

There comes a time in the career of many professionals when the most likely source of alternative career options is via a headhunter. So, if your next role is in the hands of search firm, how do you go about catching their attention?

1. Boost your visibility

One of the most effective ways of being recognised and identified as a talent is to participate actively in dialogue within your field/industry. Speaking at industry events or conferences, having articles published or being quoted in relevant articles will all increase your visibility.

2. Be recognised for your success

It might sound obvious but the more successful you are, the more likely it is that you'll be approached by a search firm. People who stand out are easier to find. Unfortunately, viewing yourself as successful is not quite enough. What matters is what other people think of you. Your colleagues, your former colleagues, your competitors. Are there enough people out there who will recommend you and suggest your name if they are asked their opinion?

3. Be recognised as an expert

Although the cultural fit between an individual and a potential employer will be a crucial element of the recruitment decision, most search consultants will be seeking individuals with specific skills and experience. If you're acknowledged as being an expert or specialist, you have a greater chance of being identified.

4. Network consistently

Many people talk about networking, fewer actually do anything about it. Networking effectively amongst your peer group and across your industry is a powerful way to increase your chances of being noticed. Make an effort to stay in touch with talented and well-connected colleagues and reach out to other people who you know are figureheads within your marketplace.

5. Invest in your network for the long term

The most successful networkers invest in their professional relationships consistently and over the long term. This type of behaviour is far more genuine and more likely to reward you than the 'suddenly enthusiastic' networking that people often end up trying when they need a job.

6. Social networking

LinkedIn, other social networking sites and search engines have changed some elements of the executive search process. Whilst the traditional 'black book' approach remains valid, most researchers will also use a plethora of online tools as part of their 'long-list' building process. As a result, it is advisable to build yourself a compelling social media presence profile.

Ensure also, that any of your articles, industry comments and/or PR is visible online. Over-exposure is not advisable but some visible presence online will lead to more executive search specialists finding you more often.

7. Executive search vs. executive recruitment

Executive recruitment consultants, the people who helped you earlier in your career, tend to work on a relatively high volume of roles and rely on a database of candidates, advertising and networking to 'fill jobs'. This type of recruiter is easier to contact and engage with, as they may be trying to build a large and varied talent pool and they will be happy for you to be part of their database until they have something suitable to present to you.

8. Don't call us, we'll call you

Genuine executive search campaigns are intended to find the best possible talent for a specific role and then persuade the most appropriate individuals to consider the role. Whether or not an individual is actively seeking to change jobs is normally irrelevant! The norm is for the consultant/researcher to call you and this partly explains why you might not find it easy to get in touch with them.

Most executive search professionals are specialists, so if you are highly relevant to their expertise, they are likely to be happy to talk to you and or meet you. If you are not of direct relevance to them and/or they are not handling a suitable mandate, you may find that they politely explain that they will struggle to meet you.

9. Use a search firm for your own recruitment

One of the easiest ways of developing a relationship with an executive search firm is to use them to recruit for you. The strongest professional relationships are often those that are truly beneficial to both parties. If you have discovered a search firm relevant for your own career development, contact them when you are hiring. They will take your call then! If you are known to that firm they may well contact you again on a future search.

Conflicts of interest and 'off limits' protocols are taken very seriously by professional search firms and this does limit some of the effectiveness of this approach. Nevertheless, if you are keen to invest in long term relationships, this approach is often successful.

10. Are you a client or a candidate?

For most people, the answer to this question is both, but not always at the same time. Executive search consultants frequently end up placing people that they have met as clients and also work for clients they first meet as candidates. It is worth remembering that a talented recruiter may well be able to help your career as well as helping you find talent for your organisation.

If, in the past, you had decided not to take a call from a recruiter in case they were looking for business, they might not take your call when you are looking for a job! The same is true in reverse, of course, so the best advice for all of us is to take the time to communicate with each other.

Take a long-term approach to building strong, mutually-beneficial relationships with colleagues and key recruiters. Try to be visible and ensure that your key skills and achievements are in the public domain.