Brilliant

How HubSpot automated reference checks and saved 18,000 hours a year.





HubSpot's smarter reference checks.

When HubSpot went remote-first in 2021, candidate verification suddenly went from a formality to a necessity. And they needed a way to do it at scale. The answer was automated, structured reference checks that generate real candidate insights, without any of the time-consuming tedium.

Once in-person interviewing disappeared and candidate volume kept climbing, that approach stopped being merely inefficient. It became a liability.

HubSpot needed a way to standardize a process that had never really been standardized, track it for compliance, and get it off recruiters' plates entirely, without losing the human judgment that makes a reference check worth doing. Years later, that fix has grown into something bigger: a documented, audit-ready process that's become one piece of HubSpot's broader approach to fraud prevention.

Who is HubSpot

HubSpot is one of the most well-known and ubiquitous names in tech, building the CRM and marketing software platform that powers customer relationship management for businesses of all sizes. Like a lot of tech companies, its hiring reach spans multiple countries, with recruiting and talent acquisition operations teams supporting hiring managers across a wide range of business functions and seniority levels, from entry-level roles to leadership.

Giovanni Villafane joined HubSpot as a recruiting coordinator not long after the company shifted to remote-first hiring, and was one of the first members of what would become its recruiting operations team. Now a Talent Acquisition Operations Partner, Giovanni and his team focus on driving meaningful outcomes through the optimization of their tech stack, including the reference-checking program at the center of this story.

The challenge.

The challenge.

Automating a traditionally manual, time-consuming process at scale.

Before 2021, reference checks at HubSpot were a manual, phone-based process, handled differently by whichever hiring manager happened to be running it. That inconsistency was tolerable when interviewing was still partly in-person and volume was manageable. Once HubSpot went fully remote and application volume climbed, it wasn't.

"Having manual phone calls was not sustainable anymore," said Giovanni. "It was a very inconsistent experience, adding a lot of friction at the end of the interview experience."

Beyond the inconsistency, there was no reliable paper trail. Hiring managers around the world were running an unstandardized process with no documentation to fall back on if a decision was ever questioned. HubSpot needed a way to automate reference checks, track the data consistently for compliance purposes, and free up recruiter and hiring manager time for the parts of the job that actually required human judgment.



“Having manual phone calls was not sustainable anymore”



Giovanni Villafane
Senior Talent Acquisition Operations Specialist, HubSpot



Discovery

A tool that slotted cleanly into to the Greenhouse ecosystem.

When HubSpot went looking for a solution, the deciding factor was how cleanly the tool fit into the systems recruiters already used every day.

"The integration and the data were paramount," Giovanni said, pointing to the relationship with Greenhouse, HubSpot's applicant tracking system. Recruiters could send reference check requests, receive completed reports, and review everything without ever leaving Greenhouse. "Having one less tool the recruiters have to check was one of the main priorities."

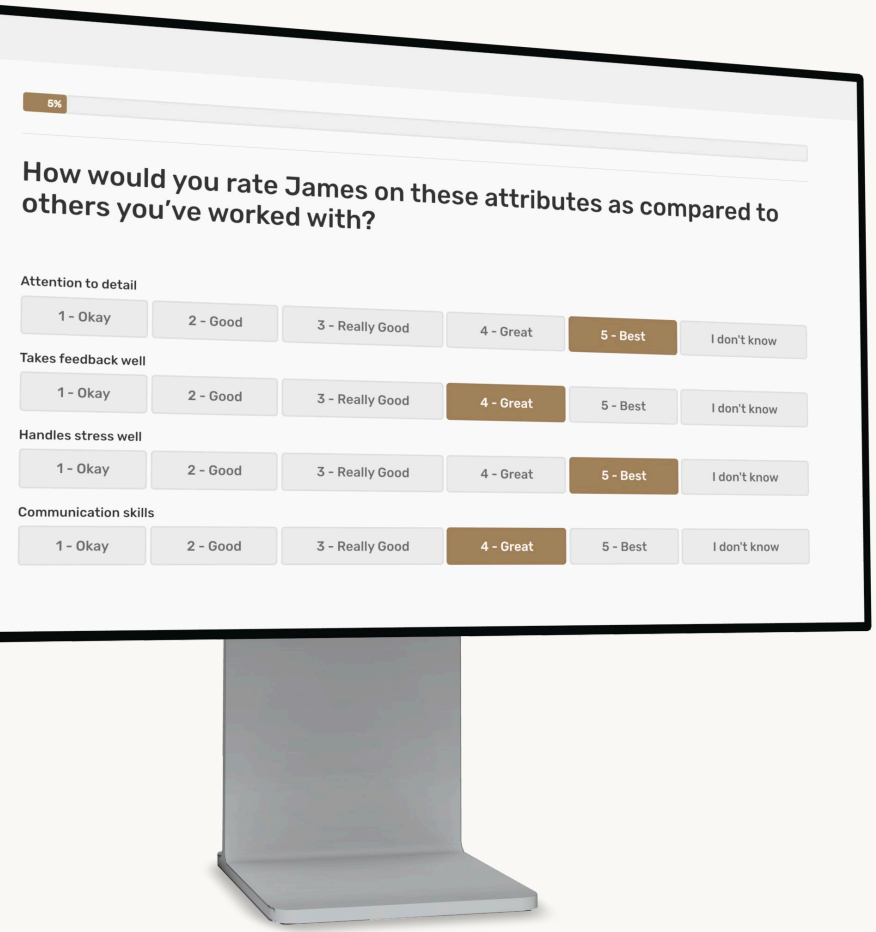
That single point of friction removed made the rollout easier than most new tool adoptions tend to be. Giovanni wasn't part of the original implementation, but the internal documentation and recruiter feedback told a consistent story.

"When we told our recruiters that you have to do one less manual thing and you can automate it, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive," Giovanni said. "They were like, ‘let's do it, let’s implement it.’"

greenhouse

The solution.

The solution.



Quick, easy, automated — and robust enough to actually gather real insight.

HubSpot rolled out the tool carefully, starting in the U.S. for specific roles in 2021 before expanding it globally two years later. Today, the coverage rules differ by role and region; they're required for most candidates, from interns to members of the leadership team.

Candidate experience was a deliberate design consideration, not an afterthought. Giovanni pointed to the platform's self-assessment feature, which lets candidates share their own perspective alongside the references they submit, and a candidate-facing dashboard that lets them swap out a reference directly if something falls through, without looping a recruiter back in.

Recruiters, meanwhile, describe it in almost mundane terms, which Giovanni treats as the highest compliment a background operations tool can get.

"It's a tool that just works," Giovanni said. "Set it and forget it. They know it's there, they know it does its job correctly."

With one click from inside Greenhouse, the request, template, and candidate instructions go out automatically, freeing recruiters to focus on preparing offers, personalizing the candidate experience at this critical stage, and moving candidates forward instead of chasing down a manual, admin-heavy task.

The compliance benefits Giovanni's team originally set out to solve have also fully materialized. Every reference check is now documented, giving HubSpot's audit team an instant paper trail whenever they need one.

"Whenever they need it, even if it's a surprise audit check, we can quickly pull that reporting, and we can show them that we have been compliant with all of the references," Villafane said.

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The results.

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Thousands of recruiting hours saved per year, and a more validated candidate pool.

The clearest, most quantifiable win has been time. Over the past year, HubSpot completed roughly 1,200 reference checks, each of which used to take a hiring manager about 15 minutes to run manually by phone. Multiplied out, that's somewhere in the neighborhood of 18,000 hours of hiring manager time given back annually.

Beyond time savings, the tool has become a meaningful piece of HubSpot's fraud-prevention strategy, an area Villafane says is one of the team's top priorities as AI reshapes what candidate fraud can look like. The platform flags discrepancies automatically, like references submitted from the same computer or IP address, giving HubSpot's team a starting point to investigate further.

"That actually has led us to create that holistic approach on fraud prevention, which is one of our main priorities," Villafane said. "It has helped us ensure that we are hiring the right candidate."

A newer feature, LinkedIn verification for references, adds another layer of confidence, confirming that a listed reference actually worked at the company and during the time period the candidate described. Combined with identity verification ahead of offers and additional checks throughout the interview process, reference checking is now one piece of a broader system HubSpot has built to protect the integrity of its hiring pipeline, rather than a standalone compliance box to check.

18,000

hours saved.

The bottom line

An intentional way to fight fraud and generate signal at scale.

What started as a fix for an unsustainable, inconsistent manual process has grown into a documented, audit-ready system that touches nearly every hire HubSpot makes worldwide. Roughly 1,200 reference checks a year, each one saving about 15 minutes of hiring manager time, add up to a meaningful amount of time returned to the people actually responsible for finding great candidates.

But the bigger shift has been in what the tool has come to represent. It started as a compliance fix and became a foundation for something more strategic: a fraud-prevention system built to keep pace with an AI-driven world, without losing sight of the fact that hiring decisions still belong to people.

As HubSpot keeps expanding what it asks of the platform, that balance, automation in service of better human decisions, remains the throughline.

Smarter hiring intelligence.

