

We prepared this 6-page memo for our GeekWire Summit session with Amazon's Jeff Wilke — please read it silently to yourselves

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Amazon Consumer CEO Jeff Wilke. (GeekWire File Photo)

One of Amazon's traditions is the "6-pager," a detailed memo read silently at the outset of an internal meeting to get everyone on the same page, literally. This has been the subject of much discussion and debate inside and outside the company, but I had never gone through the process myself — until this week.

I wrote a six-page memo in the Amazon style — complete with fictional press release, narrative, FAQ and appendix — in preparation for my on-stage conversation with Jeff Wilke, the CEO of Amazon's Worldwide Consumer business, at next week's GeekWire Summit in Seattle.

Wilke read the 6-pager in advance of a conversation we had this week, and I saw first-hand the benefits of the approach. Our call was scheduled for a half-hour, but it took about half the time because so much of the material was already covered in the memo. Yes, it took me several hours to write the memo, but it was a natural extension of the preparation we do for these sessions, and the structure of the 6-pager forced me to crystallize my thinking in an even more rigorous way.

So here's where you come in, as GeekWire readers and GeekWire Summit attendees: I'm publishing the 6-pager here, and soliciting feedback that I'll incorporate into a revised version that will be made available to GeekWire Summit attendees in advance of the session via our event app. (Don't worry, we won't make everyone read it silently before we begin the session.)

Give the memo a read and let me know your thoughts in the comments below: What am I missing? What else would you ask? Which topics are you not interested in? And what else do you want to know?

I would especially love get feedback from current and former Amazonians on the content, structure and format. After I came up with this idea, I received some guidance from contacts inside Amazon — note that it's 11-point Calibri font, single-spaced, with narrow margins — but as an outsider, I'm sure I got some things wrong.

Download the memo as a PDF, continue reading for the full text, and please don't hold back when giving your feedback in the comments below. I can take it. And if you haven't picked up your GeekWire Summit tickets yet, you can check out the event here. We hope to see you there next week!

Amazon's Jeff Wilke wows crowd with insights into influential tech company in exclusive GeekWire Summit appearance

SEATTLE — Jeff Wilke, CEO of Amazon's Worldwide Consumer business, provided new details about the company's strategy and surprising news about its future plans in a wide-ranging and insightful conversation on stage at the 2017 GeekWire Summit technology and business conference.

The discussion touched on Wilke's roots in Pittsburgh and the early influences on his career before delving into his role at Amazon and exploring the frontiers of the company's consumer business. Wilke also gave his take on the direction of technology, including the role of artificial intelligence, autonomous driving, robotics, voice interaction and augmented reality in the future of business and commerce.

In addition, Wilke discussed the role of Amazon Prime and the company's virtual assistant, Alexa, in fueling the consumer business, and gave the audience a preview of where those initiatives are headed.

Wilke, who joined Amazon in 1999, has led its consumer business through a period of unprecedented growth — stretching well beyond its origins in e-commerce and books to become a universal shopping destination. Amazon is building physical retail stores, rolling out new devices, technologies and media, and developing innovative fulfillment and delivery systems to reach customers around the world.

The conversation took place just weeks after Amazon closed its \$13.7 billion acquisition of Whole Foods Market — a record deal that gives the e-commerce giant a significantly larger brick-and-mortar retail business, with more than 460 stores in the Whole Foods chain.

The broader company has grown from 5,000 people to more than 380,000 people worldwide during Wilke's tenure, reflecting Amazon's ever-expanding ambitions. In fact, Amazon is growing so much that it's seeking a second North American headquarters, "HQ2," an effort that Wilke explained on stage.

"It was epic," said one attendee afterward. "I thought I knew Amazon before, but now I have a much clearer understanding of where they're headed, how technology plays a role, and how I can apply lessons from Amazon's business to my own company and career."

About GeekWire

GeekWire is a fast-growing, national technology news site with strong roots in the Seattle region and a large audience of loyal, tech-savvy readers around the globe. Its flagship conference, the GeekWire Summit, is now in its sixth year, drawing more than 800 attendees to Seattle for a two-day conversation about the future of business, science and technology. Learn more at www.geekwire.com/summit.

About Amazon

Amazon is guided by four principles: customer obsession rather than competitor focus, passion for invention, commitment to operational excellence, and long-term thinking. Customer reviews, 1-Click shopping, personalized recommendations, Prime, Fulfillment by Amazon, AWS, Kindle Direct Publishing, Kindle, Fire tablets, Fire TV, Amazon Echo, and Alexa are some of the products and services pioneered by Amazon. For more information, visit www.amazon.com/about and follow @AmazonNews.

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Jeff Wilke at the GeekWire Summit

We're excited to host this conversation with Amazon Consumer CEO Jeff Wilke, the highest-ranking Amazon executive to appear at the annual GeekWire Summit technology conference. GeekWire editor Todd Bishop will interview Wilke at 3:55 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 10, in this half-hour session.

Amazon has become one of the most closely followed companies in the world, and many attendees at the GeekWire Summit can almost recite the leadership principles by heart. Our goal is to go beyond the basics to achieve deeper insights into the company, its business, the industry and the future.

The backdrop for this conversation is expansive, given everything Amazon's consumer business involves, and one of the key challenges will be efficiently homing in on the topics likely to generate the most interesting conversation and valuable insights. This session will be unscripted and free-flowing. What follows are some general topics, key questions and background to inform the conversation.

Jeff Wilke's Personal Background and Influences

Jeff Wilke grew up in Pittsburgh, studied chemical engineering at Princeton University, and did his graduate work in MIT's Leaders for Global Operations program. His early operational roles in pharmaceuticals, chemicals and electronics gave him a unique perspective as he joined Amazon as Vice President and General Manager of Operations in September 1999, at the peak of the dot-com bubble.

Related Topics/Questions

- How does your background and upbringing in an East Coast industrial city influence your approach to your job as a leader at one of the world's top tech companies, on the West Coast?
- Which technology and business leaders have had the most influence on you, either through direct mentoring, or by you studying what they do?
- What's the single biggest thing you've learned from Jeff Bezos in your time at the company?
- You talked to Whole Foods employees about your own experience as a customer there, how Whole Foods changed your life and diet. ¹ Tell us about yourself as an overall Amazon customer and your own personal journey with the company. What's the first thing you bought on Amazon, and the most recent?
- Tell us about the technology you love personally. What do you use, why do you love it, and what does it say about how you work and live?
- You've said the book, "Productivity and American Leadership: The Long View," published in 1991, scared you "thoroughly," based on what was then the widening productivity gap between Asia and the U.S. and Europe. How did that book shape your worldview, and do you still draw lessons from it today in making long-term decisions for Amazon? ²

Amazon's Business, Culture and Future

When Wilke joined Amazon in 1999, the company's net sales were \$1.6 billion, and Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos predicted to shareholders that "the continued adoption of online commerce around the world as millions of new consumers connect to the Internet for the first time." ³

Fast-forward 18 years, and the growth is jaw-dropping: Amazon posted net sales of \$136 billion in 2016, a year in which it made its first drone delivery, was nominated for 11 Golden Globes, and saw its own Alexa-powered devices become the top-selling items on Amazon.com for the holidays. Wilke took over Amazon's North American consumer business in 2007 and was named CEO of Amazon's Worldwide Consumer business in 2016. He oversees businesses that generated nearly \$124 billion in net sales in 2016, representing more than 90 percent of Amazon's overall net sales last year. ⁴

Jeff Bezos wrote in the company's 2014 annual letter, "A dreamy business offering has at least four characteristics. Customers love it, it can grow to very large size, it has strong returns on capital, and it's durable in time - with the potential to endure for decades. When you find one of these, don't just swipe right, get married." He cited Marketplace, Prime, and Amazon Web Services as Amazon's "dreamy businesses," and promised, "You can also count on us to work hard to find a fourth." ⁵

Related Topics/Questions

- What is Amazon today? Is Amazon a retailer, a technology company, or something else? When you joined Amazon 18 years ago, did you have any idea what it would become?
- When you think about the world of e-commerce, automation, fulfillment, distribution, physical retail stores, delivery infrastructure, etc., how would you describe the end-to-end system that Amazon is building? What will this look like in 3, 5, or 10 years?
- You seem to have moved very quickly in your integration with Whole Foods. What can you tell us about where that's headed? What would surprise people?
- Which customer problems need to be fixed the most? Where are the biggest opportunities for improvement right now. Which challenges are you most excited about addressing in the future?
- With groceries, you went from online delivery to physical stores and then a big brick-and-mortar acquisition. Would it be accurate for people to look to the evolution of Amazon's grocery business as a blueprint or roadmap for your growth in other verticals, like fashion and books?
- Why did Amazon decide to seek out a second HQ2 — what are the main business drivers, from your perspective? Should people in Seattle take it personally? Will you be based in the new HQ?
- You've said that Amazon wants to be "pioneers, not conquerors."⁶ But in the midst of all that pioneering, some competitors and political leaders are concerned that Amazon has become too powerful, regardless of your intentions. How do you address those concerns?
- Some big brands have been reluctant to establish an official presence on Amazon.com, preferring to control the experience themselves, and not wanting to compete directly alongside resellers who may or may not have their blessing. That seems to be changing, though, with Nike as a prime example. How are you managing the relationships with these big brands to get them to sell on Amazon.com, and what has changed over the past year?⁷
- Amazon Prime seems like a force of nature. Amazon says it counts tens of millions of Prime members, but one research firm puts it at more than 80 million members in the U.S. alone. Can you give a sense for the growth of this part of the business? How does Prime influence what you do, and what can we expect from Prime next?⁸
- Do you see your online and physical stores as separate initiatives? How do you envision them working together in the future, and what role will Prime play in bridging them? What
- Referencing the Jeff Bezos quote above, I'm convinced that Amazon has found its fourth "dreamy" business: Alexa. Am I right? What other candidates do you see emerging?
- You opposed Amazon getting into the hardware business with the original Kindle. Jeff Bezos asked you to "disagree and commit," which is one of Amazon's leadership principles. What did you learn about business, Amazon's culture and yourself through that experience?⁹
- What's the best six-pager you've ever read — what was it about, why was it so great, and what ended up happening to whatever initiative it introduced?
- One of the organizational concepts you've championed is "separable, single-threaded teams." What does that mean, how does it work and what are the advantages and disadvantages?¹⁰

The Future of Business and Technology

Amazon is in a unique position to not only invent new technologies but to implement them across a wide range of businesses and operations. The company has been a pioneer and early leader in areas including e-commerce, digital books, robotics, automation, and new forms of delivery such as drones. This reach and experience give Amazon a valuable perspective on not only on what's possible but also, importantly, on what's *realistic* in the next wave of technology.

Related Topics/Questions

- Over the past two decades, shopping has moved from brick-and-mortar stores to web browsers to smartphones, and it's just now getting to voice assistants. What's next in this evolution?
- Augmented reality seems natural for Amazon, blending the physical and digital worlds much as the company has blended traditional and online shopping. What is your outlook on augmented reality, and its potential to transform the way we shop and interact with the world?
- To what extent are consumer concerns about privacy impacting Amazon's online growth?
- How have artificial intelligence and machine learning changed your day-to-day life as an executive? To what extent do they influence your decisions and the company's operations? Where do you see this headed in the years ahead?
- Amazon is still adding more people than robots, at least for now, in areas such as its fulfillment centers. How much longer will that continue to be the case? Should workers worry?
- What role do you expect autonomous vehicles (cars and trucks) to play in Amazon's logistics and delivery infrastructure in the next 5 to 10 years? How far are we from a day when the journey from manufacturer to end user is fully autonomous?
- How long until we see drone deliveries from Amazon in the U.S. to everyday customers? What excites you about the drone business, and how have drones changed your outlook?

FAQ

What is the GeekWire Summit?

The GeekWire Summit is one of the premier technology conferences in the U.S. and the largest technology event of its kind in the Pacific Northwest, bringing together more than 800 tech and business leaders for a conversation about the future. Now in its sixth year, the event draws attendees from across the globe to explore what's next in tech, business, science and society.

Can I still get tickets?

Yes, we expect the event to sell out, but you can purchase tickets at geekwire.com/summit.

Who else is speaking this year?

The lineup includes Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, Starbucks CEO Kevin Johnson, Instacart CEO Apoorva Mehta, Amazon Alexa and Echo VP Toni Reid, Fred Hutchinson President Dr. Gary Gilliland, Washington state Attorney General Bob Ferguson, Canvas Ventures partner Rebecca Lynn, Zillow CEO Spencer Rascoff, theBoardlist founder Sukhinder Singh Cassidy and renowned brain scientist Christof Koch.

Why did you create this document, and what will you do with it?

We created this six-pager, in the spirit of Amazon's internal practice, to establish a common base of knowledge and understanding not only with Jeff Wilke but also with the GeekWire Summit audience. It is a working document. We have shared this six-pager with Jeff Wilke, and we are soliciting feedback on GeekWire before the event, where we'll distribute the final version.

So the interview will be scripted?

Nope, as with all of our interviews, this will be a free-flowing conversation, and the questions herein are primarily a brainstorm and a starting point to provide a framework for the discussion.

Will you ask every one of these questions? This could take hours!

We won't be able to get to every one of these questions in the 30-minute session with Jeff Wilke, but we do aim to touch on all of the themes, and there will be natural follow-up questions, not included in this document, that will come up in the course of the conversation.

Appendix/Endnotes

1. Transcript, Whole Foods Market Town Hall, June 16, 2017. https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/865436/000110465917040187/a17-15393_1defa14a.htm
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3. From Amazon's 1999 annual report. http://media.corporate-ir.net/media_files/irol/97/97664/reports/123199_10k.pdf
4. Amazon's 2016 total net revenue excluding Amazon Web Services. Calculated by combining North American and International net sales for the twelve months ended Dec. 31, 2016. <http://phx.corporate-ir.net/External.File?item=UGFyZW50SUQ9NjU4MjQ1fENoaWxkSUQ9MzY0NTY2fFR5cGU9MQ==&t=1>
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6. Shop Talk with Amazon's Jeff Wilke, Fortune: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LoSgREZshRg>
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