

Recruiters in 2007

*What lies ahead for headhunters
and executive search firms*



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Executive Summary:

This was an "informal" survey of recruiters and headhunters who are members of *The Online Recruiters Directory* to determine the state of the recruiting industry today as seen by recruiters. The questions were open-ended, and as such this represents a qualitative review rather than a data-driven study.

Roughly 200 recruiters were asked for their views, with a roughly 10% response rate. Many of the responses were thoughtful and detailed. The report that follows is designed to give insight into where the recruiting sector is headed.

QUESTION #1

As a recruiter, what would you say was the biggest challenge you faced in 2006?

We began by asking about the challenges of the past year – 2006. Recruiters faced many challenges, including stiff competition amongst themselves and with the Internet, as well as predictable challenges of clients not paying, moving too slowly, failing to understand the process and the usual business issues.

One challenge stood out from the rest, with over half of recruiters highlighting it as the single biggest challenge of 2006 – finding qualified candidates. The IT sector was specifically mentioned, but it is clear that recruiters saw a candidate's market in 2006. This was best expressed by the following comment:

"For me the market really turned to a candidate driven market, and employers were faced with greater demands from a hiring perspective. I saw many situations where the candidates had several offers, and could be highly selective in their next position. Employers were found evaluating compensation, benefits, and perks."

QUESTION #2

What challenges do you anticipate in the industry in 2007?

We then turned the question around to see if recruiters anticipated changes in the recruiter industry landscape for 2007. Not surprisingly, predictions were much wider when predicting the future than when assessing the past.

Some recruiters expect 2007 to see a tightening of the candidate market, and are expecting challenges such as companies being able to provide more than just a competitive salary. In such a market, concerns over unethical competition and lower headhunter fees remain high.

Some of those who saw a very candidate driven market in 2006 are expecting to see more opportunities, whereas those who had not experienced the tight candidate market in 2006 are expecting to feel it in 2007.

But the major expectation is that available positions will outnumber qualified candidates, as expressed by one recruiter:

"I have more job orders than candidates AND it seems when trying to recruit a senior engineer, it turns around into a new client with a job order."

QUESTION #3

What do you expect to be your top tool to find prospective candidates in 2007?

Next we asked about the tools that recruiters would use to find candidates in a world with increasingly splintered communication and segmented networking venues.

A wide variety of tools are being used, and most recruiters are likely using several of them. The top tools mentioned were:

1. Internet research and/or advertising
2. Telephone and/or cold calling
3. Referrals
4. Headhunting (by phone or in person)
5. Referrals
6. Networking
7. Special databases

QUESTION #4

What do you expect to be your top tool to find prospective employers in 2007?

Of course, we wanted to find out how recruiters plan to find potential employers in 2007, although the responses to questions #1 and #2 indicate that they will be spending a lot less time, if any, at this task.

Nevertheless, recruiters did share mention the following top tools:

1. Internet
2. Telephone
3. Special databases
4. Referrals
5. None – employers come to them
6. Existing clients
7. Placing Ads
8. Networking

The Internet appears to play a bigger role in attracting potential employers than in attracting potential candidates. In the words of one recruiter:

"That's the real value in monster.com, careerbuilder etc."

QUESTION #5

If a typical employer asked you, "What one thing can I do better to benefit more from your services?" what would you answer?

We also wanted to know, from a recruiter's perspective, what an employer could do to be a better client, to benefit more from the recruiter's services.

This might be the most important section of the report, as it responds to the issues in questions #1 and #2. If this is a candidate's market, employers need every edge they can get, and one edge they appear to need more of is in communications. To quote two separate and curt recruiter responses:

"Be more responsive."

Amongst the more detailed responses, recruiters identified two areas where employers are not being responsive enough. The top concern is that employers do not provide fast or complete enough (or any?) feedback about candidates, making it difficult to assess additional candidates to the employer's satisfaction.

A secondary concern, mentioned by several recruiters, is that employers do not always give adequate descriptions of the position or the desired candidate from the start.

Quicker decisions and more flexibility (hours, tools, virtual office, etc.) were also cited as ways that employers can avoid losing out on prospective candidates before they choose another employer.

QUESTION #6

Which sector(s) do you see heating up the most in 2007?

Who's hot? Who's not? That's what we wanted to know for 2007. The hot recruitment market for 2007 is expected to be healthcare, especially nursing and pharmaceuticals, as well as many specialties such as therapists of various types.

Several recruiters also mentioned IT and technology as areas they expect to see heating up through 2007, reflecting that technology is at the base of an increasing number of other sectors.

Some other sectors that were mentioned at recruiting hot spots for 2007...

- Everything
- Marketing.
- Green technology
- The sciences in general
- Construction
- International recruitment

QUESTION #7

Which sector(s) do you see cooling down the most in 2007?

Who's not hot? The responses to this came as a bit of surprise. The top area that recruiters see cooling down in 2007 is IT and related technology – one of the top picks for heating up in 2007. It seems that recruiters are divided over whether this is a growth sector or a restricting job market.

Three other areas that recruiters singled out as most likely to slow down in 2007...

- None (they'll all stay hot)
- Manufacturing
- Finance

QUESTION #8

What will you be looking for most from job candidates overall in 2007?

To get into the minds of recruiters, we asked them what qualities or characteristics they plan to look for in candidates in 2007.

No question brought out as varied a response as this one. Skills remains a top concern (multiple skills, presentation skills, soft skills) and so does tenure and stability, or at least a good progressive career path.

Also mentioned were...

- Flexibility to travel
- Honesty about one's level of interest in a position
- Willingness to learn
- Best fit for position
- 3-5 year production record
- Motivation
- Verifiable references

With this set of criteria in mind, people should be able to plan ahead for their next career move, compensating for areas of weakness and highlighting in their resumes areas of strength from what the recruiters are saying is important.

QUESTION #8

What will you be looking for most from employers overall in 2007?

Once again to get into the minds of recruiters, we asked them what qualities or characteristics they plan to look for in employer clients in 2007.

There was much more consensus on what they would be looking for in employers than there was for candidates: better communications. This should come as no surprise, given the strong advice recruiters gave employers to "be more responsive" when answering question #5.

Related to communication, several recruiters will be looking for better articulated "job orders" so as to work on less frustrating accounts.

Recruiters will also be looking for more attractive job offers, both monetary and intangible, to lure the undersupply of qualified candidates, and better fees for the extra work they have to do to find such candidates in short supply.

Some recruiters will also be looking for honesty and exclusivity in their relationships, frustrated by doing legwork for employers who look elsewhere for candidates.

Also mentioned were...

- Flexibility to

With this set of criteria in mind, people should be able to plan ahead for their next career move, compensating for areas of weakness and highlighting in their resumes areas of strength from what the recruiters are saying is important.

Concluding Comments:

The recruiters who voluntarily responded to this survey are to be thanked for shedding some light on where the industry is heading in 2007.

For other recruiters, this is a helpful marker of where the industry is at and where it is headed.

For job candidates, this report provides insight into what they can do to prepare for their next career change.

Most importantly, this report provides invaluable advice on how employers can better compete for scarce qualified candidates for their most important executive and professional positions.

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