



Case Study:

Labette Community College

When the Admissions Going Got Rough
at this Kansas Community College,
They Got Busy with Live Text Messaging
and Turned the Tide





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The “New Normal”

Even before the global pandemic sent the Labette Community College faculty, staff, and students home in March, the admissions process was already a challenge. Prospective students didn’t always respond to direct mail and emails let alone phone calls. The only thing that really worked was live events.

“Visiting high schools was an important part of my job,” says Brandi Irish, a Career and Technical Education (CTE) recruiter and advisor for Labette Community College in Parsons, Kansas. “It’s a very personal approach; I talk with students about all of the CTE programs at Labette, including the health science programs. When you meet with individual students and classes, you build great relationships. School visits were critical to our admissions funnel.”

Other in-person events like college fairs, on-campus tours, and counseling were also effective at engaging students and securing their enrollment. The college supplemented these efforts with social media, email marketing, and newspaper ads that targeted older students.



When COVID-19 hit, all in-person events were canceled or postponed and the college's staff were instructed to work at home for the remainder of the spring semester. With no idea how to effectively reach prospective students beyond traditional, low response tools like email and paper-based direct mail, Irish began researching ways to improve student engagement during the "new normal" with the full support of her supervisors.

"COVID -19 created a major obstacle to the recruiting process," laments Irish. "How were students going to explore their options? There was a concern we wouldn't be able to maintain our enrollment numbers."

Labette's Search Leads to YouTube - and a Solution

As a stopgap, the Admissions team did what everyone else was doing: they began advising applicants and returning students using Zoom video conferencing. While it got the ball rolling on how to reach students in new ways, it still required phone calls and emails to schedule Zoom-enabled meetings. Reaching older adults, already a challenge in a rural area, became even more difficult.

Looking at other colleges and their processes, Irish discovered some were using automated chatbots in their student recruiting efforts. "I thought it was a pretty cool idea, but didn't have any idea where to begin. After talking with other college marketing directors, I learned they were experiencing the same lack of follow-up with prospective students that we were."

After several weeks and too many Zoom calls with prospective vendors across the country and with the critical fall semester recruiting period



looming, Irish was frustrated. “I just didn’t feel that any of the companies I spoke with were a fit for our school, especially since once of the biggest components that brings students to your school is our customer service,” she says.

One day, while watching interviews on recruiting on YouTube, she stumbled across Indianapolis-based HR recruiting tech company WorkHere.

“Mike Seidle, one of WorkHere’s co-founders, was explaining the customer service benefits of live text messaging for recruiting using their platform. Everything he said made complete sense. Texting is how people communicate these days. We want instant gratification so we open text messages as soon as we hear that ping. I scheduled a phone call with Mike immediately to see what WorkHere could bring to Labette,” Irish says.

It was the first of many conversations that eventually included WorkHere Co-founder and CEO Howard Bates. “If I asked one question, I asked 100. They answered each one graciously,” she says.

The statistics behind SMS recruiting were convincing. What started as an interesting opportunity was fast becoming a must-have:

- 80% of the total population of North America texts
- 98% average open rate for text messages
- 95% of texts are read within 3 minutes
- 90 seconds is the average response time to a text
- 45% respond to branded text messages
- 20% average open rate for email
- 47 – the number of times Americans check their phone each day



Fast Forward to Fall Recruiting

Ultimately, Irish chose WorkHere and the PivotCX platform for two reasons, customer focus and the all-important human factor. “WorkHere was willing to customize our solution and other companies weren’t. Their platform is based on live SMS, which allows for personalized conversations with applicants and students. People spot chatbots right off and get frustrated with automated responses. I shared this with our President’s Council and they agreed.”

With fall classes starting August 17, Labette Community College didn’t have time to waste learning and then activating the PivotCX platform. With the guidance of WorkHere Project Manager Georgia Green, an SMS broadcast campaign was created to reach existing students who had not yet enrolled. Processes addressing the different stages of enrollment—application, admission and enrollment—were established.

The Admissions team created a checklist of common obstacles to enrollment and how to overcome them during a live text conversation. The primary obstacles?

- I don’t have money for tuition.
- I don’t have my transcripts.
- I don’t have my test scores.
- I’m confused. What do I do next?

The goal was to keep students moving through the funnel. No money for tuition? Let’s get you to financial aid. Don’t have your transcripts? Let me help you get them. While the conversations for the broadcast were unscripted, there was a plan in place on how to help each student.



WorkHere set up the platform on both the Admission team's desktops and on their cell phones. Regardless of which they used when chatting with an applicant, the onscreen conversation looked like a normal text conversation. But there was a major difference from a chat one might have with a friend, the PivotCX platform captures and retains every chat so the Admissions team has a record of every conversation and can easily re-start and re-engage applicants.

Three...Two...One...Lift Off!

Labette Community College launched its first SMS broadcast at 1 p.m. on August 5, two weeks before classes started. The admissions team was ready but had no idea how busy they'd be. Using phone numbers in their system, an initial automated text message went out to targeted recipients. The text message was simple:

"Hi First Name, this is Labette Community College. Are you interested in enrolling this fall? If yes, please reply to this message."

If the person responded, they instantly got this message:

"Great! Would you like to meet virtually or schedule an in-person advisory appointment?"

Within minutes, text responses began coming and kept coming for the rest of the afternoon. Says Irish, "We were immediately busy texting, crazy busy, good busy for two hours. The team would go through their checklist with applicants—placement scores, transcripts, tuition—and either got answers on the spot or an actionable next step.



The final engagement rate with prospective students was 35 percent. “The response was huge! Howard Bates of WorkHere said we crushed it. And we did,” Irish says.

“The immediacy of the response to our text broadcast blew us away. People who wouldn’t respond to emails or calls texted us. Things that would have taken us days or weeks to resolve in the past were handled in real-time. There is no question this is a game-changer for us.”

A week after the initial SMS broadcast, Irish scheduled a second broadcast to those who didn’t respond to the first go-round. The college got more responses. Applicants who may have dropped off the radar screen back in the email days, were re-engaged and enrolled with live text. While final enrollment numbers were not available when this was written, Labette Community College welcomed a robust class to its fall semester.

“What’s exciting is this is just the tip of the iceberg of what we’re getting into with Pivot CX. We are changing direction on how we engage with students. This brings us into their world” Irish says.

Looking ahead to the Spring 2021 semester, the Admissions team and WorkHere are already creating Phase II. Whereas Phase I was not scripted, Phase II will have more standard scripts and handoffs based on the data collected during the initial broadcast campaign. The college also plans to add a chat widget to the home page of their website to spark immediate conversations. A third phase is planned to involve integrating with the college’s marketing and advertising.

In the future, WorkHere will offer the option of tagging applicants to identify where they are in the workflow—pending transcripts, appointment scheduled, a degree program for example—to assist in



re-engagement efforts and future campaigns. This will give college admissions departments even greater control of and insights into applicant engagement, conversations, and securing desired actions.

In late August, Irish presented the results of the initial SMS broadcast to the President's Council and the response was overwhelmingly positive.

Tammy Fuentez, Vice President of Student Affairs, said, "The live text platform helped Labette Community College reach students who had not responded to emails regarding enrollment. The one-on-one attention from WorkHere has made the implementation of our live text platform painless and we look forward to moving to the second phase of the program."

Added Theresa Hundley, Dean of Enrollment Management, "I've seen what WorkHere's live text platform has done to help with enrollment in the Admissions Office. I'm excited to see what it has to offer other areas of the college. This is a great tool to connect with students."

When Disruption Fuels Innovation

As potentially damaging as the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown have been, the disruption created the opportunity for Labette Community College to step outside of its comfort zone and adopt more dynamic ways to engage and recruit students.

"If we were going to overcome the COVID-19 lockdown, we had to get creative," Irish says. "Thankfully, we found WorkHere. They have been amazing throughout the entire process and become part of the Labette family. Live text has made things so much simpler and effective."



Learn more about PivotCX and texting for Higher Education Institutions at workhere.com/enrollment-marketing/