



# An interview with Guy Kawasaki and Dell

Jason Duty, leader of Dell's Social Outreach Services

One in a series of interviews, brought to you by Dell, between Guy Kawasaki, former Chief Evangelist of Apple and author of *Enchantment*, and corporate social media innovators.

**Guy Kawasaki:** Tell me about the evolution of social media use at Dell.

**Jason Duty:** It actually goes back further in history than social media. Dell has always been known for using technology to communicate directly with customers. We've had online forums as far back as 1986. About five years ago we began using social media to connect with customers. Then a couple of years ago a small social media team began creating programs that demonstrated the communications value of embedding social media into the fabric of our company. Since then my team, which focuses on customer support using social media, has grown from five people speaking English to a global team of about 70 participants supporting customers worldwide across 11 languages.

**Guy Kawasaki:** And this is only customer support?

**Jason Duty:** Yes. In my team we've internally branded ourselves Social Outreach Services, or SOS, which reflects what we do in terms of helping

customers and a little bit of the urgency as well. We are listening for those specific support-related incidents that we can offer assistance on. Then our next job is to engage with those customers and resolve their issues.

**Guy Kawasaki:** Can you give us the work flow? Do you have some massive Radian 6 complex search happening and whenever they see the words "Dell" and "sucks" you immediately see that tweet and jump on it?

**Jason Duty:** Conceptually you described it pretty well. We use the Radian 6 engagement console that combines their traditional dashboard search and analytics features with the capability to engage with customers. Within that tool we set up different listening profiles to look out for service-related issues that might indicate a customer's in distress. An easy one is "Dell sucks" and then we get much more specific in terms of product-related concerns, order status, credits, returns and online ordering experience. We also reach out to some of our fans and promoters and let them know we appreciate their support.

**Guy Kawasaki:** So you're not just fire-fighting?

**Jason Duty:** No, in fact there are three different tracks that my team runs on. The biggest one right now is the reactive piece that I just described. Then there's the promoter piece in which we're looking out for our fans and advocates and trying to stay connected with them and understand what we can do to keep them a fan and an advocate. The third piece is this proactive channel that we've developed. We look at customer survey data to tell us about why customers are contacting Dell. What are their pain points? We compiled a list and then tried to find or develop good content and point customers back to those solutions. We did this through our @DellCares Twitter account. On average we send out 20 or so of these proactive messages every week and we see really good results in terms of click-throughs to our use support pages. In general the reach from @DellCares in terms of impressions is anywhere from 1.5 to 2 million users a week.

al media leaders do right? **How do** Are we reaching a tipping point for **social media?** Is it now a **must-have** for **comp**  
Are we reaching a tipping point for **social media?** connect with their customers?  
ing point for **social media?** a **must-have** for companies to connect **leaders** do it right? **social m**  
Is it now a **must-have** for companies to **connect with their customers?**

**Guy Kawasaki:** Who makes the call that says yes, send this guy with the cracked screen a new laptop even though he may have dropped it?

**Jason Duty:** That's us as well. My team has the authority to make a lot of those calls, including times when we throw policy and procedure out the window and say, what is the right thing to do here? and do that. We have a standing cross-functional team that works on these types of cases that includes my team, our social media ground control team and then other groups like PR, corporate communications, legal, the business units, product groups, and so on. We sit down at a table and figure out what a particular issue means to us and what our options are in terms of how we react and what we communicate.

**Guy Kawasaki:** And if you didn't have this social media monitoring and resolution system, what do you think would have happened to these customer cases in the old days?

**Jason Duty:** About a quarter of the cases we end up engaging on are customers who have tried to get a resolution from Dell previously and haven't been successful. At that point a frustrated person will start to exercise his or her opinions on social media channels. Prior to the launch of my team those issues festered out there and sometimes became PR disasters for Dell. The majority of what we're seeing now, though, are customers who are opting to use social media as a line of first offense to contact Dell. Our resolution rates have grown to 98% of all the cases that we deal with.

**Guy Kawasaki:** Can you always assume that people are tweeting honestly? Maybe their screen is cracked because they dropped their laptop or ran over it with a truck. Are there people scamming you?

**Jason Duty:** With any support process there will always be people who look to take advantage, but I'm not seeing a ton of that out there. Generally there are enough extenuating circumstances behind the story to make us disregard it anyway. But I will say that there's this emerging concept of social bullying where people will threaten to write a blog post if you don't give them what they want. We consider those seriously, but in the end we're still looking at what's the right thing to do and what's the right way to communicate with this person or this group to come to an understanding.

**Guy Kawasaki:** When you see a social media question or concern, do you try to go back and forth at 140 characters or do you take them offline?

**Jason Duty:** We try to keep the conversation on the platform where it started. Even in Twitter, which is the most likely place for someone to ask us to call them instead. We'll certainly do that, but it doesn't actually happen very often. Generally we can work within the platform either publicly or sometimes behind the scenes via direct message.

**Guy Kawasaki:** Can you rank the services in terms of where the action is for you?

**Jason Duty:** The highest volume that we see comes first out of forums, then blogs, then Twitter and then social networking platforms like Facebook.

**Guy Kawasaki:** If you were to give advice to large companies like yourselves about the use of social media support, what are your top two pieces of advice?

**Jason Duty:** First and foremost is to build a strategy around customer needs. We launched our support organization largely because we were perceived not to be present in the communities, and that perception fostered another one which was that Dell didn't really care

about customers. We had to work to change that perception and one way to do it was to expand our presence and efforts in social media. The second is to focus on resolving open customer issues rather than running off after some really cool bells and whistles in terms of listening tools or social media campaigns. Those are all well and good but I think the core of what you do is listening, engagement and resolution. That's when you're putting customers first; it shows them that you care about them and the way that they interact with your products and services.

**Guy Kawasaki:** What other goals should companies aspire to?

**Jason Duty:** The end stated goal for many organizations in terms of support is to develop experts and advocates who aren't members of your company. There's Microsoft's MVP program and we have the Dell VIP program—these are programs centered around non-corporate experts who volunteer their time and who actually enjoy providing advanced technical expertise and guidance to other customers. Those three tactics accelerate social media programs and enhance their success.

