



How Great Wolf Lodge's Thoughtful Recruiting Automation Helps Them Connect With Gen-Z — and Employees

About Great Wolf Lodge

Industry: Hospitality
Employees: 7,500
Locations: 19

225%

Reduction in Employee Turnover

400%

Increase in Applicant Flow Rate

75%

Candidate Conversion Rate

If you've ever traveled with kids, you know that keeping them engaged — read: distracted — is the key to a great vacation. There might be no organization in the country that knows this truth more than Great Wolf Lodge — a veritable theme park disguised as a hotel that's consistently ranked by *USA Today* as America's Best Family Resort.

For years, Great Wolf Lodge has built an entire business around a very simple mission: *We bring joy to families*. They do it through a mix of experiential activities for children — from an indoor water park, to a full calendar of events designed to bring out kids' creativity and imagination.

Of course, a key ingredient for actually *delivering* on that mission is Great Wolf Lodge's people. Specifically, the hundreds of "Pack Members" who staff each of its 19 locations across the United States.

"Like any of the world's great service and hospitality brands, we view our Pack Members as an essential piece of the experiences we create for families," says Great Wolf Lodge VP of Talent, Rachel O'Connell. "Without amazing people who love what they do, we wouldn't be able to deliver the unforgettable experiences we're known for."

Hospitality's High Volume Hurdles — Exacerbated by COVID

Needless to say, Great Wolf Lodge has a high bar for the type of employees they recruit. Beyond basic skills, they also need to have a passion for the work they'll



be doing and a very strong disposition toward a service- and customer-first mindset.

If that doesn't make recruiting challenging enough, O'Connell says Great Wolf Lodge has also historically dealt with many of the same challenges other hospitality and retail brands face: Namely, high employee turnover that makes keeping resorts fully staffed with friendly, customer-first talent a significant operational hurdle.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the hospitality industry makes up 10% of the United States labor force — and the industry has one of the highest employee turnover rates (76.7%). O'Connell says Great Wolf Lodge hasn't been immune to those challenges and she feared it could get worse as Gen-Z, a generation prone to job hopping, joins the workforce.

And then came the COVID-19 pandemic.

As if recruiting wasn't hard enough, when hospitality brands were forced to temporarily close because of state-imposed shelter-in-place policies, Great Wolf Lodge was impacted like most others. While some recruiting activities slowed down, O'Connell and her team had to jump into action to stay in communication with all of Great Wolf Lodge's Pack Members and a flood of people applying to their jobs.

"Our first priority was to take care of our employees and our candidates, clearly communicate any impact on them, and make sure everyone knew where they stood," O'Connell says. "We have a relatively small recruiting team, but it wasn't an option to ignore the obvious and end up with people feeling in the dark."

Bringing the Future into the Present with an AI Assistant Named "Emma"

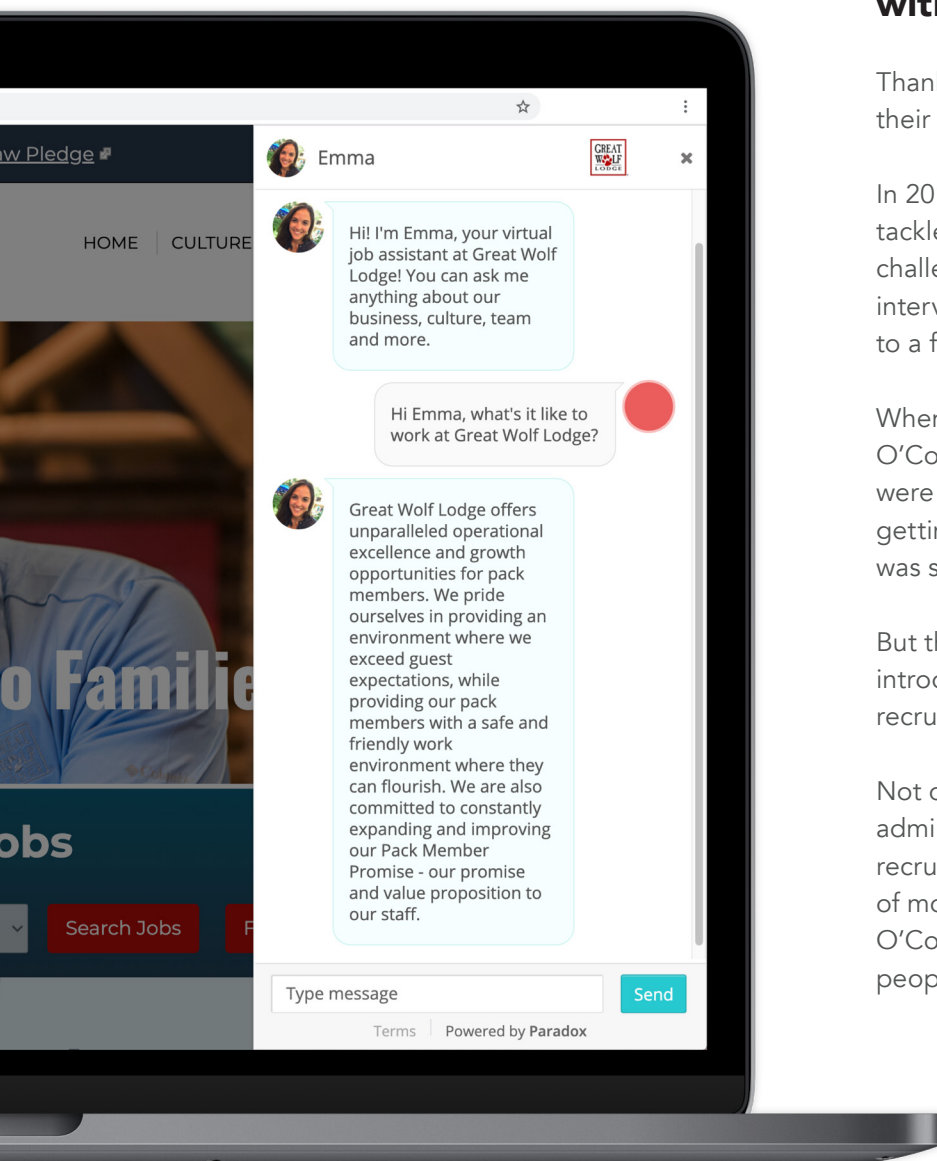
Thankfully, O'Connell and her team had an ace up their sleeve.

In 2018, Great Wolf Lodge partnered with Paradox to tackle some of the company's most chronic recruiting challenges: Screening applications, scheduling interviews, and ensuring candidates had 24/7 access to a friendly face who could answer their questions.

When Great Wolf Lodge partnered with Paradox, O'Connell's team was underwater. Recruiting demands were higher than ever, employee turnover wasn't getting better, and O'Connell's small recruiting team was struggling to keep lodges fully staffed.

But that all started to change once Great Wolf Lodge introduced "Emma" — its conversational AI recruiting assistant.

Not only was Emma able to take hours of administrative work off the Great Wolf Lodge recruiting team's plate, she also created the kind of modern, "internet generation" experience that O'Connell knew would resonate with the type of people her team was recruiting.



"We recruit pretty heavily among Gen-Z and Millennials, and those generations have become accustomed to fast, easy, mobile-first experiences that look and feel like everything else in their digital lives," says O'Connell. "Emma has been a game-changer for that audience. She's providing immediate gratification for applicants — instantly answering questions and getting qualified candidates scheduled for interviews within minutes of applying. It's incredible — not just for candidates, but for our team, too. The burden Emma's taken off our shoulders is huge."

That was never more true than during the pandemic, O'Connell says.

When COVID required some lodges to temporarily close, O'Connell and her team quickly spun up mobile text messaging and email campaigns to:

- Communicate with every Pack Member and ensure they knew how the fluid response to the pandemic impacted them.
- Continue to collect applicant data, clearly communicate next steps, and immediately engage candidates as soon as lodges opened up.

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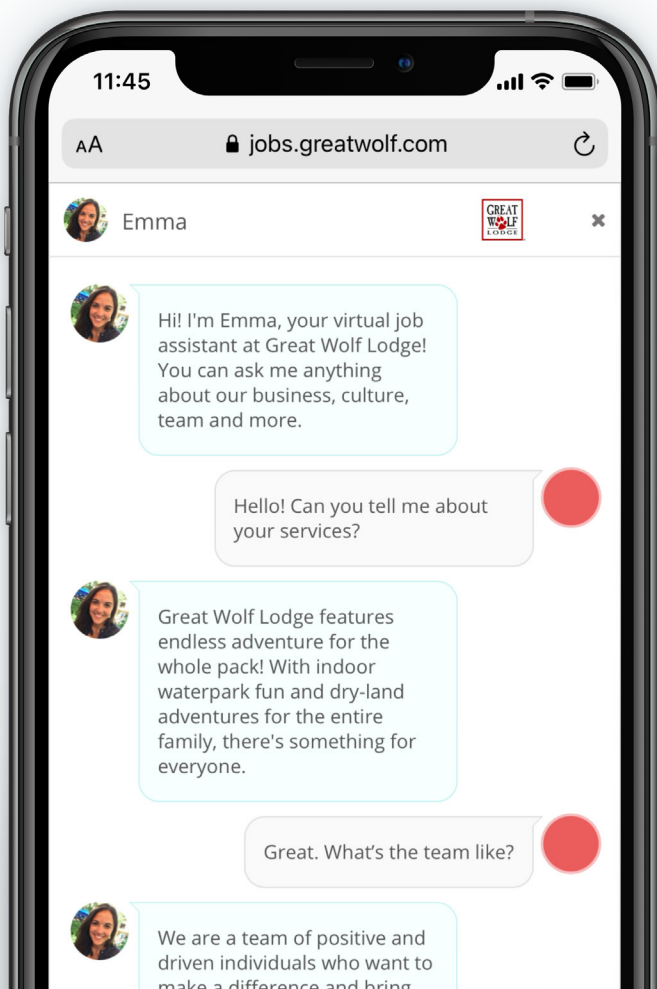
Rachel O'Connell
VP of Talent, Great Wolf Lodge

"It really simplified what could have been an incredibly complex, stressful situation," O'Connell says. "It's so critical to strike a balance between human connection and digital communication, but Emma and Paradox really helped scale our team in a way that helped us ensure we created the experiences Great Wolf Lodge is known for."

Great Wolf Gets Back to Great Work — and Looks to the Future

More than two years into their partnership with Paradox, O'Connell says it's hard to quantify just how much of an impact Emma's had on her team and Great Wolf Lodge's people. But she can point to a couple of metrics that clearly show the value:

- Since implementing Paradox, Great Wolf Lodge has seen a 225% reduction in employee turnover — something O'Connell credits to an experience that clearly communicates how much the company values its people and time savings that allow recruiters at each lodge to focus on higher value Pack Member engagement and retention strategies.
- With the help of Emma, Great Wolf Lodge has increased applicant flows by 400%. O'Connell says, "We're now getting our fair share of applicants from the available labor pool — that wasn't always the case."
- Great Wolf is now seeing 75% show rates for scheduled interviews — far exceeding the pre-Paradox world. O'Connell says, "That improvement is huge — it used to be down around 55% when we relied on leaving voicemails and sending emails."



Mobile messaging and text-based recruiting has also dramatically increased applicant conversion rates — particularly for candidates who apply after normal business hours.

“Sending emails and leaving voicemails just wasn’t working,” O’Connell says. “Candidates want to engage when it’s convenient for them, not just when we’re in the office for the process to start. Emma being available 24/7 and enabling candidates to apply or ask questions right from their phone has really changed how and who we hire.”

As for what’s next? After a year full of new challenges — particularly in the hospitality industry — O’Connell and her team are excited to return to some form of normal. She’s not sure yet what “normal” will mean exactly, but she’s confident that Great Wolf Lodge has a partner who she knows will continue to push the limits of what hiring can look like.

“A few years ago, we didn’t even know tech like this existed,” O’Connell says. “Today, Paradox has really changed how we operate. We’ve moved out of the administrative weeds and are focusing on more strategic things like employee engagement, performance management, and succession planning — all things that are far more valuable for our team members and the business. It’s really transformed how the talent team supports the company overall.”

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