

# Forbes

## EDITORS' PICK

### Dell Technologies Services Goes To Bat In The Fight Against COVID-19

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Coronavirus has turned the world upside down, disrupting businesses, workers, and our health-care system in ways never before seen in our lifetimes. As a tech analyst, one silver lining I've seen in the way things have unfolded over the last few months is the way many tech companies have really stepped up to address these new challenges.

I've written on this topic several times already, including an overview of how the different players in the industry are stepping up. Today I want to pivot towards Dell Technologies' fight against coronavirus. I recently had a good conversation with Doug Schmitt, president of Dell Technologies Services, about these efforts. I want to share some of the highlights of that conversation and talk about some customer stories that further illustrate Dell's impact in the current global emergency.

#### Internal Dell Tech measures

Perhaps one of the first things to look at, when talking about coronavirus response, is how these technology providers are handling the emergency within their own organizations. Schmitt told me that the company's number one priority is to keep its team, its partners and its customers safe. According to Schmitt, 99% of Dell's services workforce was enabled to work from home in just a few weeks. Furthermore, it managed to do this without causing any major disruptions to its customers. Its tech support agents are set up to work remotely, and the company ramped up its

web-based self-help and various automated support features. According to Schmitt, Dell's customer service chatbots are taking care of more service requests without any human assistance than ever, and its social media accounts are handling around 25% more inquiries than before. This is a time when Dell's predictive and prescriptive capabilities are particularly helpful and relevant.

The company says it holds daily war room meetings across the organization to activate business continuity plans, enable work-from-home, and sustain the overall business. It's helpful that the company has experience mitigating the fallout of natural disasters and crises with five integrated Global Command Centers at the center of their ability to plan for and immediately respond to critical situations. A good recent example is the Nashville tornado that damaged Dell and partner facilities in March. Schmitt says they were able to fully rebuild capacity at a new facility, which, combined with three other locations, was able to provide continued support for their customers during the aftermath of the disaster.

Throughout all of this, the company has also continued its field delivery operations. This is especially important for datacenter customers, who are struggling to optimize their infrastructure to support their newly remote employees and are in dire need of mission-critical support. Schmitt says it is providing its field teams with the adequate PPE to be safe on these field calls and working with its customer and partner

ecosystem to further reduce risks.

In short, Dell has managed to keep its service levels uninterrupted while also ensuring the safety of its global team. Which is important, because Dell Technologies' services have been playing a significant role in helping other organizations stay afloat during these trying times. Let's take a closer look at some Dell customer stories that illustrate this.

#### A hospital at Ground Zero

One story Dell shared was that of a hospital in Wuhan, China, the province where the outbreak is thought to have originated. By January this hospital had become undated with COVID-19 patients—purportedly with over a thousand confirmed cases, and a couple thousand staff working to save their lives. Dell is the main IT provider of infrastructure for this hospital, which deploys the company's high-end, mid-range, and hyper-converged offerings, along with Dell client devices. The hospital contacted Dell after an HVAC failure compromised the room where the hospital's infrastructure was located, resulting in a system outage. Obviously, this was a very bad time for an outage—Dell says the hospital was locked out of thousands of patient files, causing a disruption to applications which could negatively impact multiple critical patient services if not addressed right away.

In order to mitigate the situation, Dell says it assembled a cross-functional team of engineers, who worked for 20 hours

straight, overnight, to gain access and repair 100% of the affected files. Impressively, these engineers solved the problem remotely, in time for it to be up and running by the hospital's opening the next morning. Now Dell says it is working closely with the hospital to prioritize IT, plan ahead for future issues, and attempt to avoid future outages due to unforeseen incidents.

### **Patient care on floating US military hospital**

Another example of Dell providing critical COVID-19 support can be seen in the story of the US Navy floating hospital USNS Mercy which was deployed to provide medical care to a hard-hit region of the country. Before deployment, the ship had planned to upgrade its aging VNX environment, but as the coronavirus situation worsened, it was forced to go into lockdown. That means nobody, including Dell Technologies Services engineers, could make on-site visits.

The update would have to wait, but they still needed to ensure the existing systems would continue operating effectively, so the ship went to Dell for help navigating the complicated situation. Dell located a team member in the area who could meet the ship's CIO in person to deliver new drives to stabilize and extend the life of the vessel's infrastructure. The ship also was experiencing a shortage of laptops to handle patient intake; Dell jumped into action to expedite the delivery of new systems to the floating hospital. The company says that when the hospital is ready, is prepared to begin a "fully blind remote VxRail installation" for the ship, where a Dell representative will talk the ship through the process remotely.

### **Aiding government efforts**

Another huge way that the tech industry is aiding the COVID-19 fight is by providing the compute power necessary to research the virus and develop vaccines. One of Dell's customers, an unspecified government agency, is analyzing the virus's genetic makeup for the purpose of finding a cure. The herculean task required the agency to scale up its workforce, and also enable more of its employees to work from home. In order to support these efforts, the agency purportedly needed dozens of new servers for research and analytics, and

additional client systems at multiple locations for the scientists who were working on the project.

Dell's efforts to address these needs were impressive. The company expedited the agency's orders and deployed nearly a thousand client systems, to a dozen remote locations, in the span of one week. Additionally, the company pre-built the servers needed in order to hasten delivery and deployment. The process, which typically takes 60 days, was accelerated to just one week. Dell claims it was able to accomplish this, in part, because it began to engage with the customer early in the outbreak so that it could "anticipate" its needs. Dell has a long-standing working relationship with the agency's IT department, which leverages the company's ProSupport and ProDeploy suites of services, along with their connectivity technology. The net-net is that Dell was able to help the agency support its increased volume of teleworkers, enable its continued (throughout all of this, uninterrupted, I might add) COVID-19 research, and provide support to makeshift hospital teams.

### **Texas-based homeless shelter**

The COVID-19 crisis has touched practically every part of society, and tragically it's often those who are already living on the margins who feel the biggest impact. On that note, the last customer story Dell highlighted was the work it has done with a Texas-based homeless shelter. All told, the shelter purportedly serves hundreds of clients every day, providing meals, showers, housing services, medical support, overnight sheltering, and more. Like many of the other organizations I've mentioned, when the virus hit, the shelter had to figure out how to get its critical staff up and running remotely. Additionally, it had to modify its operating model so that it could provide 24/7 shelter to those in need, once the shelter-in-place guidance began to come down from the top. To aid in this transition, Dell quickly delivered laptops to the shelter, which were all came pre-configured and imaged to aid the organization's one IT staff member with deployment.

### **Wrapping up**

As I continue to provide coverage of the crisis, these stories keep coming—technol-

ogy companies stepping up and expediting essential resources to the frontlines of the fight. These businesses are in a position to enable the frontline workers who are saving lives. Dell is uniquely able to serve these organizations with its expansive portfolio of products and services. Furthermore, it made sure to take care of its own people so that they could be there to ensure business continuity for those essential services. Technology providers and IT teams may not be first groups people think of when they think about the essential workers that are keeping our society and healthcare systems afloat during these difficult times. That said, they are absolutely integral to the efforts, and deserve recognition. Good work, Dell. **F**

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I write about disruptive companies, technologies and usage models.