

Interview with Cisco's Shawn Price, Sr. Manager of End-User & Collaboration Applications:

## How Cisco sets the bar for a Culture of Customer Loyalty, and Satisfaction while providing value to students at UCSC

Cisco Small Business has been working with University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC) and its students on a cutting edge internship program that empowers students to learn about Cisco products, helps improve customer satisfaction and self-support, with the opportunity for students to earn money while obtaining college credit. The students that are part of this program additionally have room for advancement as well as the potential to become a Cisco employee in the future.

Recently, noHold took some time to learn more about Shawn Price's intern program at UC Santa Cruz in California; Shawn is Sr. Manager of End-User & Collaboration Applications at Cisco. One of the first of its kind, Mr. Price has spearheaded a project with an incredible Mission: "We use students first, to promote education, and to give back. The program helps students develop and be successful. In addition, it helps Cisco develop additional support capabilities and it's a win-win situation for our customers, for the students, and for Cisco."

Cisco recruits, trains, promotes, and in some cases hires students from UCSC (and in a previous program at Wichita State) as part of its support programs. Here's what Shawn had to say about the benefits, the goals, and how they measure success.

1) **noHold:** Hi Shawn. Thanks for agreeing to talk with us today. Can you tell us first, why students?

**Shawn:** Cisco believes in education and giving back and supporting communities. The product support organization has been giving an endowment to UC Santa Cruz with an expectation to empower students. Our mission is to use students to promote education and to give back. Cisco is helping students develop and be successful, which helps Cisco develop great support capabilities. In summary, it's a win-win situation for our customers, for the students and for Cisco.

2) **noHold:** Does Cisco actually hire these students?

**Shawn:** Students begin on an entry level, participate in the community forum, etc. Those who obtain Cisco certification have the opportunity to eventually be hired. For example, in the first intern program with Wichita State University, one student was hired directly onto the support team at Cisco. With UCSC, the opportunity is still preliminary, so there may be a time when we actually do hire students in the future.

3) **noHold:** How long does it take to onboard the students?

**Shawn:** Well, we began the program with UCSC in January, then published our first article in mid-May. That is starting from ground zero, with a team of 8 developers, and includes recruiting, onboarding, facilities, etc. Going forward, we anticipate this will take no longer than about 4 weeks.

4) **noHold:** What is the specific pitch to get students excited about the opportunity?

**Shawn:** The pitch to students is actually pretty simple. Our fundamental message is, "Come and join Cisco as an intern and we will pay you to learn while you earn credits." We make this pitch on campus, in large undergrad Information Systems classes of about 150 students. We show them the website, tools, share Cisco's mission, and invite them to be a part of that. We make sure they understand that this is a great opportunity to have a paid internship with Cisco while accruing college credit.

5) **noHold:** I'm sure you receive a pretty large response - How do you filter through all of the candidates to choose the best fit?

**Shawn:** We leverage student Team Leads today as well as a Program Manager at UC Santa Cruz. We request that interested parties submit a 2 page essay on any topic they are passionate about; it could be anything from cooking brownies to pasta, or the wacky world of BitCoin. We then screen the essays to see if they have the skillset to write. For this type of internship, we are asking for students that are part of the information systems, computer engineering, computer science or electrical engineering disciplines; these are students that have the viability to be hired by cisco.

6) **noHold:** How do you ensure retention?

**Shawn:** So far, we only lose them [students] when they graduate. We have almost zero voluntary attrition.

7) **noHold:** Can you describe the typical training involved? What does it take to get the students up to speed?

**Shawn:** We begin by sending them lab equipment. They get their hands on Cisco's small business products. Using customer support information, we target products with the highest volume of support calls and cases. We provide the students with all of the detailed case history, so we can discover what information or help customers need. The students do the searching, they develop the top 3 reasons customers call and then we go about creating content to help those customers self-serve. An example of this method is, "Most people ask how to set up VPN, here's the process to follow in order to set up VPN for your business." The students go in and create additional content, capture screen shots, and break down procedures into steps. Since the students are not certified product experts, the final articles are sent to Cisco's training team for review. The training team is a Cisco team that creates training content for support agents. The team reviews and assesses the quality of the content. Once the content is complete and accurate, it is published in our noHold knowledgebase.

8) **noHold:** Cisco uses a Virtual Agent/Virtual Assistant called 'Guide Me.' Do the students get to learn and contribute to the Virtual Agent in addition to writing articles?

**Shawn:** Yes. They get to access the diagnostic trees, solution weighting, and the syntax of "Guide Me" for Cisco's Virtual Agent and Knowledgebase.

9) **noHold:** How do you stay in touch with the students and monitor the program?

**Shawn:** Once a week, I visit on location or conduct a WebEx meeting to connect with the team and to provide recognition and feedback. I work with the UCSC Project Lead to track which products we are focusing on, the status of new products, status of lab equipment delivered, and which articles to draft. In addition, I look at metrics provided by noHold's solution to see if we received feedback on any articles that suggests how we can improve, any quality feedback that we can act on, and so forth. The team needs to know that what they are doing adds value, and that someone cares and is staying on top of their efforts. We also conduct a Quarterly Business Review (QBR) and look at Cisco business metrics which include noHold reporting, number of sessions, articles viewed, quality feedback, or why an article is not performing well.

10) **noHold:** Shawn, can you offer any recommendations for other companies who might be interested in implementing a similar program?

**Shawn:** Within the context of making self-support easier, it really depends on the mission and what the specific company is trying to achieve. Ultimately, if the goal is to make self-support part of the support solution, I recommend that they find a way to make self-support easier by making support information accessible and easy to find first, then the content needs to be targeted to specific customer needs. It's all about customer loyalty. I truly believe (and industry experts have brought me to this point) that customers on the phone are already dissatisfied. Many customers looking for support today prefer self-service. I believe those on the phone have already attempted to find support on the web and failing to find what they need, they finally come to the phone. Disloyalty is mitigated by helping users find support on the web through search, virtual agent, support community, or whatever the customer's preferred option is. If we allow them to do it [self-serve] first on the web they will be happier customers.

11) **noHold:** If customer loyalty is the specific Key Performance Indicator (KPI), do you look at loyalty across all self-support options? (community, kb articles, etc)

**Shawn:** Yes, and we also look at call and case volume trends; we are drawn to new product introductions to monitor the call/case volume, and to support call and case volumes for all products. Ideally, before a new product even ships, our student team has support content already in the Virtual Agent (Guide Me), all linked up. We use our Twitter, community [social media] to highlight support content on the web. In addition, we promote the new products on social media, as well as socialize support options, and then we watch to monitor call and case volumes.

12) **noHold:** Would you say it is part of Cisco's culture to offer multi-channel support to its audience?

**Shawn:** Absolutely. Cisco's culture is to offer support in whatever channel or medium the customer chooses. Making it easy for customers to obtain the support in the channel they prefer is indeed our mission.

13) **noHold:** How do you measure the productivity of the students while keeping them motivated?

**Shawn:** As students become more proficient and competent in writing support content, and managing the Virtual Agent, we pay them more once they pass entry level, we bump them to tier 2 level. These are people who can walk into the lab, unsupervised, get the new product, get it hooked up and configured, verify that it works, and then create content. For those who want to be part of the community forum and effectively helping customers to solve their support needs, we make them tier 3 and bump their salary once again. When they are actively participating in the community, they begin helping customers by pointing them to articles or pointing them to the Virtual Agent, Guide Me.

In terms of measuring their productivity, it's based on number of engagements and we use gamification to keep them motivated; for example, the students that are most productive get on the leaderboard. They get competitive. They are not necessarily measured on the number of articles written, we look at star articles, number of views, and quality feedback. And in turn, we keep recognizing this type of behavior by providing recognition for high-performing students.

14) **noHold:** Students change curriculum regularly. Do you anticipate trying to find new students each semester?

**Shawn:** Yes. Right now, we are trying to find students in the digital media programs. For example students in the film programs at UCSC, which has nothing to do with networking. We encourage them to join the team to help story board, shoot, edit and post engaging video content. If you compare text-based content to the same content in an engaging video, the well-developed video gets more usage; maybe five times more views than written articles.

15) **noHold:** Will every new group of interns have to be trained on support solutions such as Guide Me?

**Shawn:** We have an ongoing process to develop Team Leads who then become our trainers. With noHold's help, we 'train the trainers' and then we shadow and help the trainers when needed. Once students graduate, we can't keep them as interns. We are always recruiting, moving students to team leads, etc. These Team Leads are chartered to be experts on how to author, generate content, publish to noHold, etc.

16) **noHold:** As new 'video' interns join the team, do you anticipate that Guide Me will be part of that training?

**Shawn:** The 'video' interns are chartered to create video content, and the Team Leads will then ensure that customers can connect with the video content using the best available tools.

17) **noHold:** Does Cisco use the Virtual Agent to point users to videos, or does Cisco embed videos in the Virtual Agent solutions?

**Shawn:** We would love to have that conversation.

18) **noHold:** Do you plan to expand beyond Small Business?

**Shawn:** There is a great opportunity to expand the vision and methodology beyond today's student team at Cisco.

**noHold:** Thanks so much, Shawn for taking the time to speak with noHold today about your exciting program with UCSC and Cisco support. We look forward to staying in touch with you, and providing our support along the way.



Here's the UCSC team!

Left to Right: Back Row: Andy Lien, Zach Michel, Sean Asadipour, Tim Fleer, Talon Jones; Middle Row: Amy Donis, Lisa Slater, Raquel Robinson; Front Row\': Kevin Yen