

Why AI will never replace headhunters

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Although recruiters are increasingly relying on artificial intelligence (AI), it will never replace the highly specialised function of headhunting.



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In an ever-changing world, employees working in jobs today will find their roles evolving, as they are expected more and more to augment their own abilities with AI. It is no longer a case of man versus machine, but rather man *and* machine.

One area in which AI is increasingly being relied upon is in the recruitment process, specifically in filtering resumes and shortlisting candidates. In fact, according to a recent [Sage report](#), 24% of businesses have started using AI to acquire talent, with 56% of managers planning to adopt automated technology this year in an effort to streamline the recruitment process.

Lacking human touch

But bots are only as good as their human masters. And [80% of job seekers](#) don't like interacting with them, preferring the human touch. In our line of work, it's all about people skills, something a machine could hardly be expected to possess.

Unlike regular recruitment, performed by an HR specialist or agency looking for junior to mid-level professionals, headhunting involves coaxing a happily employed top executive to leave their post in return for better pay and perks. These soft skills could never be performed by AI: good communication, the ability to win others' trust, empathy and strong listening skills. High levels of EQ are necessary to oil the process of matching your client with the right candidate and ensuring an optimal result for both parties.

AI is not unbiased

Although those in favour of using AI argue that it removes bias from the recruitment process, there are those who counter that prejudice does invariably creep in, given that human beings themselves input the data. Take Amazon, for instance – the tech giant implemented a recruitment system that relied on hiring data from the previous 10 years, unintentionally [favouring male over female candidates](#).

With executive searches, the process is so specialised that it requires intimate knowledge of both what the executive's job requirements are and what talent exists through insider networks. Often there are only five to eight people in the country who are up to the task. These individuals need to be approached carefully and enticed away from their current positions, by offering up an appropriately tantalising package.

Cultural fit

Another reason why AI doesn't make sense in headhunting is that it doesn't take into consideration cultural fit, arguably one of the most important considerations when placing a top-performing executive. According to a [Forbes article](#), cultural fit is one of the main disadvantages of using AI in recruitment.

It takes patience on the part of the headhunter to assess from the outside what kind of organisational culture your client has and which of the available candidates are likely to be a good fit. Is the culture dynamic and entrepreneurial; or process-oriented and structured? Is there a market culture of competition and getting results; or a clan culture that is friendly and collaborative? Knowing this will give you an inside edge when you reach out to potential executives.

Humans trump bots

No doubt there is a place in the recruitment process for AI – it is making it easier for many HR specialists to fill positions quickly and effectively. But in the high echelons of finding C-suite candidates, AI will never replace human beings. The entire process – from the initial meeting with your client to wooing the right executives and successfully matching them with their new employer – requires the kind of finesse that machines will never be able to rival.

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