

# Turning online conversations into predictive market insight

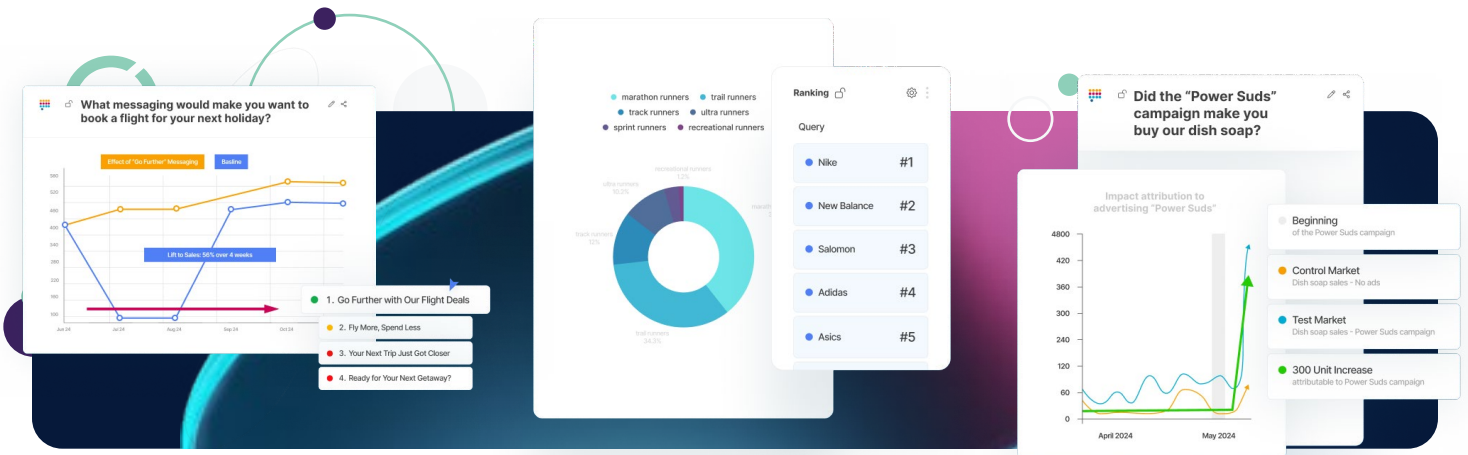
Social media has changed how consumers engage with products and services, amplifying both positive and negative voices, and making it harder for market researchers to understand audience behaviour.

So how do you cut through the noise to find out what people really think? Canadian market research and behavioural analytics company Advanced Symbolics would like you to askpolly, their patented AI-driven research system.

Founded in 2015 by marketer & CEO Erin Kelly and physicist and Chief Scientist Kenton White, this Ottawa-based company developed askpolly to analyze online conversations and predict human attitudes and behaviour.

With SR&ED credits supporting its research team, Advanced Symbolics uses Easy Advances to smooth cash flow and expand product development.





# AI that predicts behaviour

## Turning conversations into insights

Advanced Symbolics is an Ottawa-based AI company developing tools that help organizations understand how customers and citizens think, feel and behave.

The company's early work focused on helping health agencies analyze large volumes of online conversations to better understand public sentiment and emerging trends. CEO and co-founder Erin Kelly says, *"We didn't start out with marketing. We started with a life and death problem, so we had to be right."*

Its proprietary AI system, askpolly, analyzes longitudinal social media data, tracking how conversations evolve over time and using algorithms to filter for bias and to identify statistically valid patterns in public opinion. Rather than relying on surveys or focus groups, askpolly observes what people are already saying online — analyzing conversations across platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Reddit and TikTok — to infer sentiment, intent and likely behaviour.

Through askpolly's self-serve platform, organizations can query this data directly to explore public sentiment, market trends or audience behaviour. Insights that once required weeks of commissioned research can now be generated in minutes through an AI-powered query, with the same statistical validity as traditional research.

## From research tool to AI platform

When Advanced Symbolics first launched, the company operated more like a research agency. Clients would bring specific questions or projects, and the team would train askpolly on each topic and audience before running the analysis. That process could take weeks.

Today, askpolly operates as a zero-shot AI system, meaning it can answer new questions without needing to be trained on each topic. *"Now it all happens automatically,"* says Erin.

The shift dramatically expanded the platform's potential, allowing organizations to analyze new topics and audiences almost instantly.

The technology behind askpolly has taken years of intensive development. Advanced Symbolics now holds six patents, each representing roughly three years of research and development.

## Building a research-intensive company

Developing advanced AI systems requires sustained investment in research and highly specialized talent.

*"It's hard science and a heavy, heavy R&D product. You're paying PhDs and scientists to invent this technology,"* says Erin. *"We have to work on the product before it generates revenue, so investing in people is an up-front cost."*

Like many technology companies building complex intellectual property, Advanced Symbolics relies on Canada's SR&ED tax incentive program to support the salaries of its research team and fund ongoing development.

# Funding continuous innovation

## Using Easly Advances to smooth cash flow

For companies relying on SR&ED refunds, the timing of cash flow can be challenging. Research spending happens continuously, but the refund itself often arrives months later. Erin says, “We file in January and it can take until June to get the refund.”

To bridge that gap, Advanced Symbolics has regularly used Easly Advances at year-end to bring forward the value of its SR&ED credits.

This gives them predictability around timing, helps smooth cash flow and keep projects moving without the wait.

Erin says, “With Easly Advances we get the money months in advance of the government refund and can put the funds to use straight away. It’s a great way of smoothing cash flow. The first time you do it is the hardest and then after that it’s fairly easy.”

## Using SR&ED to build sovereign tech

Advanced Symbolics has built its funding strategy around a mix of capital sources, including debt, equity and revenue. They hired their first employees with a loan from BDC and have done several equity rounds. While they were developing their platform, the company financed their research through revenue, working as a market research agency and gradually introducing askpolly’s abilities to their clients.

Since 2023, as they ramped up product development to achieve the zero-shot AI, they built SR&ED financing into the mix to smooth cash flow. Erin says SR&ED credits are vital to keeping the research program on home soil, but small innovation companies need faster access to the credits, “If Canada wants to be a leader in AI and especially if it wants to retain this as a sovereign technology then it’s vital to have access to your SR&ED refund earlier.”

## Expanding the reach of askpolly

Now that they have achieved their zero-shot milestone, Erin says askpolly is now primed to be the research platform that large language models (LLMs) need.

“The Microsoft Copilot team told us that research is the number one thing people use their agent for,” Erin says. “And yet they don’t have the algorithms to be able to sample social media for statistically valid market research. So customers who want to do market research through the LLM platforms will need a platform like askpolly.” Microsoft has already signed up: askpolly is available as an integration to its popular Copilot agent, currently shipping with every license of Microsoft Office. And the company is continuing to develop tools for marketing and brand teams as an “early warning system” on competitors or market sentiment.

With social media crossing international boundaries, Erin says the aim is to extend market reach beyond North America: “askpolly speaks every language and you can do global sampling. We want to expand our horizons.”

“We use SR&ED financing to subsidize our product research until we can get it to market. It’s reliable funding, backed by the government, so it’s money we know we can count on.”

- Advanced Symbolics CEO and co-founder Erin Kelly

Bring forward your SR&ED refund to keep R&D moving. With **Easly Advances**, you can unlock your expected SR&ED credits months earlier to smooth cash flow and keep investing in product development while you wait for your refund. Speak with our expert team on 1-833-386-3632 or [contact us](#) to get started.

