



**CUSTOMER PROFILE**

**COUNTRY:** Wolfville, Canada

**INDUSTRY:** Higher Education

**FOUNDED:** 1838

**NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:**  
300 faculty, 300 staff

**WEB ADDRESS:** [www.acadiau.ca](http://www.acadiau.ca)

**CHALLENGE**

Acadia University wanted to enable students to purchase their own laptops but needed to narrow their selection to models that would meet exacting requirements and student approval.

**SOLUTION**

The university invited vendors to showcase their laptops to students and empowered students to choose the vendor offerings they liked best. Dell™ Latitude™ and Dell XPS™ laptops were among several models the students selected. Dell worked with Acadia to get a direct-buy program up and running by fall semester.

**BENEFITS**

**GET IT FASTER**

- Launched direct-buy program for multiple vendor offerings in just 2 months with Dell's assistance
- Able to provide 2-hour turnaround for repair and parts with Dell Warranty Parts Direct

# GIVING STUDENTS AN ADVANTAGE

Dell works with Acadia University to create direct-buy program within two months to put laptops in students' hands



Nestled in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia, Acadia University is an undergraduate, liberal arts university with 170 years of history. Similar to state-funded schools in the United States, Acadia receives government funding that helps it provide students with an excellent college experience at a relatively low tuition cost. From the wide columns to the thick ivy on the walls and the rural setting, you wouldn't think there's a technological revolution going on, but that's just what has happened.

**“ ALL THE PURCHASING HAD TO BE COMPLETED IN FIVE MONTHS, AND WE COULD NEVER HAVE DONE THAT WITHOUT THE COOPERATION AND SUPPORT WE RECEIVED FROM DELL.”**

Patti McNeil, executive director of technology services, Acadia University

“It was clear in the 1990s that the online world was going to be playing a big role in the way students learn and perform research,” says Scott Roberts, executive director of communications, Acadia University. “There are several other universities in the Maritime Provinces very much like us: small institutions with low student-to-faculty ratios. Acadia seized upon technology as a way to enhance education and gain a competitive edge over similar institutions in this region. By 1996, we had a plan to put a laptop computer in the hands of every student, and it became the Acadia Advantage.”

#### **A HEAD START ON TECHNOLOGY**

Included in the price of tuition, the laptop computer went everywhere the student went at Acadia, from residence rooms to classrooms, many of which were equipped with overhead projectors, ergonomic chairs, surround sound and cameras. Teachers were encouraged to modify their teaching methods to take advantage of the laptops and they did, using educational software and collaboration tools. Students gained important skills and when they graduated, obtained great jobs.

Every two years the university refreshed the hardware and put the purchase of new laptops out for bid, and over the course of a decade the vendor changed from IBM to Dell. This decision was based on cost, student preferences for the models tested and Dell's willingness to act as a technology partner with the university.

As the information technology world exploded between 1996 and 2006, the Acadia Advantage program began to show signs of age. Students didn't actually own their laptops and had to return them at the end of each school year, which caused a few regrets. Also, students were getting more experienced with computers in high school, and many more were coming to college already equipped with a laptop of their own. Students wanted more features for gaming and video in their spare hours. And they wanted more models from which to choose.

#### **CREATING AN OWNERSHIP PROGRAM**

In 2006, Acadia re-evaluated the Acadia Advantage program, and ultimately decided to change the user model from leasing to ownership. Students now buy a laptop through

#### **HOW IT WORKS**

##### **HARDWARE**

- Dell Latitude D630 laptops with Intel® Core™ 2 Duo processors
- Dell XPS M1530 laptops

##### **SERVICES**

- Dell Warranty Parts Direct

# “THERE’S NEVER BEEN ANY SENSE THAT DELL WASN’T ABSOLUTELY WIRED IN WITH OUR WAY OF THINKING ON HOW WE WANTED TO ROLLOUT AND RUN THE ACADIA ADVANTAGE 2.0 PROGRAM.”

Scott Roberts, executive director of communications, Acadia University

the Acadia Advantage 2.0 program, and enjoy special prices through the university.

Acadia had to guarantee that the laptops would run more than 100 software programs it was using in various classes. The university would continue to provide on-site repairs with the same two-hour turnaround it had been delivering with the Dell Warranty Parts Direct program, since Acadia’s own technicians were already trained and certified to perform Dell warranty repairs on campus.

It was up to the university to choose a laptop that would fit with its software and be an absolute hit with the students. Only the best of the best would do, and the price needed to be right.

It was a job for Patti McNeil, executive director of technology services, who joined Acadia University just in time to make the selection and run the new program. “We wanted to give the students as much choice as possible in the selection process because they were going to be paying for the new hardware and would be using it for all their classroom and study activities,” says McNeil.

## A RIGOROUS SELECTION PROCESS

McNeil and her team developed the criteria for their selection and put out an RFI, then an RFP. Five responses came back, and in a qualifying process they eliminated one vendor, which left four: Dell, HP, Toshiba and Apple. The second part of the selection process would involve the students in choosing what would become their own laptops.

McNeil invited the four vendors to come on campus and participate in a four-day fair to showcase their offerings to the students. Each vendor brought two models: one lower-priced entry and a higher-end machine with more features. “We gave out certain specifications to ensure that the laptops shown could run the necessary programs,” says McNeil. Windows Vista® was a must because the university was migrating to Windows Vista. Moodle™, a Web-based learning management system, as well as language and music programs, also had to be compatible.

Choosing a low-end model under \$1,000, Dell brought in the Dell Latitude D630 with the latest Intel Core 2 Duo processors, Intel integrated graphics and new levels of customization. On the higher end, Dell brought the Dell XPS M1530, a multi-media performer that plays high-definition movies and has a Blu-ray Disc™ option.

For four days the students filed through the vendors’ exhibits, testing equipment, getting the feel of the machines and questioning vendor representatives. As they evaluated the models they filled out “passports” with their comments and answers to questions. For example, students were asked to list their top two laptops and the reasons why, as well as what price range they were most likely to consider.

“The students told us what they thought, what they liked, what they didn’t like and how they ranked the models,” says McNeil. “That information became one component in our final evaluation of which vendors we would choose. We had a very rigorous process.”

Input from the students strongly indicated their preference for the Dell Latitude and XPS models, both of which the university chose to offer to students in its direct buying program. “The products that Dell brought in were right on target,” says McNeil. “They fit the students’ preferences exactly. For instance, a lot of our students here are gamers and they love the XPS. Overall, it was a lengthy process determining which vendor to partner with. But Dell came out with high marks across the board. Certainly our comfort level with Dell and the experience we had with the two-hour service were strong points in Dell’s favor.”

## **ADDING VALUE WITH PREMIER.DELL.COM**

“In addition to the students’ preferences, we also tried to get a sense of how we could work with the vendors,” says McNeil. “We asked them what else they could do to help us make the program work.”

Dell offered to customize a page of its e-commerce Web site, Premier.Dell.com, and integrate it with the Acadia Advantage 2.0 Web site. Students would be able to log on to their Acadia Web site and buy directly from Dell and have all their payment transactions handled.

“Dell showed us how Premier.Dell.com could be used to customize features, for instance, to build the D630 from two gigabytes of RAM to three, or choose a larger hard drive using a self-service page of the Dell site,” says McNeil. “Dell gave us one of their Web people to work with who made it very easy for us to make the changes we wanted. We were able to put the direct-buy program into place in just two months.”

## **DELL HELPS MEET EXACTING DEADLINE**

McNeil is certain that cooperation from Dell helped to put the program into gear in time for the fall semester.

“We made the selection in February, and all the purchasing had to be completed in five months in order to be ready by September,” McNeil says. “We could never have done that without the cooperation and support we received from Dell. We didn’t have to have a Webmaster on our site. We didn’t have

to build engines. We didn’t have to put payment vehicles behind it—Dell did everything.”

“We realized that we were going to be fairly exacting,” Roberts sums up. “But at the same time, we knew absolutely that we did not want to be in the business of selling laptops directly to students. So we were going to ask a lot of any vendor. And there’s never been any sense that that Dell wasn’t absolutely wired in with our way of thinking on how we wanted to roll-out and run the Acadia Advantage 2.0 program.”

When students return to campus next semester, they will be carrying their laptops, as they always have. But this time they will own their machine with the assurance that they have the best that their money can buy.

If the beginning is any indication, the Acadia Advantage 2.0 program is going to be a huge success.

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