

# Headhunting: What is it and how does it work?

You're checking your socials and you have a message request from a person you don't know. They say they like the look of your skill set and want to know if you're open to work opportunities. Congratulations, you've just been headhunted!

If you've ever been contacted about a job you didn't apply for, it's likely the person contacting you is a headhunter. Headhunting is a type of recruitment process where the hirer or recruiter actively seeks out suitable applicants based on their skills and knowledge. It's often used for senior or specialised roles, so if you have some [unique or in-demand skills](#), you may hear from headhunters from time to time.

But how do you know if the headhunter is legitimate? Learn more about headhunting and what's involved, so you know what to expect and whether to respond to their outreach.

## What is headhunting?

Headhunting is a style of recruitment where highly skilled or specialised people are 'hunted' or 'poached' for a specific position. It involves a recruiter personally approaching potential candidates who have all the desired qualifications, expertise and experience. The person they reach out to may not even be looking for a new job – some of the time they're even employed by a competitor. Companies may have an internal headhunter if they often hire for specialised roles or don't want to publically advertise their vacant positions. Big organisations may also hire an outside headhunter for one-off or less frequent job openings.

Headhunting – or proactive recruitment – is often used for more senior-level and specialised roles. It's common in the technology, finance, healthcare, creative, engineering and legal sectors, especially where the role calls for unique skills. Headhunting is also used when companies are hiring for a role they want to keep confidential for strategic business purposes.

## **What is the difference between headhunting and recruiting?**

[Headhunting and recruitment](#) are two different ways to get new employees.

Headhunting is proactive – people are approached by the employer or headhunter.

[Recruiting is broader](#), more passive, and often relies solely on candidates applying for a publically advertised role.

[Companies often use recruiters](#) for roles where they can expect a high volume of applicants. Recruiters post job ads inviting applications, vet the applications and do the first round of interviews before shortlisting applicants for the hiring company. On the other hand, headhunters actively look for people, then directly contact them to see if they're suitable for an interview.

## **How does headhunting work?**

Headhunters typically work with the [human resources manager](#) or hiring manager of a company to find the ideal people for a role. They help by:

- Finding and contacting people [on social media sites](#) and at networking events
- Tapping into their wide networks of professional relationships across industries
- Interviewing and meeting potential candidates to assess their suitability for the role, looking at qualifications, motivations and career goals

Once the headhunter has who they believe is a suitable [candidate](#), they will arrange meetings between the company and the potential employee. They can then go on to help negotiate the employment contract.

## **Headhunting strategies**

Headhunters will use many avenues to find the right people for their clients. They will start with social media and [professional networking platforms](#) to look for professionals

with relevant experience.

If they can't find the talent they're looking for online, they'll attend [industry networking events](#) to meet more people and expand their professional circle. Poaching senior-level staff or those with specialised skills is common practice in many competitive industries, such as sales, marketing and tech. Networking events can also help headhunters get referrals for potential candidates from other professionals or headhunters.

## What to do if you're headhunted

If you are headhunted, there are a few things you should do to ensure the role is legitimate and right for you. Steps to take [if you're headhunted](#) include:

- Research the headhunter and their agency to make sure they're legitimate. Verify their identity by contacting their agency by phone.
- Research the role and opportunity, including the company and its culture.
- Compile any questions you have about the role, company and how the opportunity benefits you.
- Carefully consider the offer and if it's worthwhile leaving your current position.
- Be open to communication and negotiation. Even if the role isn't right for you now, there may be another opportunity in the future.
- Always be aware of potential scams – there are scams on social media sites that specifically target job seekers, so be sure to verify any headhunter's identity. No headhunter or recruiter will ask for payment or your debit or credit card information. If they do, it's likely they are fraudulent.

Being headhunted can [open doors to new opportunities](#) that you may never have previously considered. It's a common practice when filling senior roles in industries like technology and finance, and in creative fields. If you have specialised skills, it can be worthwhile updating your professional networking profiles to ensure you are searchable and contactable for headhunting opportunities. If you are headhunted, see it as a compliment that someone with your skills and experience is in high demand.

## FAQs

### What types of positions are typically filled through headhunting?

Headhunting is typically used to fill senior-level positions such as [CEOs](#), CFOs and other c-suite and directorial roles. It's also used to find technical professionals with

specific experience, for example, in technology, finance, medicine, law and engineering.

## **Why do companies use headhunters?**

Companies use headhunters to save time finding new talent to fill vacant positions. Headhunters are used in situations where confidentiality is required, or when regular recruitment processes have been unsuccessful.

## **How do headhunters approach potential candidates?**

Headhunters approach potential candidates directly via email, phone calls and professional networking platforms. A typical way for a headhunter to reach out is via private message to set up a phone call to discuss the role in more detail. Remember to always verify someone's identity before giving them your personal details.