

Compass Group Revolutionizes High-Volume Hiring with AI



A Provider of Great Food to Millions of People Every Day

Compass Group is a global leader in providing food and support services. The company serves meals across various market sectors, including government, banking, healthcare, education, sports, and high-profile events like the Grammy Awards and the Super Bowl. Its support services offer hospital cleaning, reception services at corporate headquarters, and managing remote camps, as well as grounds and facilities services at schools and universities.

Headquartered in Chertsey, England, Compass Group operates in 35 countries, serving approximately 5.5 billion meals a year and employing more than 550,000 people globally, including 300,000 associates in the United States. The company has received a series of notable business distinctions and employer awards, including *Newsweek*'s recognition for one of America's Greatest Workplaces for Diversity and one of America's Greatest Workplaces for Women.¹

Witnessing Applicant Drop-Offs in High-Volume Hiring

Compass Group's frontline recruiting team plays a crucial role in supporting line managers to hire the best talent for each open job posting in the most efficient way possible. Tasked with accommodating more than 160,000 hourly hires across a wide range of sectors every year, Compass Group's lean team of 20 recruiters supports as many as 1,000 open requisitions at a time. The diverse nature of its operations demanded a highly customizable and flexible recruitment approach to cater to specific clients, locations, and job types.

Recruiters as Self-Service Hiring Enablers and Talent Advisors

Recruiting at Compass Group relies on a combination of technology tools and strategic consultations leveraging market data and people analytics to address varying hiring barriers in different markets (e.g., talent scarcity, increased competition). The recruiting team provides centralized tools and systems

Summary

Challenge

- Supporting more than 160,000 entry-level frontline hourly hires every year with a centralized team of only 20 recruiters.
- Hiring high volumes of personnel across a wide range of sectors, locations, and job types.
- Mitigating candidate drop-offs among job applicants via mobile devices due to a multistep application experience.

Solution

- Layered Paradox's AI-powered assistant, "Olivia," on top of Compass Group's career website to enhance the candidate experience.
- Integrated Olivia with ATS to automate application, assessment, interview scheduling, and on-demand video interview processes.
- Streamlined and customized applicant experience for each job requisition to meet varying staffing needs across the board.

Results

- Reduced application time from more than 9 minutes to under 3 minutes, while overall process from job search to scheduled interview takes as little as 6 minutes.
- Achieved a 600% increase in conversion of applicant conversations via chat into scheduled interviews, allowing candidates to engage with Olivia 24/7.
- Increased overall application completion rate to 85%.

to facilitate self-service for over 30,000 line managers who are hiring across more than 10,000 locations. "Because of our size and scale, we put tools into people's hands to make smart decisions and do things in a simple way," said Shay Johnson, Vice President of Talent Acquisition at Compass Group.

The talent acquisition (TA) team primarily focuses on attracting candidates and getting them into the pipeline. It handles advertising spend optimization and manages the distribution of job postings. On top of that, the TA team helps connect and facilitate local partnerships with colleges and other organizations. The team also supports hiring events and provides tech support and other marketing materials.

¹ [Compass Group](#), 2024.

Beyond recruitment, the team offers operational consultation to help managers with strategies and market data, presenting recommendations and creative ideas for line managers to overcome hiring challenges, such as wage or transportation constraints in certain environments.

A Long and Complex Hiring Process with Multiple Manual Steps

The legacy online application process, featuring online forms or multiple screens of information, was lengthy and cumbersome. Candidates often abandoned the applications due to the time and effort required to complete them; it typically took more than nine minutes for people to apply. The traditional application forms were also not optimized for mobile devices, which is crucial since many candidates apply via their phones. Adding to the complexity, the process involved creating usernames and passwords, which further deterred candidates from submitting their applications.

“*Speed is everything. When you are looking to hire at the volumes and the roles we’re hiring for, and you’ve got massive competition, a part of the driving force is making that experience for the candidate seamless—fast and fluid.*”

Shay Johnson, Vice President of Talent Acquisition, Compass Group

Right after the pandemic restrictions lessened, Compass Group needed to hire a large volume of frontline workers quickly. However, the existing processes could not keep up with the demand. The recruitment process was slow, with significant delays between application submission and interview scheduling. Candidates often had to wait for emails or be redirected to different pages, which broke the flow and caused frustration.

Both recruiters and hiring managers had to manually handle many aspects of the recruitment process, including screening and scheduling. This manual intervention was time-consuming and prone to errors, leading to inefficiencies. Additionally, the slow process resulted in losing candidates to competitors who could offer faster hiring experiences.

Revamping the Candidate Experience with Conversational AI

Compass Group tackled high-volume hiring by automating interview scheduling and streamlining the application process with Paradox’s AI-driven assistant, “Olivia.” An early adopter, Compass Group had first deployed Olivia as a concierge, enabling candidates to learn more about the company and be guided through the traditional application process. Making Olivia the default recruitment experience allowed candidates to apply through a chat-based conversation instead of filling out forms, opening the door for automated assessment and scheduling.

“We wanted everything to happen in line with the conversation, so that from a candidate’s perspective, you can never really tell where an application starts or ends, and you’ve just moved on to another step in the process,” Johnson said. “It’s continuous and fluid, and it’s all native within that text or chat.”

Integration with Existing Platforms and the HCM System

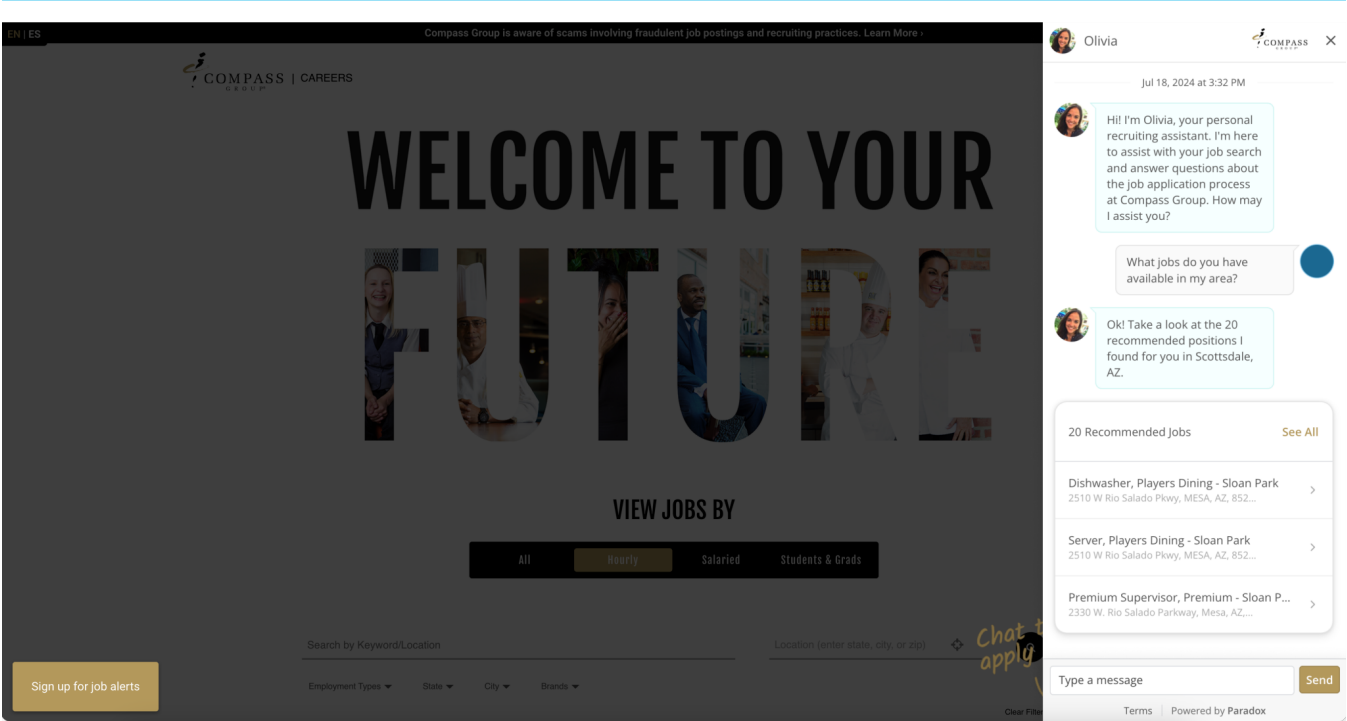
Seeing the benefits of using AI in recruitment, Compass Group decided to upgrade Olivia to serve as more than a concierge. The AI-powered digital assistant now operates the company’s career website, interacting with candidates from the moment they land on the site until the completion of their interview (see Figure 1 on the next page).

Olivia was also integrated with Compass Group’s existing applicant tracking system (ATS) on the company’s human capital management (HCM) system (SAP SuccessFactors). This integration ensured a seamless flow of information and reduced the need for multiple platforms (see Figure 2 on the next page).

The system also eliminates the need for candidates to create a username or password to track their applications. “Olivia autoprovisions that for the candidates so they don’t even know that it’s happening,” Johnson said.

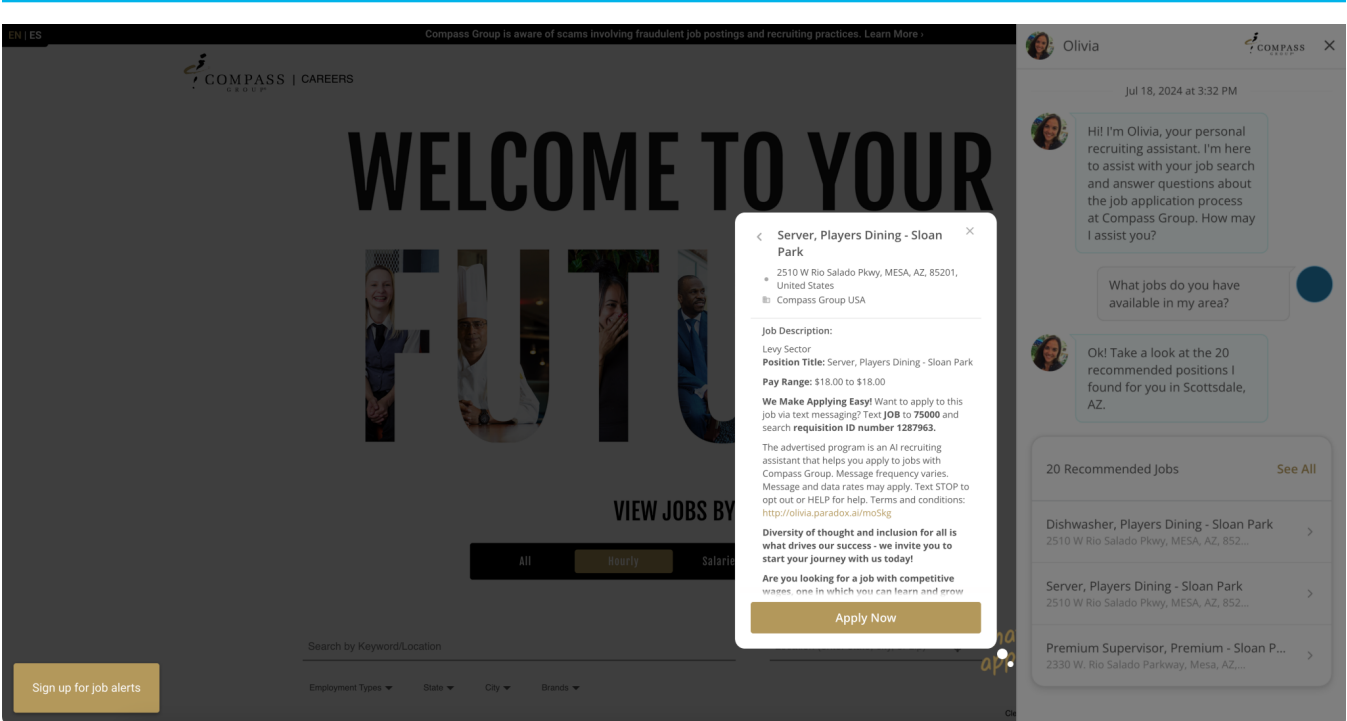
Using Olivia also automates various recruitment tasks such as screening candidates, scheduling interviews, and sending reminders. This automation reduces the manual workload for recruiters and hiring managers, allowing them to focus on having more strategic conversations around talent needs.

Figure 1: Career Discussion with Olivia via the Compass Group Career Website



Source: Compass Group, 2024

Figure 2: Job Application Powered by Olivia via the Compass Group Career Website



Source: Compass Group, 2024

A Seamless Candidate and Line Manager Hiring Experience

Integrating AI tools into recruitment allows for a customized applicant flow that aligns with managers' hiring preferences for different roles or clients (e.g., branding, hiring manager notification preferences). Once candidates submit their job applications to Compass Group, Olivia continues the process using Paradox's picture-based personality assessment tool (Traitify) to quickly determine candidates' traits and suitability for multiple positions simultaneously.

Olivia then automatically schedules interviews or guides qualified applicants to hiring events without requiring a manager to review each candidate. Alternatively, managers also have the option to sort candidates by screening qualifications and/or assessment scores to select who Olivia will schedule or invite to hiring events. Additionally, line managers can invite a candidate to complete an on-demand video interview with prerecorded questions for further assessment.

According to Johnson, each component of the applicant flow is seamlessly integrated into the experience rather than being an added service that's bolted on.

“ *Our job is mostly enabling the business with intuitive technology, smart automation, and strong advertising so all a manager has to do is submit a requisition and days later, candidates will be popping up on their calendar.* **”**
Shay Johnson

Recruiters as Talent Advisors

Olivia's ability to seamlessly handle routine processes empowers Compass Group recruiters to serve as talent advisors. By providing real-time data insights and automating tasks, such as screening candidates, scheduling interviews, and answering common queries, Olivia frees up recruiters' time. This enables them to engage in deeper consultations with hiring managers, offering tailored advice on market trends, competitive salary benchmarks, and effective hiring strategies.

With Olivia managing the administrative workload, recruiters can dedicate more time to understanding the specific needs of each business line and bringing their expertise into Compass

Group's key sectors, such as healthcare, business and industry, and education, to assist with onboarding new clients.

“It's definitely been a journey to try to get with these accounts and understand what their unique processes or challenges are, and then prescribe the right mix of either products or automation to leverage what they're comfortable with,” Johnson said. “Once an account is established, they understand the tools that they have to use, they understand how our team supports them, they get into that rhythm, and it becomes more low-touch.”

Furthermore, Olivia's integration with Compass Group's advanced people analytics systems ensures that recruiters have access to up-to-date, actionable data. This real-time information allows recruiters to present evidence-based recommendations to hiring managers, enhancing their role as trusted advisors. For instance, recruiters can leverage internal and external market data to suggest competitive compensation packages or identify alternative sourcing strategies in challenging markets. By equipping recruiters with these insights, Olivia helps them to not only fill positions more efficiently but also to contribute to the overall talent strategy of the organization, ensuring that Compass Group remains competitive in attracting and retaining high-quality candidates.

Results: Reduced Application Times, Revamped Experience, Increased Efficiency

Compass Group's revamped and AI-powered recruitment strategies significantly reduced application time, improved the candidate experience, and enhanced the company's TA efficiency across a wide range of hiring groups. By replacing traditional, lengthy web-based application forms with a conversational interface, Olivia allowed candidates to apply via text or chat, providing a faster and more user-friendly application experience. This streamlined and frictionless experience, which eliminated the need for creating usernames and passwords, minimized candidate drop-off rates and improved the overall application completion rate. Additionally, Olivia provided real-time responses to candidate inquiries, ensuring immediate feedback and support.

A Lean and Efficient AI-Powered Hiring Environment

Olivia significantly enhanced efficiency by automating routine tasks, reducing the manual workload for both recruiters and hiring managers. The integration of Olivia with Compass Group's ATS and other recruitment tools ensured a seamless flow of information and eliminated the need for multiple platforms. This automation greatly simplified Compass Group's recruitment tech stack efficiency.

The application time was reduced from over nine minutes to under three minutes, and the overall process from job search to scheduled interview now takes as little as six minutes. This efficiency boost led to a 600% increase in the conversion of conversations into scheduled interviews, with 33% of candidates engaging with Olivia after hours, demonstrating the assistant's ability to provide continuous support. Additionally, Olivia's user-friendly interface and real-time interaction capabilities increased the overall application completion rate to an impressive 85%, ensuring a higher number of qualified candidates progressing through the recruitment pipeline.

Next Steps: Personalized Hiring Experiences for Everyone

As part of continuing efforts to streamline the recruitment process, Compass Group is extending the Olivia experience across 20 different customer brands. Previously, the mix of branded content and Compass systems led to confusion among prospective job-seekers. Olivia will now be personalized for each brand's freestanding career environment, allowing candidates to follow a consistent applicant flow without being redirected to a Compass environment, according to Johnson. For each account, the Compass Group recruiting team will prescribe the right mix of products or automation that each brand is comfortable with.

“ We want to continuously introduce more automation within Olivia to become completely customizable down to the job requisition level, so a manager can say ‘I’d love to use this [candidate experience] for my cook positions for this cafe.’

Shay Johnson

Last, to reinforce awareness of the technology, materials are being added to a new HR Fundamentals course in the Compass Group's learning management system, which line managers take during onboarding and as an annual refresher. The course materials will also serve as a reference for the help desk and manager service teams.

Lessons Learned

Compass Group's commitment to continuously enhancing the hiring experience, powered by top-tier technology, tells an evidence-based tale of empowerment for both recruiters and hiring managers. Here are some lessons learned:

- **Prioritize the desired experience before high-end technology.** The hiring process experience for candidates, recruiters, and hiring managers should serve as the efficiency and optimization lever when adopting new technology. Flexible and scalable technologies can significantly improve recruiting efficiency.
- **Streamline hiring processes but remain intuitive in the candidate's experience.** Simplifying the application process through AI can reduce application times and minimize candidate drop-off rates. Replacing lengthy forms with intuitive, mobile-friendly interactions enhances the candidate experience and increases application completion rates around the clock.
- **Automate mundane tasks.** Leveraging AI to automate repetitive tasks, such as screening, scheduling, and sending reminders, can free up recruiters' time, allowing them to focus on more strategic activities. This not only improves the candidate experience but also ensures a significantly faster and seamless recruitment process.
- **Empower recruiters with data.** Integrating AI with existing recruitment systems can provide recruiters with valuable market insights and analytics, enabling more informed and data-driven hiring decisions. This can help recruiters identify the best candidates more quickly and effectively, and it also enables more informed conversations with line managers around current and future talent needs.

About the Authors



Josh Bersin

Josh founded Bersin & Associates in 2001 to provide research and advisory services focused on corporate learning. He expanded the company's coverage to encompass HR, talent management, talent acquisition, and leadership and became a recognized expert in the talent market. Josh sold the company to Deloitte in 2012 and was a partner in Bersin by Deloitte up until 2018.

In 2019, Josh founded the Josh Bersin Academy, a professional development academy that has become the "home for HR." In 2020, he put together a team of analysts and advisors who are now working with him to support and guide HR organizations from around the world under the umbrella of The Josh Bersin Company. He is frequently featured in publications such as *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review*, *HR Executive*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *CLO Magazine*. He is a popular blogger and has more than 800,000 followers on LinkedIn.



Stella Ioannidou

Stella is the senior director of research and Global Workforce Intelligence Project leader at The Josh Bersin Company. In this role, she conducts empirical research on a variety of topics related to the skills economy, talent intelligence, and HR technology. Stella has almost 20 years of experience across several industries, including banking. Prior to joining The Josh Bersin Company, Stella was the HR transformation leader for Deloitte, where she led large-scale HCM implementations and designed frameworks for talent acquisition and performance management for the public sector. Stella holds master's degrees in engineering, information systems management, business administration, and lifelong learning. Stella lives and works in Greece and is pursuing her PhD in talent intelligence. She is a certified project manager, change management practitioner, lean six sigma green belt, and ICAgile HR professional.

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