

HOW TO FIND AND MAKE THE MOST OF A RECRUITER OR HEADHUNTER

You probably know someone who knows someone who landed a great gig by working with a recruiting agency or professional headhunter.

Maybe you've picked up the phone to a recruiter's call for a reference on one of your former employees or coworkers. Maybe you've considered applying to a job listing through a recruiting agency. But at the end of the day, do you actually know what a recruiting agency is, let alone how to best take advantage of one?

Honestly, we weren't so sure either. It's a complex and foreign world of negotiation, phone screens, and email blasts so it's natural if you feel like avoiding recruiters entirely, but this is also your career on the line. We set out to find out exactly how to use (and make the most of) an all-too-often underutilized resource.

What is a headhunter?

Headhunters are recruiters for hire. Often they work for an outside agency and are hired by companies (usually the big guys) to find them talent ASAP. The keyword here is "ASAP" — which is exactly why job searchers often have a negative impression of them. They get paid faster if they make a hire faster, which means they might drop in, ask for your resume, and then professionally ghost you if you're not the right fit.

Still, there's a benefit to talking to them. For you, working with a headhunter can be a great opportunity because they bring you positions, cutting down on your time spent job hunting. And if you're ultimately hired for one, the company pays the recruiter's fees, not you. These for-hire headhunters often also have access to positions that aren't posted to the usual job boards, meaning you could beat out the competition early if you are the right person for the job.

What is a recruiter (and what's the difference between recruiters and headhunters?)

Recruitment agencies — or individual recruiters — are essentially intermediaries between you and potential employers slash hiring managers.

Recruiters might work for a firm that's hired by companies to help them fill open positions or (maybe more often) they might work in-house for a single company. Because of this, there are a few positive elements: they know the company better than a headhunter would, and they're also interested in finding candidates who fit with the company culture — which they know well since they're a part of it.

Still, for the sake of how thorough this article is, here are the three types you'll most likely encounter:

Corporate Recruiters

These are in-house recruiters who are tasked with finding talent for the company where they work, and they're everywhere. Facebook has a whole team of them. Our founder, Lauren McGoodwin, used to work as a corporate recruiter at Hulu. Some recruitment teams even have their own Instagram accounts.

Typically, these recruiters will contact you — often through your LinkedIn profile, so make sure it's optimized — but you can also reach out directly to a recruiter about a specific position you find on a Careers page or to request an informational interview.

If you want to get deep into the corporate recruiting process, our friends at The Muse have some in-depth tips for working with one.

Contingency Recruiters

Okay, so this is a bit of a trick. “Contingency recruiter” is another word for headhunter, i.e. an independent professional who doesn't work for a specific company but is hired by various teams to find the best talent. They're compensated only if and when they find a candidate to fill the role. Just make sure you pick the right agency to work with — but more on that later in our section, “How To Find The Right One.”

Freelance Recruiters

Less common than the other two, but worth considering if you're trying to make a living by working for yourself. Freelance recruiters can put you in touch with clients who need contract work. This is especially common in the design and web development industries. In the interest of brevity, we won't go too much into this type of recruiting, but here's a great resource if you're freelancing.

Why (or when) should you use a recruiter?

You're Looking in a Specific Industry

There are some definite advantages to using a recruiter or agency, especially if you're in certain industries. Many companies in the fashion and beauty industries work exclusively with recruiters to hire new talent. The same goes for many web design, development, and technology jobs.

You Don't Have a Strong Personal Network (or Just Want to Better Your Odds)

Often, recruiters have contacts at the places you're applying (or in the case of corporate recruiters, they're actually working for the company already) so chances are they can bump your resume to the top of the pile if they like your style.

You Want to Leave It to the Experts

Consider this too: a recruiter's blessed with the stellar ability to sell you. It's their job. We're not always our best representatives during a job search (consider any interview you ever botched, and you'll see what we mean), but it's in the recruiter's best interest to get you the optimal gig, and they do it with great form and style.

You're Moving to a Strange City or New Industry

Then there's the advantage of someone knowing the environment and competition. While I bounced ideas for this article off a close friend, who works in fashion as a Creative Director, she pointed out that

it was in her best interest to go through a recruiter when she decided to move from the East to West Coast. “I had no idea what companies were working out of Los Angeles beyond two or three big names, and I didn’t know many people in my industry working out here,” she explained, “but my recruiter gave me all sorts of insight about my options, in addition to setting up some interviews. Then I started combing through LinkedIn.”

Still not sure whether you need one? Watch this in-depth discussion with Lisa Hall, a partner at VonChurch Recruiting to determine whether a recruiter is a good option for you.
How to find a recruiter or headhunter for your hiring needs

How to Contact a Recruiter

Sometimes you know exactly which company you want to work for (some of us are just meant to work at Github or Everlane, you know?). If you’re after the environment and work style more than the job title or salary, you’re probably primed for reaching out to a corporate recruiter who works in-house at your dream company. Consider optimizing your LinkedIn profile for, and reaching out to, a company’s recruiting team via a carefully crafted cold email or LinkedIn message. If you have a few companies in mind, reach out to each of their recruiters as you see fit.

Credit: <https://www.theladders.com>