

A billion reasons for holiday parks pairing

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EXPANDING: Top Parks chairman Richard Emerson, left, with Discovery CEO Grant Wilckens. Picture: RUSSELL MILLARD/AAP

AN Adelaide-headquartered holiday parks company is set to become a \$1 billion concern within the next two years following a \$25 million takeover powered by heavy investment in new technology.

Discovery Parks has joined forces with the national Top Parks holiday group to create a network of 235 parks across Australia fuelled by a loyalty base of 140,000 camping enthusiasts.

"We are buying the brand. We own the licence, Top Parks will be a licensee," said Discovery founder and chief executive Grant Wilckens.

Both the Discovery Parks and Top Parks brands will be retained, allowing for differentiation between the companyowned and licensed parks.

A recent \$5.5 million investment in cutting edge technology has been pivotal to Discovery's 14 per cent revenue growth last year – against a five per cent industry downturn – and will help secure its future, Mr Wilckens said.

"The market was covered by mum and dad investors previously," he said. "We have invested in staff and facilities and technology. We think of ourselves as the Airbnb of holiday parks. We will be a \$1 billion company by 2020."

The new liaison will provide the licensed parks with access to Discovery Parks' greater purchasing power as Australia's largest park owner-operator, as well as its digital marketing expertise, Mr Wilckens said.

Discovery and Top Parks members will also have access to a new customer rewards program – G'Day Rewards – to be launched today at the Adelaide Caravan and Camping Show at Wayville Showgrounds.

"Both brands will (still) exist, but the reality is that we have created a new brand, the G'Day brand," Mr Wilckens said. "It's really about a partnership, G'Day is a neutral brand to benefit the customer.

"We don't control Top Parks, we control their brand and distribution from a technology perspective, it's really about partnerships."

The G'Day loyalty program is a combination of both brand's rewards program, Mr Wilckens said, with hundreds of retail partners, including Pizza Hut and The Good Guys, on board.

"You might not think about holiday parks as innovative digital service providers, but that's where Discovery Parks is heading," he said. "We're investing significantly to provide a better customer experience."

Top Parks chairman Richard Emerson said the deal would position Top Parks members for strong growth, with clear culture and customer synergies. "It will create a leading market industry member group that can deliver great benefits to park owners and our customers," he said.

The two companies have been working on the deal for the past 10 months, with an unconditional settlement set for February 28.

Discovery is more than 90 per cent owned by Brisbane behemoth Sunsuper (with \$50 billion funds under investment), which sealed its majority shareholding four years ago when the company was valued at about \$240 million.

Today's deal will generate 30 (most technology) jobs. Mr Wilckens hopes to raise his SA workforce of 170 to about 400 within the next few years.