve service and outreach.

Crucial to Dell's deciphering of emerging nuances in the marketplace is its ability to listen. On any given day, Quintos says, there might be 25,000 posts on Internet forums made about Dell products and services. Dell considers it a forward line of engagement.

In December 2010, Dell launched its Social Media Listening Command Center, which allows analysts to filter and aggregate social media conversations into key topics so specialists can effectively partake in them. For Dell, the sun never sets on its conversations with customers. Some 5,000 Dell employees are available around the clock to converse with customers in every corner of the world. Utilizing this capability is yet another value-added facet of The Power to Do More platform. »

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Karen Quintos (second from left) with attendees at the most recent Dell Women's Entrepreneur Network, held in Rio de Janeiro



As part of its mission to do social good, Dell has partnered with the University of Texas to host the Dell Social Innovation Competition for college students. This year's winner was Taka Taka Solutions from the London School of Economics for its work in cost-effective waste management solutions for developing countries.

Delivering Value and Growth

As a cohesive brand platform with many different prongs, The Power to Do More is designed to deliver customized messaging to each of its distinct customer segments: public business (serving education, government, and health care), large enterprise, consumer, and small business. In education, Dell's Connected Classroom initiative helps teachers in a variety of countries integrate technology into learning that prepares students for life after school. For CIOs, Quintos notes that Dell provides compelling models for simultaneously achieving greater efficiency through data management that, in turn, delivers business value and drives growth.

For consumers investing in technology for personal needs, Quintos says, "it's about giving them 'more you' technology in bringing their hobbies to life and allowing them to be themselves." The company has developed branded products, solutions, and services designed to meet specific needs.

Saving time, the linchpin of efficiency, also means freeing customers to pursue their passions, be there for their loved ones, and get involved in their communities — messages that are central to The Power to Do More campaign.

"We believe in the power of brands to do social good," Quintos acknowledges. "If there's one thing that we've learned as we've evolved our brand, it's that people want to associate with brands that speak to them, that align with their values and beliefs. It's the intangible way you feel about a company independent of what products or solutions you may buy from them."

Quintos points to a pair of examples where Dell wears its values on its sleeve. For the past five years, with marketing playing a key role, Dell has partnered with the University of Texas to host the Dell Social Innovation Competition, for college students involved with social entre-

preneurship. Astoundingly, this year's event attracted 1,500 students from 350 different colleges, located in 80 different countries.

Winners are given access to Dell's brightest thinkers who help them implement their ideas using the most sophisticated approaches to information technology. This year's winner, Taka Taka Solutions, a group from the London School of Economics, provides cost-effective waste management solutions in developing countries throughout the world.

A second initiative near and dear to Quintos is the Dell Women's Entrepreneur Network, which brings together women from around the world to share ideas on how to grow business opportunities from concept to production. The latest gathering was held in Rio de Janeiro and featured sessions on everything from navigating the private equity landscape to preparing pitches for VCs to harnessing social media.

Reinforcing the Brand

Reflecting on her own mentors, Quintos mentions Sally Woolsey, with whom she worked in the technology and operations group at Citibank. "I remember so vividly the strong sense of brand preservation she brought to every meeting and project," Quintos says. "In every instance, she always made sure our decisions reinforced the Citibank brand and its value to consumers. Today, I absolutely approach my work at Dell that way. A common question that my teams constantly hear from me is: 'How does that impact our customers?'"

At the end of the day, what Dell offers its faithful is the promise of technology that empowers businesses, professionals, and citizens in ways they didn't think were possible before. But it comes with a distinctly human touch. "When I think about my role at Dell — as CMO, boss, mentor, colleague — and my roles in my personal life — mom, wife, advocate for causes like the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure — I want to make an impact and a difference to those in my world. I want to teach, to help others, to counsel, and drive for results."

As for any advice Quintos cares to share, she says: "If I were standing before an up-and-coming MBA, I'd say the same thing I tell my 16-year-old son: 'No matter what you do, let passion be your guide. If you're in a job you're not passionate about, you may be in the wrong profession. Work for a company that activates your passion and makes you happy to get up every day.' If there's one secret ingredient to marketing, that's it." ■

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