

Episode 50: Using Marketing to Attract Top Talent with Dell’s Jennifer Newbill

00:00 S?: Welcome to the Neon Noise podcast. Your home for learning ways to attract more traffic to your website, generate more leads, convert more leads into customers and build stronger relationships with your customers. And now your host, Justin Johnson and Ken Franzen.

00:15 Justin Johnson: Hey, Neon Noise station, welcome to the Neon Noise podcast where we decode marketing and sales topics to help grow your business. I am Justin and with me I have my co-host Ken. Ken, how is Ohio treating you today?

00:29 Ken Franzen: Ohio is... I think today is the last nice day in the foreseeable forecast. We've got some 70's going on which is great, but looks like it's gonna be the highs of 50's coming up in the future. I think you're due for a trip back to your home state of Ohio here in a couple of weeks. So you might wanna pack the snow boots and the parka there, if you still own one, and bring that with you.

00:56 JJ: Definitely gonna need to do that. It's probably gonna be rather, rather chilly and not Florida weather when I get up there. Any who, enough about that. This show today is exciting, I think it's gonna benefit many of our listeners. One of the biggest problems companies face is hiring and finding new talent. And our guest today is an expert when it comes to the recruiting arena. Today, we will be speaking with Jennifer Newbill. She's the director of global talent acquisition center of excellence leading Dell's Canada attraction engagement and experience. Jennifer and her team manage the global employment brand strategy and are also closely partnered with various Dell teams on employee advocacy and measuring employee and market sentiment. Jennifer has been with Dell Inc for over 14 years in various human resource roles including recruiting, leadership and development and HR operations project management. Jennifer welcome to Neon Noise.

01:56 Jennifer Newbill: Thank you for having me.

01:58 JJ: Absolutely. Please fill in the blanks on anything I may have missed and share with us a little bit of detail about your background.

02:04 JN: Absolutely. You did a great job, which of course was what I wrote in my bio. [chuckle] So I was listening to it going, "I think that sounds familiar." And I'm like, "Oh, I think I wrote that."

[laughter]

02:16 JN: I've been in HR really heavy hand in recruiting for about 20 years. And the how I got into recruiting is always sort of interesting. And I think for the most part, anybody that's in recruiting, you don't get a degree in recruiting. People don't go to college and say, "You know what, I want to be an expert in recruiting and that's what I'm gonna study in school." And so usually people have an interesting background in how they got into recruiting. For me, it was, I went to a liberal arts school, I studied psychology so I have a little bit of that psychology bent and that's where things like advocacy and trust and sentiment really excite me in my role now. And then I decided to get a master's degree in business 'cause I thought, "I've got a liberal arts degree in psychology, what am I gonna do?" So I moved to Dallas, I went to school just north of Dallas and studied business and got a really good foundation. And then I learned about an organization called Heidrick & Struggles.

03:15 JN: And they are an established, very well-respected, executive search firm. So that's actually where I started which is maybe a little bit of a strange path, because usually people will go there later in their career. And what we did is we worked with large corporations in finding very senior-level talent. I worked in research and this was before... I love to date myself, but this was really before the internet was used a lot at work and email was a very new thing. And so we had a library of actual books, so Hoover's, Who 's Who in Business in America, that was what I used to help identify talent and then I did a lot of cold calling. So that's early part of my career and how I got into recruiting.

04:02 KF: We're getting more and more questions about how to acquire talent. It seems like right now in the economic situation that we're in, a lot of clients turn to us and say, "Justin, Ken, we're really busy right now. In fact, we can't sustain the amount of demand right now that's being asked and we need to increase our work force. What type of guidance can you give us to attract new talent, young talent, the right talent, the superstar, all star." And I just looked at them and I'm saying, "I'm not in recruitment." I get that it seems like I'd be a good fit for this and someone that could answer your question but it's still marketing. Recruitment, marketing, or employer branding and attracting talents, the right people, 'cause you're company's as good as your people are. So can you kind of break down to us a little bit, dive into that what maybe recruitment, marketing or employer branding is and why it matters and maybe some high level approaches to it?

05:08 JN: I think one of the observations I've made is smaller company's tend to think, "We need marketing and we're marketing our products and services." And they tend to wait to really hire someone or think about recruitment marketing. And that's where, I think, it's a bit of a missed opportunity. I was gonna say mistake and then I thought, "No, I don't want to be negative here," but I think it's very common where if you're a start up or a smaller company, having a holistic approach to the market that includes not just attracting potential people to purchase your products and services, but also potential people to work for your organization is probably one kind of high level piece of advice I would give. Now and then it starts to get into the minutia of how do you do that? There's a lot of different ways you can do it and I think it depends on your growth strategy, where are you located, how many offices. "We're a startup, but we have five locations." "We're startup, we all work remotely." "We're startup, we have one location. We are all in Austin, Texas."

06:09 JN: So I think that's where some of the caveat start to come in, but that's where digital can really help quite a bit. So if you have... If you're a startup company, you have your page on LinkedIn, it is never too early to start thinking about how LinkedIn can help you build pipelines and connect with candidates. And that's just sort of one example. I'm not saying you have to use LinkedIn, but typically smaller companies are engaging on LinkedIn, creating profiles, thinking about how they can leverage LinkedIn from a social selling standpoint, but they think, "Oh, we're only 50 people, we don't need a recruitment marketing strategy." Really, it's never too early to have a recruitment marketing strategy.

06:48 JN: And so looking at Facebook and how you connect with people holistically, looking at LinkedIn, looking at Twitter, whatever properties you're choosing to look at. And it's never too early to start asking your employees for feedback, understanding how they're feeling, what the sentiment is and seeing, "Do we have reviews on Glassdoor?" I was looking at a company that's a bit of a competitor for our organization today, but they're much, much smaller. But they're nimble and fierce and dynamic and super cool. They only have 11 reviews on Glassdoor. That's not a lot. I thought, "Oh, that's not a lot of reviews." But, I'm curious, has anybody at the company even read them? Are they talking to their employees about Glassdoor? Are they talking to their employees about how they're feeling? Do they know what people are saying? So I think for smaller companies, it's kind of never too early to start thinking holistically about marketing the company to include, "Oh, we're also trying to attract talent."

07:40 JN: The second answer I would give is you can't rely on email for so long. And in recruitment marketing and recruiting, we also have CRMs. So instead of customer, they're candidate relationship databases. And there's some candidate relationship databases that are really nimble, really fierce, they're great for small companies. It is never too early to build pipelines of talent and stay connected with people. You may only have two positions open now, all of a sudden, you're gonna get hit with 12. If you're a 50-person company, that's crazy. I've been with startup companies before. I know what that's like to go from we have one rack to we have 15. "Oh my God, how are we gonna hire 15 people?" So again, being proactive and having some kind of relationship database that helps you manage the pipeline of people that you meet at conferences, or events, or you listen to on a podcast, or you connected with and follow on Twitter is never too early. Because what happens is you get behind the curve and all of a sudden you get some funding, you get a big deal, you have to hire 15 people. And again, 15 people for a 50-person company is like a nightmare-ish kind of scenario. And again, I've been there. So I would just say, it's never too early to start thinking like a recruiter when it comes to talent.

09:01 KF: Interesting. Yeah, I think about that growing. You wanna grow quickly, you wanna scale quickly, but you also wanna do so in a manageable way. And so having the right tools and a plan in place is essential there. Now, what about making your company an attractive place to work? If we're all recruiting for the... Let's say we're all recruiting for the top 1% of the talent pool. I know that's not the target for every business out there. Some businesses are recruiting for those that are fresh out of college. Other businesses are looking for those that are the veterans, that are experienced and need no training. But let's say that we're chasing after the same talent pool, whether they're at the top or the bottom of that spectrum, what are some of the things... Dell looks like... Some of the pitchers I've seen... I've never been in any of your facilities, but they look like they got some pretty nice facilities and looks like a pretty cool place to work and you see some of these startups with ping pong tables and beanbag chairs and they feed you breakfast, lunch and dinner and you can take food home with you.

10:04 JN: Yeah.

10:04 KF: All things that we don't have here in Neon Goldfish. [chuckle] But...

10:08 JN: I think, when I moved into employment branding it was still relatively new, this was about seven, eight years ago. And I'm very self taught and I read everything I absolutely can about attracting people to an organization. One of the things we found, especially for millennial Gen Z-ers is they're like, "Ping pong tables, yeah, yeah, yeah. What I want is to be challenged and to have wonderful experiences, especially that include some travel or international travel." Not every company can offer that. So we're throwing that out there.

10:41 KF: Sure.

10:42 JN: "But I wanna take advantage of this time in my life where maybe I don't have a family or maybe I'm really trying to figure myself out and I want a company that invests in me in that way." So ping pong tables aside, that's really what a lot of the people that are newer to the job market are telling us. So what do we do with that information? Well, we showcase people that work for us that have those stories to tell. So my big platform is always about leveraging your employees to be advocates and to share their experiences through storytelling. And we know that individuals are trusted more in the marketplace now than institutions are. So we know from research, from people, organizations like the Edelman Trust survey that's been happening for 17 years now, they're like, "Hey guys, for the last five to six years, trust in institutions has gone steadily down and trust in individuals has gone up." So it's this interesting sort of flip flop that's happened.

11:43 JN: So if you're relying on a corporate account or a corporate message to attract people especially if you're a smaller company, you're sort of kidding yourself. So even if you only have five people on staff, every week talk about one of those people with a picture of them, with a quote, something inspirational, something about them also personal not just professional. If you have a connected or flexible workforce which we do, I am talking to you from my guest bedroom in Austin, Texas, not from our corporate headquarters. That's an amazing program we have at Dell. A lot of people want flexibility. Show people working at home with a picture of their dog or their cat on their shoulder. Whatever that is, that's very effective. And it kind of demonstrates your culture.

12:31 JN: But in general, if you can't meet the needs of what people want, they will figure it out which is a little scary in recruiting. Because again, go back to mid-to-late 90s when I started, it was newspaper adverts. It was complete lack of information that the candidate had. There was no way for them to find out except to, "Hopefully, somebody will call me and I will interview and it will be this awkward day of interviews and I will try to ask questions." But really, it's not about the candidates. It's about the company 'cause that's the way it was back then. And I may say yes to a job and then it turns out it wasn't the right fit for me or it wasn't the right fit for the company.

13:08 JN: So, I think transparency is a good thing because our candidates are more informed. But it's also so much more competitive. So be competitive. Think about a marketer, like you do with your products and services just like you do with talent. And think about what does the talent wanna know? What they wanna know, is this exciting work? Are these cool people? What's the philosophy of the company? If you recall, Reed Hastings, who is the founder of Netflix, wrote this manifesto. And this was years ago and he titled it Culture Code. I don't know if you guys are familiar with that, but a lot of companies have followed too and we have our own culture code at Dell. And what he did is he said, "You know what, I wanna think about talent and I wanna share my philosophy about what it's like to work at Netflix." And it seems a little ivory tower but honestly, it was him being very transparent about what people could expect if they worked with Netflix, as a partner or a vendor and if they worked at Netflix. And I think it's behooved them in such a tremendous way.

14:07 JN: So, being very transparent, leveraging your employees with their stories, asking them to speak on your behalf, which is very scary at first, but we do a lot of that at Dell. And all it's done is improved our employees' sentiment and improve the external sentiment on sites like Glassdoor. So, that would be my big chunk of advice and you could spend years doing that and focusing... That's not a six-month kind of thing. And that's why some companies hire people like me 'cause they're like, "Whoa. We need a person and a whole team to help us do this on an ongoing basis. This is a lot of work." My team and I are an end-to-end marketing team that sits within the HR.

14:49 KF: So, what is your platform? And are you putting these out, these stories? Are they video stories? Are they text-based stories? And how are you getting the distribution on these? Where are you pushing these out through?

15:00 JN: We have all types of stories. So, anything from a visual graphic that can tell a story in a graphical way depending on the topic, to a picture. A static picture works very, very well on social media. Not everything has to be video. There's a lot of video. It's gonna be 85% of content on Facebook. Maybe that's what Facebook thinks or Facebook wants but people don't always want to watch a video or they're not always in a position to listen or listen to audio on a video. So, if you do video, think about the candidate experience, think about close-captioning so that people can listen to it with the sound off. Things like that. But we are really, really excited about Instagram. It's not new. Instagram's been around for a while but we sat back and watched it. Because we've seen things like Periscope and Meerkat and other platforms sort of get really people excited and then they go away. And so, we're not risk-averse but we tend to say there's only so many properties where we can play and when we make a commitment, boy, we make a commitment.

16:00 JN: And so, Instagram is great because that's where our employees really create the majority of our content. So, not only is it easy for us, so my team doesn't have to create a lot of content for it, our employees feel like they have a voice. So, what we do is we encourage our employees. If you're sharing content on Instagram that has to do with a day in the life of your job, with your coworkers, going to happy hour, community service, whatever it may be, share that and tag us. And then we sort of scan all of the Careers@Dell, Life@Dell tags and we pick some that we like and we repost them on our feed. Some companies are very nervous about doing this and some companies are in industries that are highly-regulated. They just can't do that and I get that. At Dell, being in technology, it's sort of like the world is our oyster and we can do that. So I would caution people to think through what that process is like and what you can do based on your industry. But our Instagram feed is just full of our employees. Sharing what they're doing and their experience from their perspective.

17:07 JN: It's not really a corporate, "Here's our message. Here's stock photography. Blah, blah, blah." We're shying away from stock photography more and more and more. And we will start to have on all of our properties the majority of our imagery be our employees. And just get away... 'Cause people know what stock photography is and again, it feels corporate. And when somebody sees corporate they think, not only kinda not dynamic and kind of stale but they think, "Boring." Or they think, "Well, I don't know if I can trust this message." Trust is the word. Hashtag trust. I wanna put it on a T-shirt. But we love Instagram. We are on LinkedIn because really, LinkedIn is still a huge property and we do get some benefits. We run media on LinkedIn. This is what bigger companies do. All those smaller companies can start to think about media in smaller chunks. But we run media and we drive people to what we call lead capture pages, and we'll have some copy and some information about, "We're looking for sales people. Are you interested?" They don't have to fill out an application.

18:11 JN: They don't have to fill out a form, they just click the button and go, "Yep. I wanna hear more." That triggers the recruiting team to scan their profile on Linkedin and then call them. So there's some really beautiful things you can do on Linkedin that are very low-hanging fruit for the candidate, and it's all about their experience now. Twitter is just a feed of our culture, that whoever engages on Twitter can see if they wanna engage with us and follow, and it serves a purpose. I don't think we get a lot of hires out of Twitter. So again, it's more the top of the funnel, kind of the brand awareness piece. And then Facebook is kind of the big challenge right now. Facebook is doing really cool things with Facebook Live.

18:50 JN: Everybody's still on Facebook. Facebook groups are exploding. There's things you can do on Facebook that are exciting, but organic content on Facebook without any targeting doesn't seem to be performing for us like it used to. And I hear that from a lot of people in jobs like mine with other large corporations, not just technology companies, but consumer goods and things like that. So at some point in the story, you have to start thinking about paid versus organic and budget. But knowing who your targets are, and having that constant dialogue around who those targets are, and using your money really judiciously, is very important. And at some point in the gross story of a company, it has to become part of the dialogue. Especially with Facebook. Posting and praying on Facebook does not work anymore.

19:36 KF: You described your team as a marketing team within HR.

19:41 JN: Mm-hmm.

19:42 KF: But you're in the HR department. You aren't part of the marketing department.

19:47 JN: Correct. We roll up to our chief HR officer. Yep.

19:51 KF: Perfect. So, how closely do you work with the marketing department in the social properties that you're working with? Are they HR social properties? Or are they company corporate properties that you share with marketing?

20:06 JN: Yeah. That's a great question. We have our own properties, excluding LinkedIn. So we have a Dell LinkedIn page, a Dell EMC LinkedIn page. We just went through a big merger about a year ago, an RSA LinkedIn page. So all of our big brands have presence on LinkedIn. And we contribute content to some but not all of those pages. So if we're hiring sales storage people in Dell EMC, we will send content about, "We're attracting sales people for Dell EMC specifically at Storage Sales People." And they'll share our content on their feed. But there isn't necessarily a careers LinkedIn property, if that makes sense. So that's a shared property, and it works. We have no problems with it. It works great. I will tell you, about four to five years ago when we were starting to share our content, "Hey, we'd like to see more culture and people stuff in LinkedIn. And maybe some job stuff too, 'cause you know what? People use LinkedIn for jobs on occasion." [chuckle] And we were told initially, and I quote, "Our followers aren't interested in this content." And that was a little disheartening and I think other people have heard that same thing before.

21:18 JN: My approach was to say, "Okay, let's talk about our objectives. What objectives do we have as an organization?" Kind of the big objectives. So obviously, we want to sell our products and services. How do we do that? That's through having great talent. And when you sort of have that discussion and you say, "This is cool. We have the same objectives." People kind of can't deny that or fight it anymore. They go, "You know what, you're right. We do have the same objectives." And then you say, "Hey, tell you what. You're concerned that the followers aren't going to engage with our content. Let's have a pilot. We'll give you one piece of content that we feel really good about a week and we'll do it for four weeks." And then after the four weeks, we'll say, "How did that content perform? What was the engagement like? Were people liking? Were people sharing? Were people commenting?" And so that's a good way to kind of get your foot in the door with the owners, the marketing team. If you're HR and the owners of the properties for a shared platform like LinkedIn. For Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, we have our own life at Dell or Careers at Dell instances, and our marketing team is aware, and they're fine with it, and they have no problem with it.

22:29 JN: But it's where you have these shared properties like LinkedIn, I think the conversation gets really tricky and difficult, and I love the word pilot. There's nothing better than a pilot 'cause it creates trying something, evaluating it, seeing what the results are, and either throwing it out or saying, "This is interesting. We all see the numbers here. Let's revisit the conversation." And that worked for us really well on LinkedIn. Because what happened is, and has happened pretty consistently since that time, this was several years ago, so we're all playing very well together at the same sandbox, was, "Wow. Last quarter, out of our top 20 pieces of content on LinkedIn, 10 of them were related to culture and careers." And we don't say I told you so 'cause that's rude [chuckle] But we think it inside of our heads.

23:16 JN: We're like, "Yep. Okay, great." And they're like, "We love your content." We don't remind them that they said what they said. We don't, 'cause that's rude. We just go, "That's great. And we have the same goals and objectives. Isn't this awesome?" We're all a part of the same team 'cause we all work for Dell Incorporated. So this is great, this works really well together. So we kinda got over some initial little bumps, and thankfully we're actually... I hear people complain about the bumps that they're dealing with with cross functional and cross team collaboration, and it's a real thing, and it's a real challenge. And I feel bad 'cause I say, "We don't have those anymore." But we've had them in the past. And I validate them, and I know they're absolutely valid.

24:00 JN: And I think what happens is, behaviorally, people see somebody going into their space. And they land-grab and they get territorial, because they get really nervous. And that's just a normal, psychological response to... It's almost like being in your home and somebody kept getting on your front porch and knocking on your door and ringing your doorbell, like, "Who is this? Why are you here? What do you want with me? This is my property. I didn't expect anybody." It freaks people out. It's a very normal reaction. So coming to the table with some really good collaborative discussion around, "You do you," and, "Boy, you are good at it."

24:34 JN: And we did a lot of that with our marketing team. Stroking lots of egos goes very, very far. You have to do it from a place of authenticity though. You have to mean what you say, 'cause people will see through that. But saying, "You do great work. We wanna figure out how we can leverage you and your expertise in this world. And also have more consistency from a visual identity and messaging standpoint. Can we do that?" And they go, "Oh, yeah. We can... That's really cool." So we have all our creative in-house. We do not work with a third party. We work with our Dell brand creative team on our visual identity and our messaging. It ties to the bigger Dell picture, so it doesn't look like we're a different company, but we have some of our own rules and our own guidelines.

25:20 JN: Do we use our own font? No. We have to use the Dell font. Do we use our own color palette? No, Pepto-Bismol pink is not part of our color palette, we are not allowed to use it. [chuckle] But do we feature stories and people and slightly different messaging based on the conversation we're having with our followers? Yes. So it's worked really well, but it takes time. You've gotta take your ego and kind of put it aside and go, "Put yourself in their shoes. You're an HR person getting in their marketing space. It's uncomfortable for them." And I think going into a meeting and saying, "This is what we need and what we want from you," is a bad idea. It just won't work. It'll really blow up in your face.

26:00 KF: I like the ways in which you're playing well together, but also respecting each other's roles. I think that's important from a corporate aspect. And for small businesses, a lot of these things don't exist. We don't have marketing and HR departments with the... Maybe the smaller company, even like Neon Goldfish, we're six people and we do fun things, but we definitely don't have... You're talking, I think, to the marketing and HR department right now.

[laughter]

26:29 JN: Yeah, awesome.

26:30 KF: So...

26:31 JN: That's great. It's all one...

26:34 KF: Yeah. So we're in alignment with ourselves pretty well. But some of these things that you talked about that, they're so exciting, what are some of the successes, some of the things that you've learned over the years, some of the takeaways that we could help one of our listening audiences, an entrepreneur, small business owner that is probably maybe a little bit bigger than a Neon Goldfish, but maybe not quite a Dell Inc., who is looking to say, "Alright, I like this idea of recruitment marketing. I love everything that Jennifer's saying here, but how can I apply this in a smaller scale or a different scale for me?"

27:13 JN: Yeah. Absolutely. I think that's a great question. Again, I would go back to never underestimate the power of your employees' voice in the marketplace, no matter how big or how small you are. And it's never too early to start including your employees' voices in anything that you do and anything you talk about and encouraging that. Now, encouraging, that's scary, so start thinking about do you have a training program for your employees? Do you have dos and don'ts? For a really small company, it's probably a little more simple than for rolling out training to thousands of people in different locations around the globe. I would also say really try to be as keenly aware and mindful of your return on investment, where you're spending your money and what results you're expecting from that and what results you're getting.

28:00 JN: And I say that sort of as two separate things, because I have to remind certain people that some of our plays and some of the actions and the activity we take are about awareness and about the top of the funnel. And you'll get things like, "Well, everybody knows who Dell is." First of all, actually, not everybody does. So, let's just take that line of thinking and throw it away. But secondly, a lot of people have misperceptions of Dell. So sometimes awareness or our adjusting perceptions of a company or educating people... Like GE, GE is not really an appliance company anymore. And I have a friend that runs employment brand at GE. She's amazing and we've had many discussions around, "Gosh, GE does cool stuff." And I don't know if you saw their ads that they had with the parents and the son that was going to work for GE. And the parents had this crazy misperception about, "What do you mean you're gonna be an engineer at GE? GE doesn't do engineering."

28:53 JN: And so there's some really cool examples of big companies that it's never too early to start thinking about and think, "Okay, from this property, we're not gonna spend money and we're just trying to get awareness." Or, "We're going to spend money and this is the return on investment that we want, 'cause we want people to click into jobs and we wanna get hires from it." So I think kind of having that distinction and being really clear about that and having that conversation all the way up to the senior level is really, really important. We create some content that we don't necessarily expect people to then go and click jobs on. Will they? Yes, they may do that. And that's a bonus for us. Then we create some content where we're saying, "We want people, the call to action is to click on jobs. And we want to see how this video or how this particular piece of content performed."

29:38 JN: So I think it's never too early to start measuring, really getting some clarity around what type of results you're looking for and what sources are working well for you. So I think that's another one. So employee advocates and measurement would be the two really big pieces of advice that I would get. I would also throw out this idea of collaboration. So you guys collaborate great 'cause there's six of you but at some point, let's say Neon Goldfish becomes 250 people and you're dispersed around the US. There's an inflection point... I've heard 50 people, 75 people... There's a point where everybody starts to kind of get siloed. Being mindful of that and keeping those... What are our objectives collectively conversations happening, you might be able to avoid some of that from occurring and I think that that would be a beautiful thing.

30:31 JN: I know an HR leader that runs an HR organization for a start up company that's kind of exploding. And one of my really good friends is one of the executives over there and she's done an amazing job doing that, where they've gone from 75 people to now, they're almost 500. And she's just one of those people that's always thinking about the future and what are the potential road blocks and keeping those lines of communication open so it doesn't turn into, "Well, recruiting's your job, recruiting. It's not mine." That's a very common thing that we hear.

31:02 JN: Recruiting and talent attraction is everybody's job at the company. And if you kind of start that discussion early and keep it going and have the CEO and all of his or her direct reports saying it constantly, it's gonna become a part of the culture. And when things like that become part of the culture, the employees really feel it and believe it. They need to believe it. And then they're talking about it and then all the people outside the company see it and they believe it, too. It can be pretty powerful.

31:32 KF: There's a lot of... What I think aren't 100% accurate... A belief about... Stereotypes about the work ethic of the millennial generation, that they're lazy, they don't wanna move out of mom and dad's house. They expect to be paid for doing absolutely nothing. I've had some really good interns come through here at Neon Goldfish that fall in that category. I have a couple that are on staff or that weren't interns that were on staff, that were fantastic employees. And you have this struggle with a lot of employers that are from the "roll up your sleeves and dig a ditch" days where hard work was all there was. I just think there's a disconnection here and I'd love to hear your insights on this, on millennials. And are they hireable? Are they hard-working? Or are they just the overall... Do they live up to the stereotype that is so widely spread?

32:34 JN: So I am not a millennial. I'm just gonna throw that out there. I am a member of the awesome Gen X generation. We are cynical and boy, we watched our parents work hard and we're gonna work hard. They are stereotyped. What we've done at Dell is, our CHRO, who's very progressive, who's an amazing leader said, "I'm getting sick of hearing about how millennials are so difficult, 'cause I don't believe that." 'Cause he's got a couple of kids that are now graduating from college and they're sort of Gen Z millennial age. And he said, "I don't believe that. But how can we myth-bust this?" So we actually surveyed employees at our company that fit into a certain demographic and we learned a lot from them. One in particular that is interesting is they don't necessarily wanna work from home all the time.

33:25 JN: Work from home or flexible work is actually valued more by people with children who are more Gen X, baby boomer. So we're able to kinda figure that out and we're like, "Okay." 'Cause we have a work from home program at Dell and we wanted to know who appreciates it, who wants to use it, and Gen X said, "Hey, work from home on Friday, that's cool but I want interaction with people." We were like, "Oh, wow. Cool." The other thing that they told us is they wanna be challenged. And this is the really important piece. If you're not getting what you want from someone, millennial or otherwise, maybe you need to take a look in the mirror and think about what conversations you're having with them, how you're challenging them. And a lot of that has to do with trust.

34:05 JN: We had a conversation with our account team from Great Place to Work, you guys may be familiar with that. They do more than just awards. They do a lot of really in-depth analysis around how your employees are feeling. So they do sentiment analysis and trust is a big part of the survey in the sentiment analysis that they do. Trust in your manager and feeling like your manager has trust in you to innovate, to think creatively, to think outside the box. If millennials don't have that, they will leave. And it's not because they're looking for greener pastures or they're necessarily even looking for more money, they're looking for the trust, the challenge, and the ability to be creative in what they do.

34:47 JN: Now, not everybody is an engineer and has patents and can create things every day. But everybody in their job, regardless of what you do, has the ability to think about how they could do their job better. If someone feels like they have the trust from their manager... And I had a conversation with someone on my team yesterday where she was telling me something and I said, "So I'm hearing, you feel like I trust you to try to do something different today with how we've been doing this in the past." She said, "Yes." And I was like, "Yes. Score. Goal." Those are the people that you keep and retain.

35:23 JN: And it's kind of also regardless of millennial vs Gen X. Everybody wants to feel valued. Everybody wants to feel like they have opportunity to continue to be challenged and to grow and learn. But millennials in particular, what they've done is they've vocalized this better. So actually, good on them and kudos to them because Gen X and baby boomers just work and work and work and complaining, "My boss sucks." And what millennials have said, "Hey, if you're not challenging me and you're not giving me purpose as to why I'm here then I'm just gonna leave. And I'm not mad at you. I'm just gonna go somewhere else and I'm gonna look for that." So that to me is the big resounding message and I would agree, Ken, 100%, they've gotten a really unfair shake and I have a couple of people that report to me that I would say are probably millennial, and I've had HR rotation people, we have a wonderful program at Dell, and the HR rotation people are fresh out of grad school, and they're amazing.

36:22 JN: And you just need to give them a little more than fetching coffee [chuckle] and they will give you incredible result. And if they don't, course correct, give them feedback, they learn and then they move forward. So, you do think some of the stereotypes. Also, this about being promoted constantly. Have a conversation with them around, you don't have to be a manager to be a leader. You don't have to get promoted to get smarter and do things better in your current role. So how can we take these three or four things that you do, and expand on it and continue to challenge you and use your mind? That's not a bad request. And so again, I think that it's really on us as business owners or managers or leaders, to get the most out of the generation and it's... And not blame it on them, I think that's been pretty unfair.

37:16 KF: Thank you for that answer, that was a lot of insight there and it sounds more like a lack of evolution on the business owner/manager side to kind of correlate with. And you look at this from a recruitment, marketing, or a management of current employees approach, in the evolution of marketing in itself, and how we cater to the changing consumer, there's a lot of... If we continued to advertise our products and services strictly on television and newspaper and ignored the internet as a channel and didn't follow the consumer path in that way, we'd be left in the stone ages.

38:07 KF: I love the track that you talked there about that, that brings up so many light bulbs up really. What is your take on what's most important to maybe this younger crowd? This... Is it... 'Cause I think about when I got outta college, it was, "Hey, where can I go that I'm gonna have some security, but I can make the most money and I can deal with a lot of BS?" But money was my priority, I wanted to make the money, I wanted to make the cash, I'll do whatever you tell me to do, but I'll make that money. And if you empower me, great, but that wasn't one of the top priorities. Do you see any differences? Is that empowerment, is that leadership, that purpose, higher on their...

38:55 JN: Yeah.

38:56 KF: Priority list than maybe some other people?

38:58 JN: I would say there's, with the younger generation, there is a little bit of a difference, we're more alike than we're different. And of course, if you're looking at a baby boomer, they're going to be thinking about pensions and retirement because they're getting ready to retire. So it's sort of a natural thing that depending on the point in time in your life that you're in, what responsibilities you have, do you have children? I do not. I have three children, they're all getting ready to go to college within a five-year period, that the needs and desires of an employee are going to naturally change as a result of that. But for the younger generation, what they're saying is, "Let's not make no mistake here, I wanna be paid fairly." And I think they're very savvy around market conditions and being paid fairly. "So you pay me fairly, but in return, I will give you the best that I can if you challenge me, but I also wanna feel like there's kind of a purpose to what I'm doing."

39:54 JN: So one of the conversations we're having at Dell is talking about how we're helping to enable human progress through the digital and technical transformation that's going on around the world. And when you start to think about it, this is more than hardware and PCs. This is a big deal, the whole world is changing. And what's interesting, that we talked about earlier, is recruiting landscape is changing and social media is here, but leadership, and how we lead people hasn't changed. We're still treating people the same way even though we're in a digital age. And so, really being a part of that transformation, now that Dell and EMC have come together and we have this family or brand under Dell technologies, we have a much easier time about talking about our greater purpose, but doing it in consistent way that gets everybody within the organization, all employees, need to be engaged, not just the executives, not just the managers, all the employees need to be engaged and having that purpose.

40:51 JN: So a good example at Dell, and a lot of companies have cool things like this, is we're actually recycling waste from waterways and the ocean. Sadly we all know there's a lot of junk that we people have put in water, and we're using them as part of our process in some of our equipment and systems. So I think about 10% of some of our laptops have the recycled plastic. When you talk about things like that, employees get really excited. That's not the only reason why they're at the Dell. They want to be paid fairly, they wanna have interesting, challenging work, they want their manager to trust them, and they want their manager to deliver on their promises and for them to trust their managers.

41:36 JN: But they also like to hear about, "Oh, this is really cool, we actually have a bigger purpose in the planet and the world." And so that's... And again, I don't think it doesn't matter to Gen X or baby boomers. When you talk to Gen X or baby boomers about it, they're like, "Wow, that's really cool." What millennials have done has brought a voice to some of this. And again, that's why I think we should praise and value them, because they're bringing these things up and saying, "I don't wanna just work at a company and just check in, stamp in and stamp out, and not feel like I have any meaning." And so having meaning is important. And you can have meaning and work in finance, and marketing and in a corporate role, and be kind of more behind the scenes. You absolutely can. And so that's where I think the conversation is going.

42:22 KF: And I think there are so many opportunities out there for I think corporate America. This is way ahead of the rest of the world. And I'm saying that with the including small and medium sized businesses. You guys are definitely way leaps and miles ahead of the mainstream as far as getting that culture nailed down and appealing to these items. But the opportunity that lies for a small business, we're competing with similar pools. We're competing with corporate America as well, the larger, larger organizations. And so as a small business owner, I look at, "Okay. What can I bring to the table? What can I do to attract? How can I just make myself different?" Obviously, the baseline is going to be pay, and benefits and things. But some of these additional things that you bring up are spectacular and there's little just... Everything's usually a couple of percentage points, couple of notches that away from being good to great. And what can we do to become great as a company to attract talent and retain talent?

43:25 JN: And when you think about corporations, especially those of us that are mature technology companies, because we really struggle with the smaller, more dynamic start-up or small-to-medium technology businesses. They're attracting a ton of talent. So we don't necessarily have the upper hand. But I think that for the larger, more mature companies, we had to do this. And I'm being candid here. It's not like we said in 2010, "We're gonna start focusing on things like employment branding and recruitment marketing 'cause we just feel like it. It's gonna make us feel good."

[laughter]

44:01 JN: We had, and pardon my language, an "Oh shit" moment, where we were like, "We have to do this. We will not compete." And when you can't compete for talent, you fail as an organization. And that's where other great companies like Microsoft's done a really good job where they've put a lot of investment, and a lot of people, and a lot of time because it was scary for mature technology companies. And sadly you see people like IBM, they're struggling. I just read IBM had their 22nd quarter of decline in a row. Remember how sexy and cool IBM was in the '80s? So they have no choice. If they're going to survive, they have to change some things. And even though they are sort of a competitor of Dell's, I'm rooting for them. To see a big company like that be able to change some things. At Dell, we went private and then Michael Dell had this amazing, he's pretty much a genius, had this amazing plan, "I want to create end-to-end IT solutions and be a part of the driving force of the digital security and workplace transformation." And he bought EMC and their federated companies and we have these eight wonderful brands that are a part of this transformation. And driving the dialogue around this, that's how we're staying alive and how we're keeping people excited.

45:18 JN: If we had been doing what we'd been doing 10 to 15 years ago, we would be in big trouble. Big trouble. So that's the thing for big companies, if you rest on your laurels, and you just go, "Oh, we're just so great. We're Johnson and Johnson," which Johnson and Johnson's great. They have a fabulous brand. Some of the advertising they've been doing with nurses and patients and... They have to make it real for people, to keep people excited about their brand. It's brilliant. But they're not doing it just 'cause they're like, "This feels good." Although it does. They're like, "We have to do this to continue to be relevant and to attract people. We have to touch people's minds but also their hearts or they're just gonna walk away." There's just too much competition. The market's like really pretty tight right now.

46:09 KF: That's interesting. You might have already answered this in, 'cause you've talked a lot about the... We talked a lot about change and evolution. But looking in that, that maybe is a little bit of a rear-view mirror type stuff up to today. But even looking forward, what has you really excited about the future? What are some of the things, maybe you're working at now that you could share with us now, or some of the things that you see coming down, trends, that has you really excited at the moment or that you are going to be more excited about in the future?

46:42 JN: I feel like this phrase is sort of abused and used too much, but recruiting in HR, really having a seat at the table and making sure that our business leaders really see the value of things like employment brand, and talent capabilities, and leadership, and how important... You're not just a manager. You have an opportunity to inspire people. And that's actually gonna improve our business. That excites me. So what we've been able to see at Dell, as an example, and I know other companies that if they did this, they would see it too. I just know it. So I'm like, "Go do it guys." But we've been able to prove that leaders that get, what we call, inspiring leader feedback from their team members through annual anonymous survey, they have a significantly higher score of EMPS. And EMPS helps drive things like CMPS and market share and financial results. So we're having that kind of dialogue where the EMPS, how the employers are performing, how the leaders are performing. Are they inspirational to their team? And how it's actually a part of the health of the company. Period.

47:54 JN: It's not a bunch of numbers. Although there are some numbers, 'cause there's some really cool data about it. But it's those four things that will make us successful. That is exciting to me, because I think where some companies are still stuck and quite frankly, where we've been in the past is sort of like, "Here's what we're telling Wall Street, this is what we're doing next quarter, meet your quotas, meet your goals. That's how we measure and drive success." People are not motivated by that, by the way. They're just, they're not. Unless you're the CFO. Maybe that motivates you. [chuckle] And so we're breaking out for our employees to say it simple. We wanna know what our customers' experience is and customer Net Promoter Score is very valuable and we use that as the barometer and we talk about it constantly.

48:39 JN: But then there's the employee Net Promoter Score. And when you have a high employee Net Promoter Score, they refer more talent to the company, they attrit at a lower rate and they refer more products and services which, by the way, is a financial gain. And then we have the financial results. And then we have the market share and the market potential that we talk about. It's simple, those four things. But the fact that people are now more of the conversation, the power of our employee voice and employee advocacy, the power of our leaders and what they can really do. We've seen a 70-point spread in EMPS between an uninspiring leader and an inspiring leader at Dell. That's shocking. So it's like, "Get the uninspiring leaders either inspirational and get them the help they need or get them out." And then the inspirational leaders, let's talk to them about what they do and their best practices and it's sort of like, "Tell me, share with me." And celebrate them and praise them, because they're actually bringing more value to the company.

49:44 JN: It's not the day-to-day grind of being a manager. And that conversation, which our CHRO was leading and he does an amazing job talking to our most senior-level people, Michael Dell and his direct reports, that conversation is really important to people like me. That's what excites me. And then people start to see value in things like, "Oh, recruiting." Because what's happened in the past is like, "Ugh, recruiting. Go film Iraq. Stop asking me questions. Oh, you need feedback. Uh, it's like... " This is actually candidate experience, is valuable, because there's return on investment with how you treat people and whether they're gonna buy your products and services and refer other people to your company that work there. So that's the exciting thing, that's what gets me really going. It's not things like AI. You might've thought I might've said, "AI." AI is here, AI is gonna grow, AI is not gonna take all of our jobs, but it's going to complement our jobs. And I do think it's quite interesting, but it doesn't excite me the way that what I was just describing excites me.

50:45 KF: I'm glad you didn't say AI just because... Yes.

[laughter]

50:50 JN: AI's okay, but let's be honest.

50:52 KF: Everyone says, "AI."

50:54 JN: Let's be honest, when you call American Express and you have a question about your card, what do you do? You start pressing zero immediately.

51:03 JJ: Zero, zero, zero, zero, zero, zero. Round, round, round. [chuckle]

51:06 JN: It's agent, agent, customer service agent. Nobody really wants to talk to a computer. I do think there's amazing technology that's having this machine learning and this self-learning and AI can do some things, but there's some things that I personally just don't think they'll ever really be able to do. But I think you can complement processes and operationalize things and make improvements with AI. I do believe that, but I'm not excited about it. I'm excited about where our conversation is going at the company I've worked at for 14 years. And how we're so much more focused on the people and the part that our talent plays in our success, than I am about where are we gonna plug and play AI.

51:51 JJ: Love it. Love it, love it, love it.

51:53 JN: Yay. I love it, too. [chuckle]

51:56 JJ: Jennifer, if you have one piece of parting advice for our listening audience, what would that be?

52:01 JN: I'm gonna be a broken record, but my piece of advice is do not do it alone and do not underestimate the power of your employees in the marketplace. What stories do your employees have to share about what excites them about working at Neon Goldfish? And share that. When you're recruiting somebody say, "Hey, I'm the hiring manager and... I'm Justin and you're gonna be meeting with Ken. But actually Suzie's this other person on our team and I just wanna share some stuff that she has around, some of the things she's done with the company that excites her." And you can never do too much of that. So I think that's really powerful.

52:37 JN: As you get bigger as an organization, start doing it on a functional basis, 'cause people really do wanna know what is it like to be marketing, what is it like to be sales. And that's what we're doing a lot more of in the coming year at Dell is really talking about what career can you have as a sales person. And not so much about the culture, although we still talk about the culture, but we've just done a lot of culture talk. So don't underestimate... And don't do it, don't... Yourself. If you're a small business owner and you've got 12 people reporting to you, don't try to do all the recruiting and the talent stuff yourself. That's crazy talk. Engage with each person on your team and give them maybe one big initiative that they can go run and drive with and they're gonna be that voice for the company, it's gonna be that much more powerful.

53:18 JJ: I love that, absolutely love that.

53:21 JN: Awesome.

53:22 JJ: What is the best way for our listeners to get in touch with you?

53:26 JN: You can follow me and direct message me on Twitter. So I think I have to follow you back in order for you to direct message me or you can direct message me and I can choose to respond. But I'm also, I'm on LinkedIn. So I am on social. I'm pretty, pretty engaged and I usually respond to direct messages on Twitter pretty quickly. So that would be... Yeah, and I am jennifern@dell, @jennifern@sign@dell.

53:54 JJ: Beautiful. We will have that information available in the show notes at neongoldfish.com/podcast. Jennifer, thank you so much for being on today. Lots and lots of value for our listening audience.

54:10 JN: You're welcome. It was fun.

[chuckle]

54:12 JJ: We had a blast. Okay, until next time. This is Justin, Ken and Jennifer signing off. Neon Noise Nation, we will see you again next week.

[music]

54:22 S?: Thank you for listening to this episode of the Neon Noise podcast. Did you enjoy the podcast? If so please subscribe, share with a friend or write a review. We wanna cover the topics you wanna hear. If you have an idea for a topic you'd like Justin and Ken to cover, connect with us on Twitter @neongoldfish or through our website at neongoldfish.com.