

CEO, Suneera Madhani,
as an ambassador of
Fattmerchant's brand

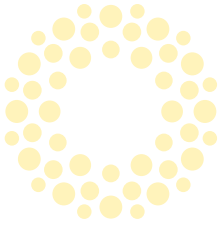
Keeping the Talent Pipeline Robust

Leading employers utilize a multi-pronged approach to recruitment to ensure they have the skills they need not only for today, but for the challenging years ahead.

Chief Executive



ORLANDO
ECONOMIC
PARTNERSHIP



Thanks to three-year revenue growth of 1,047%,

Orlando-based merchant services company, Fattmerchant, was named, for the second year running, to the Inc. 5000 list of fastest growing companies. In simplest terms, the company's leadership attributes that success to being able to match demand with superior SAAS technology. But, says Parisse "PJ" Spelios, the company's vice president of talent, "we truly believe that the only way to meet that demand is by having the right people. Our greatest resource is our human capital. As a team, we have been able to successfully execute the vision of Fattmerchant and grow the company in a very short period of time."

Regardless of industry, product or service, talent is the common ingredient underpinning all sustained success, according to senior executives, which is perhaps why it's the cause of so much hand-wringing. According to recent research from *The Economist*, four-fifths of CEOs worry about skill shortages in the workplace—and they're right to, if the World Economic Forum's prediction is right: 65% of today's jobs won't be around in 15 years. That means companies need a robust talent pipeline strategy that accounts as much for future skills as it does present needs.

With nearly every company in some stage of digital transformation, bringing the right people on board, who have both the skills and cultural fit, is the only way to compete in a business climate that requires agility, efficiency and, as has been proven in the Covid-19 pandemic many times over, resilience.

While talent acquisition strategies vary, one thing the best employers have in common is a multi-pronged approach. Fattmerchant, for example, utilizes the full gamut of social media platforms to increase exposure and to highlight the company's culture. "We also have a generous referral bonus program and we network within the community, work with schools and within our own communities and get our name out there," says Spelios, who also credits CEO, Suneera Madhani, as an ambassador of Fattmerchant's brand, with attracting talent to the company. "From her social media presence to her podcasts, people who meet her want to work for her. Therefore we have an organic pipeline just through our CEO." Because of its robust growth, Fattmerchant hasn't had to hit pause on hiring; since the pandemic began, it has brought on 25 new employees, "and we're still hiring," says Spelios, who adds that despite the challenges of Covid, "talent remains our top priority."

For timeshare provider Wyndham Destinations, despite being in an industry hit hard by Covid, talent development is still at the forefront, albeit with some additional skills on the list. "The unprecedented events of 2020 enabled us to refine our one-to-five-year outlook for skills and talent," says Kimberly Marshall, chief human



Following its spinoff in as an independent publicly traded timeshare company, Wyndham Destinations chose Orlando for the site of its global headquarters location. "If you were to draw a five-mile radius around my office, you'd hit every major time-share brand in the world," said Michael Brown, CEO of Wyndham Destinations. "You add to that the fact that Orlando is a vibrant, growing community, and has great support from Orange County government. It just made sense."

resources officer. "Essential capabilities include remote working skills for all, and virtual leadership competencies for our leaders of Call Center and Corporate teams." She adds that "change agility as it relates to technology is vital – as are the skills of decision velocity, critical thinking, and problem solving. Digital technology is the essential connector, with its channels for marketing, customer service, communications, recruitment and training. Candidates will need to be adept at working in digital channels. Finally, Inclusion & Diversity will remain central to our focus, as we come back to full operations."

Despite being a company that was able to pivot fairly easily to virtual work, Fattmerchant still looks to recruit the best of the best from around the country to its headquarters in Orlando. "We prefer to have our talent together in Orlando to maintain our unique culture," she says. "It is more challenging to create an amazing company culture when you can't work with your colleagues in person." But she says she hasn't had any trouble convincing candidates to relocate to Orlando, thanks to the emerging technology sector, tourist attractions, vibrant downtown and balmy weather, adding: "I, myself, relocated from Atlanta."

In addition to recruiting from far and wide, companies located in Central Florida utilize partnerships with the numerous universities and community colleges in the area to enhance their pipelines. Wyndham Destinations relocated to Orlando in 2017, partly for that reason. "Here, in one of the world's top tourism destinations, we enjoy a strong partnership with the University of Central Florida's Rosen School of Hospitality Management," says Marshall. "Notably, the school's renowned timeshare program has enabled our leaders to serve as adjunct professors, provide industry and

career development insights, and engage in a number of mentoring programs.”

Students who want to get a better sense of what it would be like on the ground can apply to become a “Wyntern” in a summer internship program designed to offer an immersive experience for college students and recent graduates. “Based upon their interest and field of study, Wynterns are embedded throughout corporate departments, contributing to day-to-day operations,” says Marshall. “The Wyntern experience is further enriched by a day of community service, a summer group project, and direct interaction with senior executives.”

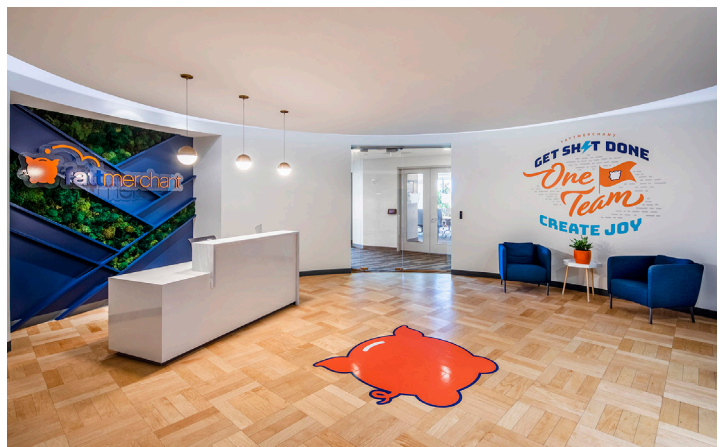
Lockheed Martin’s Missiles and Fire Control division also takes advantage of its Orlando location to tap a pool of 550,000 college students within a 100-mile radius. “Right now, people with skills in engineering and cyber are in such high demand, so attracting them is the really big challenge,” says Monet Nathaniel, vice president of human resources, who estimates she spends about 30 percent of her time just working on the talent pipeline and ensuring that the company maintains an attractive employer brand. In order to give students a chance to experience Lockheed Martin’s culture, the company created the College Work Experience Program, which gives University of Central Florida students a chance to work in various departments across the company.

Another partnership with Valencia Community College’s Advanced Manufacturing Training Center allows Lockheed Martin to provide classroom speakers and to be directly involved with curriculum development. But efforts to reach future talent don’t stop at the college level; partnerships with local K-12 schools have opened the door to earlier education. “We spend quite a bit of time

working with the teacher population to ensure that we’re helping to shape that STEM curriculum as well,” says Nathaniel, who adds that she tries to look at the holistic benefits of school partnership, rather than specific ROI. “People sometimes get limited in who they’re going to engage with, looking for a one-for-one return. But there are intangible benefits around educating and making people aware specifically around the STEM talent.”

One of those is around fixing manufacturing’s PR problem; despite how much of it now involves exciting new technologies such as AI and robotics, the industry still has a stodgy image to overcome. “We’re all kind of battling that,” says Nathaniel, which is why “we’ve been really focusing our efforts on how do we start shaping students at that K through 12 level, helping them understand the fields that they have the opportunity to go into, and making it exciting, using entertainment as a way to really broadcast and market the opportunities.”

One of the best ways to do that has been giving students access to engineers—and vice versa. Lockheed Martin maintains an active corps of employees who volunteer in schools locally and participate in some of the national campaigns, such as E-week, during which engineers visited communities across the country, engaging kids in STEM experiments and projects. “We have a two pronged approach where we want to provide opportunities for our engineers to reach out into the community, but doing that also allows us to educate students in the community.” That’s turned out to be a retention benefit as well, she adds. “We get very positive feedback from our senior employees, existing employees who are given an opportunity to go out and share what they do. So it really is a benefit on both ends.”



To accommodate its hypergrowth, in 2018 Fattmerchant moved into a 3,200-square-foot addition on the sixth floor of the Metcalf Building in downtown Orlando. The space was designed with perks including a walk-and-talk IT setup, massive open-floor plan, break areas, a gaming area and quiet rooms. “The expansion gives employees an additional space to get their work done in an entertaining yet relaxed environment,” says vice president of talent PJ Spelios.

That has been true at Electronic Arts, a leader in digital interactive entertainment, which gives young people—and particularly young women—a chance to interact with software engineers and animation experts to get a better sense of what a career in the field will look like. Three years ago, the company launched “Get in the Game,” a one-week, hands-on, intensive summer camp at its Orlando studio, where high school girls learn what it takes to be a game developer. But, recognizing that reaching a student once isn’t enough, EA’s program makes sure the company maintains its connections with students once they’ve gone off to college—regardless of where in the country they might be studying. Prior years’ students return to the Orlando EA studio for the next level of study, even as a new high school cohort is starting up, which means multiple levels are operating concurrently. “That way we can continue to feed the pipeline with a new cohort every year, and returning students are coming back for what’s next,” says Holt. In year two, for example, the returning group did some job shadowing, and in year three, albeit virtual, students were paired with mentors.

Holt adds that EA has benefited enormously from the Orlando ecosystem. “There’s a great partnership between business, educational leaders and community and government leaders,” he says. “That educational pipeline has been huge for us, and the partnership aspect has been huge, too.” In 2004, the company worked with the University of



Fifteen female coders from Orlando-area high schools showcase their ‘golden tickets’ guaranteeing them an internship interview with Electronic Arts (EA) while pursuing STEAM subjects in college. Daryl Holt, vice president and group chief operating officer of EA SPORTS Worldwide Studios, pictured at far right.

Central Florida and with the city of Orlando to create the Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy, a master’s-level program for video game development. “It’s perennially now the number one or number two in the country,” says Holt, who notes one out of every two college hires is a graduate of that program. “So that’s been a great pipeline for us. And those are really the types of things that happen in Central Florida that create this unique environment that has been so valuable for our growth.”

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