

How to get yourself headhunted

Executives looking to change jobs need to build long-term relationships with consultants, writes Timothy Barber

PEOPLE in the City are beginning to shift their feet. After sitting tight in their jobs throughout the downturn, workers are sniffing out new roles in increasing numbers, according to figures from recruitment firm Morgan McKinley – it said yesterday that the numbers of those looking for a new position in October were up six per cent compared to September.

If you're an executive looking to move jobs, you'll need to get yourself on the radar of the City's headhunting firms. And you have to be proactive – the days of waiting for consultants to beat down your door are long gone. In a market that's more competitive than ever, you need to take all the extra steps you can, from networking to blogging, to put yourself first in line when positions need to be filled. We look at the do's and don'ts of getting yourself headhunted.

Right, if you market yourself, consultants will find you.

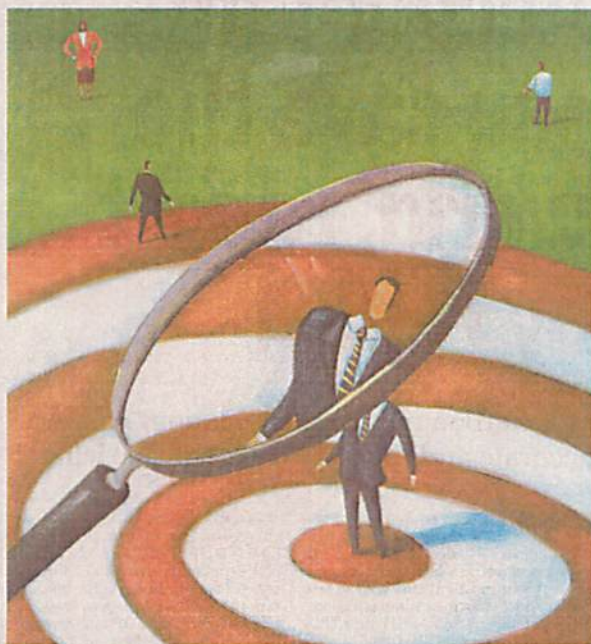
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DO: BE VISIBLE

After headhunting consultants receive briefs from their clients, they engage a team of researchers to create a long list of key candidates. To get onto such lists, you need to market yourself. "People think in terms of PR for their companies but not for themselves," says Helen Pitcher, chairman of executive talent advisory IDDAS. "You have to make sure your brand is out there in the places researchers will be looking." For senior executives, appearances in the press and wider media will cement your reputation and get your name into Google – the first place researchers look. Sector journals and conferences are other areas in which to increase your profile.

DO: GO ONLINE

Cropping up in Google is one thing, but you need to maintain an active online profile too. A blog is one option, while Linda Jackson of outplacement firm Fairplace recommends creating a profile on business networking site LinkedIn, which has become a huge force in the search process. "You can go into a lot of detail, showing the things you're responsible for, areas



you've worked in, projects you've managed. You can also see who has been looking at your profile – if it's a headhunting firm, get in touch."

DO: BE A GOOD NETWORKER

Headhunting consultants will be in regular contact with key senior figures in your industry, and you need to make sure they are aware of you and recommend you. Attend as many industry events like conferences and dinners as you can, including those hosted by headhunters themselves, and maintain membership of a professional organisation. "You have to be politically astute and good at building alliances," says Jackson.

DO: BE A HELPFUL SOURCE

You need to develop trusting, long-term relationships with headhunters, and one way to earn their respect is being a useful source for their research. "If a researcher calls you, be helpful – you'll be tagged on their database as a good contact and be the first to hear about anything good," says John Purkiss, managing director of recruiter Purkiss & Company and co-author of the book *How to be Headhunted*.

DO: CREATE A SEPARATE CV

When applying for a job directly your CV should be concise and focused towards that job. Headhunters want something different. John Purkiss says that since search consultants will be looking to create a six to eight page appraisal for each candidate that can be sent to the client, they need more details. "You need a one page summary, followed by three or four pages of detail, including why you left previous employers, everything you did – it's like a detailed house survey, rather than something to impress an interviewer."

DON'T: LEAVE IT TOO LATE

This is a long game. As you progress up the career ladder, develop relationships with several consultants you get on with

who will continue talking to you when they move firms. Don't suddenly start approaching them when you want a new job. "If people only start turning up when they want to move, headhunters will spot that a mile off," says Helen Pitcher. "You need to develop proper relationships, rather than just popping up on the radar at that particular moment."

DON'T: BOMBARD WITH CALLS

Remember the consultant is retained by a corporate client to search for the best candidates for a position – they are not an employment agency for candidates. You may think you're showing willing and get-up-and-go, but showering a headhunter with phone calls and emails is not going to make them want to talk to you. "If you approach them speculatively don't get miffed if they don't call you back," Pitcher says. "Remain respectful with the researchers or receptionist you speak to, and the consultant will be more likely to be in touch when they have a good slot."

DON'T: BE UNRELIABLE

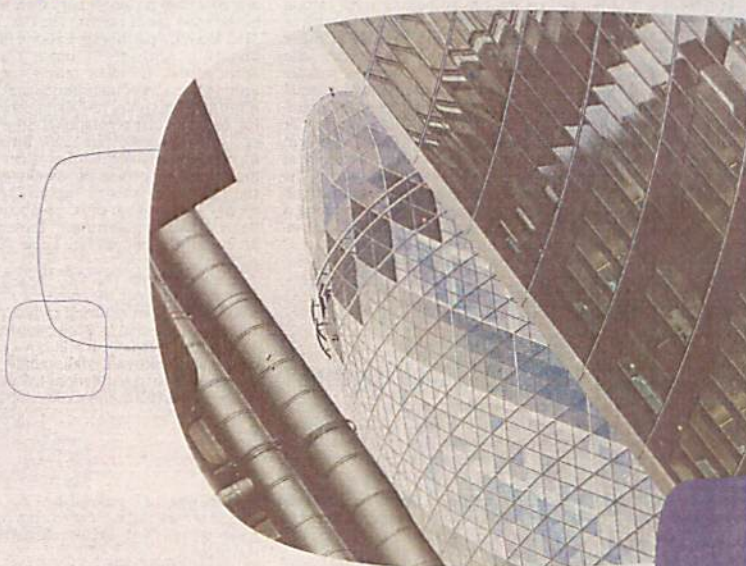
Executive search firms are dependent upon their reputations for filling positions with the right people. If you don't want to ruin your own standing with headhunters irreparably, be absolutely upfront and consistent about whether you want a job they put you forward for. "If you end up on a shortlist and then withdraw, their reputation will be damaged," says Pitcher.

DON'T: ALIENATE THEM

Even if you're dying for a change of job, beware of seeming overly desperate when you meet with the headhunter. "Don't behave like a supplicant," says John Purkiss. "The best candidates treat headhunters and clients as equals, with whom they're exploring the possibilities for an alliance." Purkiss says City people also have a tendency to be a little too deal-orientated in meetings. "Don't try and be transactional – the relationship you're building may produce nothing for a while but should go on for years."



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