

## AI Redefining Search — Without Replacing Human Judgment



Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping executive recruiting, speeding up how firms identify, evaluate, and engage leadership talent. As AI tools automate research and administrative work, search teams can move faster and surface stronger insights—changing what “best candidate” discovery looks like in practice.

At the same time, demand is shifting toward leaders who can translate AI into real business outcomes while navigating risk, governance, and constant change. Technical fluency matters, but so do adaptability, sound judgment, and the ability to lead cross-functional transformation.

For search firms, AI is both an advantage and a dividing line. Those that embed it into their workflows will deliver greater precision and efficiency, while keeping the human elements—context, relationships, and decision-making rigor—at the center of executive hiring.

### Advantages of Incorporating AI

The advantages of incorporating AI into the recruiting process are undeniable, according to Bob Cavoto, CEO of **20/20 Foresight Executive Talent Solutions**. “For example, AI tools can cull through thousands of profiles quickly, screen résumés for required skills, and streamline scheduling and candidate tracking,” he said. “That said, AI cannot replace the human dimension of executive search. The role of the consultant remains central. Human expertise is essential for evaluating leadership capabilities, assessing cultural fit, and understanding the strategic context of each client’s needs.”

“These are nuanced judgments that AI cannot replicate,” Mr. Cavoto said. “However, by combining AI’s ability to handle repetitive, data-intensive tasks with the consultant’s deep insights and relationship-driven approach, we are able to operate more efficiently while maintaining the high standards of executive search.”

“In practice, this means AI supports the process, but the consultant drives it,” Mr. Cavoto continued. “We view technology as a tool to augment our work, freeing us to spend more time analyzing organizational dynamics, engaging with candidates and assessing their qualifications, and advising clients on strategic talent decisions. Embracing AI in this way ensures we remain both innovative and deeply effective in delivering top-tier talent solutions. So, while AI will not replace consultants, it will likely disrupt firms that fail to leverage these technologies effectively. This is why at 20/20 Foresight, we are committed to investing in AI and exploring where it can add value by streamlining and automating key processes.”

### BY THE NUMBERS

#### AI in the Workplace

**91%** of organizations report using at least one AI technology in the workplace in 2026...

with over half also using generative AI tools like ChatGPT in daily workflows.

Source: Azumo

Executive recruiting in the AI sector is evolving faster than any other discipline, driven by the growing need for leaders who not only understand AI technology but can also translate it into strategic, ethical, and scalable business outcomes, Fahad Jalal, founder of CEO of **Qlu.ai**, explained. “The market is highly competitive, with organizations vying for a very small pool of executives who combine technical literacy with cross-functional leadership,” he said. “Traditional search models, which relied heavily on static networks or role-based criteria, are no longer sufficient. Recruiters today must interpret complex intersections—data governance, automation, ethics, and innovation to identify leaders who can operate in ambiguity. At Qlu.ai, we see AI transforming the recruiting process itself, enabling deeper, faster analysis of executive career trajectories and organizational fit. In essence, AI recruiting has shifted from finding talent to understanding intelligence not just artificial, but human.”

“Boards are increasingly seeking executives with a rare blend of technical fluency, ethical judgment, and organizational adaptability,” Mr. Jalal said. “The ideal leader understands the fundamentals of AI not to code it, but to question it intelligently. Experience leading digital transformation or scaling data-driven operations is now a baseline requirement. What differentiates exceptional candidates is their ability to align AI initiatives with broader (cont'd. to page 2)

## IN THE NEWS

**Russell Reynolds Associates Names First Chief Science Officer**

**Russell Reynolds Associates** (RRA) has appointed Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic as its first chief science officer. In this new global role, Dr. Chamorro-Premuzic will lead RRA's research and development (R&D) and innovation

initiatives, driving the firm's data strategy and the development of proprietary insights to further enhance RRA's advisory capabilities. "The integration of cutting-edge science and data-driven insights is paramount to delivering unparalleled value to our clients," said Constantine Alexandrakis, CEO of Russell Reynolds Associates.

As advanced technology platforms and artificial intelligence continue to transform leadership advisory services, this appointment reinforces RRA's commitment to leveraging advanced analytics to deepen client impact worldwide. Dr. Chamorro-Premuzic's role represents a critical new capability, focusing on the content and process aspects of the firm's data strategy, enhancing the technological advancements led by chief technology and data officer Harpreet Khurana. In this capacity, Dr. Chamorro-Premuzic will oversee the center for leadership insight, which explores the forces shaping modern leadership, including economic and geopolitical uncertainty, generative AI, board culture, and the development of next-generation leaders.

human and business objectives improving performance while safeguarding trust, transparency, and equity. Leaders who can foster collaboration between engineering, product, and business teams, while embedding responsible AI practices into corporate DNA, are in highest demand. The next generation of AI leaders will be both tech-aware and people-centric—comfortable leading in a world defined by uncertainty and acceleration."

Qlu.ai uses data-driven insights to map leadership narratives—what candidates say, what they've done, and how that translates into future potential. Mr. Jalal explained that they "look beyond buzzwords to understand their philosophy of AI: Do they view it as an operational enabler, a cultural shift, or a moral responsibility? Then, we compare that outlook against the client's strategic goals—whether it's cost optimization, innovation acceleration, or responsible governance. AI-enabled assessment tools now allow us to quantify qualitative traits like adaptability, systems thinking, and change leadership. The best matches emerge when both sides share a clear, human-centered approach to transformation—where technology amplifies, rather than replaces, human decision-making. That alignment is where enduring impact begins."

**From Search to Strategy**



"Executive recruiting will move beyond identifying candidates to architecting leadership ecosystems powered by real-time intelligence," Mr. Jalal said. "With AI, recruiters will no longer operate reactively; they'll anticipate talent needs, model succession scenarios, and align leadership pipelines with business evolution. The ability to continuously interpret signals—from career patterns to market shifts—will redefine how organizations think about leadership readiness. Another major transformation will be the growing expectation of transparency: *(cont'd. to page 4)*

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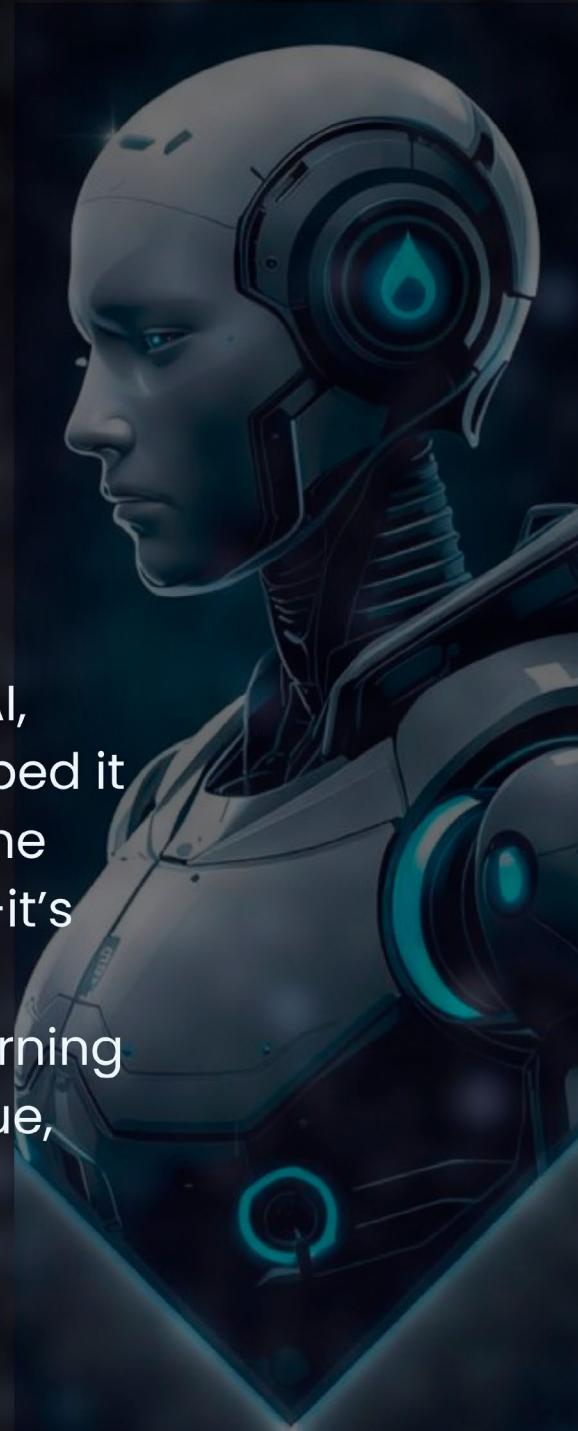
60%+ of companies use AI, only 10% strategically embed it into skills development. The real risk isn't technology—it's organization. Without redesigning roles and learning systems, AI leads to fatigue, not advantage.

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both candidates and clients will want clarity on how AI shapes hiring decisions. This will push the industry toward greater accountability and ethics in data use. Ultimately, the future of executive search won't be about replacing human judgment—it will be about enhancing it through insight, context, and precision.”

“The biggest change ahead for executive search is that AI will move from being a support tool to becoming a true enabler,” said Joseph Blass, founder and CEO of **Ezekia**. “Up to now, firms have used AI to speed up research or help with targeted tasks like transcription of interviews. What’s coming next is AI that understands each firm’s workflow, learns from past searches, and helps consultants uncover insights that go far beyond candidate identification.”

“At Ezekia, we believe the future should be AI-first, not an afterthought. AI will sit at the centre of the search process, linking data, communication, and client strategy. It will help firms shift their focus from simply finding candidates to driving business development through market intelligence, client trends, and relationship insights. The firms that make AI central to how they work will be the ones that lead the next generation of executive search.”

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**Cowen Partners Executive Search** is seeing two distinct areas of demand, technical leadership from top AI incubators. “This space is extremely competitive and requires opportunities that win both hearts and minds,” said Shawn Cole, co-founder of the firm. “Competitive compensation alone isn’t enough as candidates want to work with the best people, have access to the best resources, and be inspired by the leadership and mission.” The second is C-suite operators. “These aren’t necessarily AI natives or experts but proven executives with transferable skills in scaling, infrastructure, investment banking, or go-to-market strategy,” Mr. Cole said.

Boards and CEOs are seeking leaders who can translate their tech experiences into AI’s potential into practical business outcomes while managing its risks, according to Mr. Cole. “The most in-demand executives pair strategic adaptability with a strong grasp of data and digital systems, enabling them to bridge technical and commercial priorities,” he said. “They’ve typically led large-scale fundraising, built scalable infrastructure, and driven aggressive go-to-market strategies that turn emerging technology into enterprise value. I can’t say that risk has been a huge priority for the positions, but perhaps by the people – shared values.”

“For AI-native companies, alignment is assessed through the candidate’s ability to translate technical innovation into scale,” Mr. Cole said. “Leaders who’ve successfully *(cont’d. to page 5)*

raised capital, built infrastructure, hired at pace, and executed aggressive go-to-market strategies. These organizations are often led by highly technical founders, so they seek executives who can complement that expertise with commercial and operational leadership.”

### Integrating AI

For traditional companies integrating AI into their tech stack, Cowen Partners focus is on candidates who have led enterprise-level digital transformations at best-in-class, AI-enabled organizations. “We look for evidence of AI curiosity, adaptability, and a proven track record of applying technology to drive efficiency, insight, and growth,” Mr. Cole said. “In both cases, alignment comes down to how well a leader’s vision connects emerging AI capabilities to the client’s broader strategic objectives and because AI enablement is evolving so quickly, curiosity and staying current with trends have become key indicators of long-term success.”

Most of the standard tech stack is now AI-enabled, and leveraging these tools represents the greatest opportunity for executive recruiters today, Mr. Cole noted. “Research and sourcing as we know them are changing rapidly, and likely won’t exist in the same form within the next year,” he explained. “Many firms are already reducing or eliminating dedicated research teams, as what once took days can now be accomplished in a matter of hours. These advanced tools have freed us to focus on the human element, building relationships, understanding fit, and creating the right match between candidates and clients. Rather than replacing the recruiter, AI has elevated the process, allowing us to deliver a faster, more personal, and higher-quality experience for everyone involved.”

“There are going to be significant winners and losers as those with access to information, who have a faster time to candidate, and provide a better human experience will rapidly gain market share,” Mr. Cole said.

“The AI sector is moving at a pace that is both exciting and challenging for executive hiring,” said Jon Sarn, partner at **Kinsley|Sarn**. “We are seeing strong demand for leaders who can bridge the gap between technical innovation and commercial application. Boards want executives who not only understand AI but can also turn its potential into measurable business outcomes. At Kinsley|Sarn, we have noticed that many organizations are still defining what AI leadership means for them. Some are looking for seasoned technology leaders who can embed AI capabilities into established operations, while others need transformational executives who can build entirely new business models around AI.”

“That uncertainty creates both opportunity and risk in the search process,” Mr. Sarn continued. “What is clear is that executive recruiting in this space cannot rely on traditional sector familiarity alone. It requires an evaluation of adaptability, learning agility, and cross-functional thinking. We focus on identifying leaders who are comfortable navigating ambiguity, able to influence across disciplines, and confident operating in environments where the technology is evolving faster than the playbook. The firms that secure that type of leadership now will define how AI creates value for their businesses over the next decade.” *(cont'd. to page 6)*

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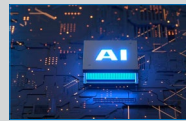
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### IN THE NEWS

#### Kingsley Gate Launches IGYNYTE AI



Private equity-backed **Kingsley Gate** has launched IGYNYTE AI, a solution that combines proprietary AI technology with decades of executive search expertise. "IGYNYTE AI disrupts the old trade-off between quality and speed,"

said JL Baker, who leads IGYNYTE AI. "We've developed IGYNYTE AI to challenge traditional recruiting by combining our proprietary native AI platform with decades of executive search expertise. Our clients no longer have to choose between deep human insight and data-driven precision—they get both."

Clients work directly with experienced consultants while the platform's proprietary IGYNYTE Intelligence accelerates every stage of the search—from role definition to candidate shortlist. This native AI human capital platform was developed from over 20 years of executive search experience and insights from thousands of successful placements. Each engagement includes a dedicated team—partner, client partner, project manager, and specialized recruiters—ensuring strategic alignment and seamless delivery from search initiation through onboarding.

AI is influencing how organizations think about leadership and talent, but its most effective use still relies on human interpretation, according to Mr. Sarn. "Many of the executives and boards we work with are exploring AI to improve data accuracy, identify emerging skills, and gain clearer visibility into workforce trends," he explained. "We often discuss where these tools can genuinely enhance decision-making versus where they risk adding noise. The conversation tends to focus on integration and impact, how AI can support better insights without replacing the judgment that comes from experience. From a recruiting standpoint, AI is helping companies widen their lens and make faster, more informed evaluations. But in executive search, success still comes down to understanding context, culture, and leadership chemistry. We view AI as a promising complement to human expertise. It can streamline the process, but it does not define the outcome. The most effective leaders and organizations are those using AI to sharpen clarity, not to replace it."

The most significant change will be how organizations redefine what leadership looks like in an AI-driven world, Mr. Sarn noted. "Technical understanding will remain valuable, but the real differentiator will be adaptability, leaders who can inspire confidence through periods of rapid change and guide teams where clarity does not yet exist," he said. "We expect executive search to become even more focused on assessing mindset rather than background. The ability to learn, pivot, and apply judgment amid uncertainty will carry as much weight as industry experience. Boards are beginning to recognize that resilience and curiosity often predict success better than a résumé that mirrors yesterday's environment."

#### Balance Between Speed and Precision

"Another major shift will be the balance between speed and precision," Mr. Sarn said. "AI-enabled insights will help firms identify talent faster, but the firms that

*(cont'd. to page 7)*

thrive will be those that keep the rigor, maintaining thoughtful evaluation while harnessing better data. Ultimately, the future of executive search in the AI space will not be about replacing human judgment. It will be about elevating it, using technology to uncover deeper insights while preserving the relationships and trust that sit at the core of great leadership hiring.”

“AI sits at the core of how NU operates and what my co-founders and I set out to create,” said Nada Usina, co-founder and CEO of **NU Advisory Partners**. “Every search begins with intelligent data ingestion that structures millions of data points across leaders, markets, and companies. Our AI systems clean, tag, and connect that data, surfacing patterns and relationships that give us a panoramic view of talent. It allows us to see who is emerging, how markets are shifting, and where leadership potential is breaking through.”

*“Every search begins with intelligent data ingestion that structures millions of data points across leaders, markets, and companies.”*

“We use AI across every part of our process. It powers candidate research, network mapping, and leadership analytics,” Ms. Usina said. “It reads and structures contracts, enriches CRM data, sharpens initial assessments, and summarizes meeting notes. Our proprietary tools and custom GPTs automate workflows and manage knowledge across platforms, giving our consultants live context and better, real-time insights. Each search makes the system smarter, sharpening our accuracy and speed.”

AI also changes how we work with people and build relationships, Ms. Usina explained. “Clients see transparent progress and clearer data,” she said. “Candidates experience faster, more informed communication. Our team spends more time advising and less time on repetitive work.”

NU is also helping clients raise their own AI fluency. “Through our Practical AI sessions with PE and VC firms, boards, and CEOs, we’ve had the chance to show hundreds of leaders how to integrate AI into every aspect of their work, including talent strategy, deal diligence, market and company research, communication, data analysis, and workflow automation,” Ms. Usina said. “NU is all in on AI, and we’re just getting started. There’s still so much to build, so much to learn, so much to push forward. We couldn’t be more excited for what’s ahead.”

#### Overhauling Outdated Systems

“Today, every organization needs AI leadership,” said Martha Heller, CEO of **Heller Executive Search**. “Companies continue to develop AI tools to rapidly translate legacy code and overhaul outdated systems. But despite conversations of AI driving tech jobs down, businesses need more leaders in the heart of tech and AI development to drive progress. Integrating AI into your business creates new workforce needs.” *(cont’d. to page 8)*

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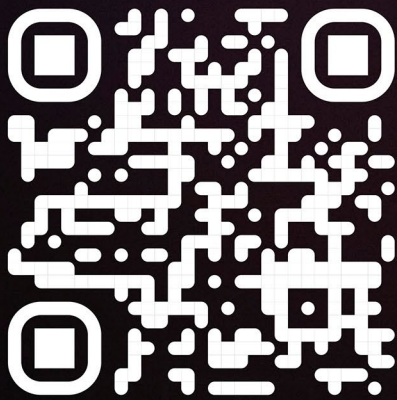
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“As an executive search firm focused on finding technology and AI leadership for today’s data economy, we are actively working with clients to define what they need, identify the key attributes for AI talent, determine where they are, and find the right AI leaders,” Ms. Heller said. “Together with our clients, we are creating the first generation of AI leaders.”

The most effective AI leaders for tomorrow are full stack problem solvers who use vibe-coding tools to drive a solution from idea to proof of concept, according to Ms. Heller. “AI leadership is about innovating to propel the business forward,” she said. “But it’s not just tech knowledge and data science. It’s very much a people-leading role. The executive needs to be a change agent, with masterful change management capabilities. Setting businesses up for success in the AI era requires strategic orientation, with leadership stripping down and re-wiring their companies – without losing the company’s culture.”

“This starts at the top with board-level data literacy and a CEO who can articulate a new model or a path to improvement with a strategy that is driven by AI investment,” Ms. Heller continued. “Who are the board and c-suite leaders for native AI businesses who will transform legacy into AI-enablement in the future? Does the boardroom know how to navigate AI? Some boards are AI panic-spending without clear metrics, while others are stalling innovation out of excessive caution. True AI leadership can provide the strategic insight and depth of understanding of AI needed to separate the hype from reality and keep the board focused on business outcomes. AI leaders must educate the board, not just advise.”

“AI Executive Search is everywhere and nowhere at the same time,” said Clark Beecher, co-founder and managing partner of **Beecher Reagan**. “While there is clearly a robust market on the technical side, the executive landscape remains largely aspirational. As I see it, companies have two choices on AI talent as we sit here today: AI native or AI enablement. Natives sit in native businesses, and enablement is represented by people moving into AI-focused roles from a past in data & analytics or machine learning. The AI native is stronger on the tech stack and less so on business implications. The AI enablement talent is lighter on the tech stack and stronger on the business implications side. It will take another 24 months for the middle to fill in.”

“Many of the executives currently promoting AI as part of their capability set represent the AI enablement group, as many of the AI natives have strong financial incentives to remain at their companies,” Mr. Beecher said. “It’s the same way we assess any other executive candidate. It starts with the search intake call, where we ask the client to clearly define their vision. From there, we create a tailored scorecard and use it to guide and score the candidate interviews.”

“Next, we apply our Verity Leadership Assessment to validate the behavioral traits that align with the client’s vision,” Mr. Beecher continued. “Finally, we synthesize the findings, highlighting both alignment and gaps between the scorecard and assessment, then present that back to the client.”

*(cont'd. to page 9)*

While the context and subject matter may be different, the process remains the same.”

“Many of our clients bring their own tools to the process,” Mr. Beecher added. “On the search side, we integrate those tools into Candidate ID and Market Validation, focusing on the executive’s impact in both current and previous roles. We also leverage AI to support interview analysis and scorecarding, as well as to synthesize insights from the Verity Leadership Assessment.”

Mr. Beecher believes the value lies in efficiency and validation. “AI will significantly shorten the cycle for candidate identification and validation,” he said. “Right now, the process is highly fragmented and cumbersome, but like every emerging market, we’ll eventually see consolidation. AI recruiting platforms will narrow down to one or two dominant players. At this stage, however, the shakeout between winners and losers hasn’t happened yet. That inflection point needs to occur before true consolidation can take place.”

*“After re-tooling their process with AI at its core, our executive search clients complete searches faster, provide greater insights to their clients and become more profitable.”*

#### Understanding AI

“Leaders need more than a strong understanding of AI to be successful in their role,” said Breck Armstrong, managing partner, North America at technology consulting firm **17 Oranges**. “They must also be adept at setting and leading vision, possess strong domain expertise to fully understand a business and their existing processes and be adept at change management to ensure investments are well leveraged by the organization. AI Leaders must be visionary and secure the buy-in of the board, entire senior management team, and the frontline employees who will engage the technology throughout their workday. While AI provides the opportunity for significant efficiency gains and new top-line revenue, these benefits must be properly evaluated against risks such as overspending in low return opportunities, introducing compliance and data security risks, and failing to properly address change management within the organization leading to low adoption.”

Generative AI has proven to be the greatest driver of return on investment for search firms, according to Mr. Armstrong. “At the end of the day, we are all working with, distilling, and evaluating knowledge to help guide our clients choose the best leaders,” he said. “After re-tooling their process with AI at its core, our executive search clients complete searches faster, provide greater insights to their clients and become more profitable. These techniques afford executive search professionals more time to spend with clients and prospects, building deeper personal connections and generating new business.”

“I believe clients will demand more from their executive search partners as the industry expands its use *(cont'd. to page 10)*



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of AI,” Mr. Armstrong said. “Clients will expect searches to close faster while receive greater insights from their search partners. Client’s may feel empowered by their own AI enabled platforms and take on more searches internally, resulting in harder assignments being given to search firms. Search firms will need to level up their capabilities in response and look to AI to ensure they are as efficient as possible and maintain desired levels of profitability.”

Mr. Armstrong also sees a trend of AI enabled tools leading to the de-personalization of the search process. “This is evident in tools that promise automated candidate development just from a position spec or bots designed to prequalify candidates,” he explained. “Our industry has the opportunity to leverage AI in ways that give us more time to re-invest in building deeper human connections with our clients and candidates as these relationships drive our success.”

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*“AI is impacting relationship-driven industries like executive search in both positive and negative ways.”*

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“AI is impacting relationship-driven industries like executive search in both positive and negative ways,” said Canay Deniz, co-founder and CEO of **Ren Systems**. “On the positive, it’s helping networkers to facilitate meaningful social relationships with far more people. AI can recall context and data that humans simply can’t while providing relevant reminders and touchpoints that are far superior to recurring calendar reminders. On the flip side, AI is also poisoning the well. Because it’s so easy to automate messages and outreach at scale, there’s more noise and it’s more difficult than ever to stand out with something genuine to say. The key will be using AI to scale authenticity, and not the other way around.”

The issue with over-reliance on any technology is that it’s undifferentiated, according to Mr. Deniz. “Any company can sign up for ChatGPT and begin prompting, entirely offloading a table stakes version of their job to AI,” he explained. “To maintain or gain an advantage, companies need to configure and adopt purpose-built AI for their industry and use case. That alone requires sufficient expertise to even know which vendors to evaluate and adopt and then how to deploy successfully. Human judgment is involved in countless decisions that require folk knowledge that ChatGPT can never train on.”

“Executive recruiting opportunities today feel as stable and abundant as they have been in the past two or three years, however, this does feel different because of the rise of AI and the requirement for companies to not fall behind,” said Radley Meyers, partner at **SPMB**. “As a result, companies are re-evaluating their current leadership teams and aligning with leaders who can advance AI initiatives. This means that hiring across technology functions have increased, whether it be chief AI officers, chief data officers, CTOs and CIOs. It also means that the internal consumers of AI within companies - HR, finance, sales, marketing, etc. - are also focused on bringing on leaders who can best utilize and adjust to the changing landscape.”

*(cont’d. to page 11)*

### A Strategic Priority

“In cybersecurity, the momentum has been steady rather than explosive, but notably resilient,” he said. “Even through periods of broader tech volatility, cybersecurity has maintained consistent growth. Recently, there’s been a discernible uptick in executive hiring as boards elevate security to a strategic priority. This is being fueled by both increased regulatory scrutiny and the intersection of AI and security, creating opportunities for leaders who can safeguard innovation as much as they enable it.”

Above all else, boards and CEOs are looking for executives who are experts in change management, according to Mr. Meyers. “We are going through a massive shift in how people and organizations leverage technology,” he said. “This is unlike other transformation periods, because the evolution is fast moving and all encompassing. During past transformations, whether it be cloud, digital, ecommerce, or any other boom we’ve seen, the impact was more gradual, and phased. With AI, we are seeing immediate impacts on how products are built, how back office functions operate, and how hiring decisions are made. Having leaders who are experts at bringing people along, getting buy-in from their peers and the broader employee base, and executing on a vision is at the top of the list of qualities we’re looking for in hiring.”

*“In cybersecurity, the momentum has been steady rather than explosive, but notably resilient.”*

On the technical front, Mr. Meyers explained that boards and CEOs are looking for AI expertise. “The problem here is the level of expertise they want, the market has not been able to deliver,” he said. “If you are an early stage company, looking to bring in AI expertise, it’s a bit more straightforward because you can hire a leader who is still a practitioner of AI. When you are a large enterprise company, you may have a harder time finding a CIO or CTO who has led 2,000+ person teams who is capable of both leading an enterprise wide technology org, and also being in the weeds of the AI evolution ecosystem.”

With his focus cybersecurity, Mr. Meyers said that he sees these roles shift in two directions. “In product-led, data-heavy companies, I expect a consolidation toward trust leadership,” he explained. “Meaning security, privacy, reliability, and even parts of safety and IT will fall under a single executive who owns customer trust as a business KPI. In more traditional environments, security leadership will remain distinct but with deeper board exposure and a clearer link to enterprise risk. Either way, the skills will converge and these leaders will have to be adept at risk economics, AI and data governance, third-party and software supply chain, and the ability to brief the board like a CFO. Practically, breach costs and disclosure requirements will keep board attention high. As long as the average breach is measured in the millions and carries time-to-report obligations, the role will continue to rise in both strategic and externally facing capacities.”

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<b>Benchmark Executive Search</b> Jeremy King, President	(703) 728-8506	<b>Korn Ferry</b> Tony Rossano, Head of Global Technology Practice	(612)-906-3438
<b>BrainWorks</b> Guy Gomis, SVP, Partner	(908) 608-8855	<b>McDermott + Bull</b> Chris Bull, Managing Partner	(949) 753-1700
<b>Caldwell</b> Jim Bethmann, Managing Partner	(214) 765-7848	<b>McIntyre Associates</b> Kyle McIntyre, Owner & Executive Recruiter	(860) 284-1111
<b>Calibre One</b> Aanand Varanasi, Partner	(650) 248-8350	<b>N2Growth</b> Tony Morales, Co-Chairman	(800) 944-4662
<b>CarterBaldwin Executive Search</b> Jennifer Poole Sobocinski, Partner	(678) 448-0010	<b>NGS Global</b> David Nosal, Chairman + Managing Partner	(415) 568-6356
<b>CIO Partners</b> Joe Gross, President	(770) 971-0324	<b>NU Advisory Partners</b> Lea Hagglund, Associate Partner/Nada Usina, CEO, Co-Founder	(469) 441-7089
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<b>CyberSN</b> Deidre Diamond, CEO	(857) 415 2652	<b>Pinpoint Search Group</b> Mark Sasson, Managing Partner	(970) 816-6175
<b>Daversa</b> Joe Patalano, Managing Partner		<b>Riviera Partners</b> Sean Cleary, Managing Partner	(631) 873-5789
<b>DHR Global</b> Sal DiFranco, Managing Partner	(312) 782-1581	<b>Russell Reynolds Associates</b> Angela Jung, Consultant	(305) 717-7400
<b>Direct Recruiters Inc., a Starfish Partners Company</b> Ryan Lange, Partner	(440) 996-0593	<b>Sheffield Haworth</b> Mark Dixon/Daniel Woodgate, Managing Directors	(212) 593-7119
<b>DSG Global (Diversified Search Group)</b> Joyce Brocaglia, Global Practice Leader, Cybersecurity	(908) 806-8442	<b>Spencer Stuart</b> Peter Hodgkinson, Consultant	(212) 336-0200
<b>Egon Zehnder</b> William Houston, Global Lead	(202) 774-1300	<b>SPMB</b> Radley Meyers, Partner	(415) 924-7200
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<b>Hightech Partners</b> Raffaele Jacovelli, Managing Partner	+32 475 733348	<b>WittKieffer</b> Hillary Ross, J.D., Managing Partner/Nick Giannas, Senior Partner	(312) 859-8841
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## SPOTLIGHT

## Domain-Specific AI Transforming Executive Search



*Mark Jacobson is the GM, executive search with **Findem.ai**, an AI-powered talent intelligence and recruiting platform used by companies to find, engage, and hire candidates more efficiently.*

*At its core, Findem uses artificial intelligence and machine learning to build deep talent profiles by aggregating publicly available data (such as career history, skills, education, and signals of experience) into a single, continuously updated view of a candidate. Mr. Jacobson recently sat down with **Hunt Scanlon Media** to discuss how Findem's foundation of context-rich, longitudinal talent data is changing executive search, allowing AI to move beyond keywords and résumés to support faster, more transparent, and insight-driven talent decisions.*

#### **Mark, what inspired the creation of Findem and its focus on AI-driven talent data?**

Findem was created around a simple but transformative insight: people are far more than what they choose to write in a resume or LinkedIn profile. If the industry wanted AI that could meaningfully understand talent, it needed data that reflected the full arc of a person's career—not just titles, timestamps, or keywords. Before Findem, firms were spending enormous energy on manual research: assembling longlists, stitching together multiple databases, and rebuilding market maps for every engagement. The real problem wasn't the effort—it was the data itself. You can't build intelligent systems on unstructured profiles and one-off spreadsheets. Our breakthrough was to build labeled, contextual, longitudinal data—what we call 3D talent data. It captures three essential dimensions: Who a person is; where they worked and in what company context; and when they achieved specific outcomes over time. Executive search questions are inherently contextual. "Find me a sales leader who scaled a business from early stage through exit" can't be answered with keyword search. It requires understanding what someone did, at what stage, and with what impact. That foundation of expert-labeled, context-rich data is what separates domain-specific AI from generic AI—and it's why Findem is delivering ROI in an era where most enterprise AI projects struggle to do so.

#### **How do you see AI changing the future of recruiting and HR?**

We're entering a decade where talent decisions must be faster, more transparent, and rooted in evidence. Boards want clarity. CEOs want agility. And teams can no longer rely on workflows driven by manual research and institutional memory. AI is fundamentally reshaping the market. The last decade was defined by point solutions—tools that solved narrow parts of the workflow but didn't change outcomes. The next decade will be defined by intelligent systems that understand context, generate insights, and guide decisions.

#### **What is the risk of not learning the ins and outs of AI?**

For executive search, the implications are profound: Speed and scale without sacrificing quality; institutionalized intelligence

that compounds with every engagement; and evidence-based communication that elevates the search experience. Crucially, this isn't about replacing humans. It's about shifting their focus. AI can complete mechanical research tasks 80x faster and with greater consistency, freeing researchers and consultants to focus on advisory work, client storytelling, and candidate assessment. We call this emerging role the talent engineer—someone who partners with AI to shape search strategy, evaluate outputs, identify bias, and translate insights into board-ready narratives. By 2026, we expect the shift from traditional SaaS to assistive and agentic AI to be well underway. We're launching specialized agents built specifically for search workflows—not generic chatbots, but domain-specific intelligence tuned to what elite firms actually do.

#### **How does Findem ensure fairness and transparency in its algorithms?**

Fairness and transparency have been core to Findem from day one. Our 3D data is fully auditable. Every attribute—from company stage to role impact—is explicit and based on verifiable signals. We never infer protected classes or rely on opaque scoring. We maintain rigorous GDPR and CCPA compliance, pass external bias audits, and provide clients with controls for adjusting or disabling attributes tied to sensitive categories. We also work with organizations such as AnitaB.org, RecruitMilitary, and Glider AI to ensure our datasets treat diverse talent pools accurately and responsibly. AI has the potential to democratize opportunity—but only if built with transparency, community partnership, and continuous monitoring at the core.

#### **How do you measure success—for both clients and your own team?**

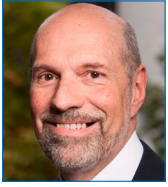
For clients, success is measured by outcomes that matter to firm leaders: Reduced time-to-fill; Lower cost-per-search; higher consultant productivity; and more transparent, evidence-based client interactions. Many firms consolidate multiple tools into Findem and often accelerate searches by 30 days or more. We also measure how much time teams reclaim from manual research so they can focus on the strategic advisory work clients pay for. For our own team, we measure success by customer impact, partner satisfaction, and the compounding quality of the intelligence we help firms create.

#### **What's next for Findem?**

The theme for 2026 is clear: outcomes over features. We're launching AI agents tailored to the nuances of executive search - agents that understand context, stage, and operating realities across the talent landscape. Our longer-term vision is to become the operating system for talent decisions. Our labeled data becomes the foundation for organizations to build their own agents, their own AI workflows, and their own intelligence on top of our platform. The firms that win will be those that invest in transformation - not just tools. And we're building the infrastructure to power that future.

## SPOTLIGHT

## The Evolution of Tech Leadership in Europe: 40 Years of Transformation



Since its creation in 1985, **Hightech Partners** has been at the forefront of identifying and developing technology leaders across Europe. From the early days of IT infrastructure and operational excellence to today's era of artificial intelligence and digital ecosystems, the firm has witnessed—and guided—the profound evolution of what it means to lead in technology.

Raffaele Jacovelli, managing director at Hightech Partners, recently sat down with **Hunt Scanlon Media** to discuss the key trends shaping the tech leadership landscape and the executive search industry today.

### How have the skill sets and leadership qualities sought in European technology executives evolved since Hightech Partners was founded in 1985, especially with the rise of digital transformation and AI?

When the firm was founded, we had been supporting the major American technology companies to expand in Europe. There were very few leaders that could claim a long track record and expertise in similar roles, hence we had to evaluate both ability and potential. After the internet bubble burst in 2000 and Lehman Brothers crash in 2008, companies have shifted to a more conservative approach hiring people that had already covered role as close as possible to the perfect. Two decades later, due to the structural shortage and the different set of competences required, companies are forced to hire combining hard and soft skills looking to the candidate's potential rather than purely track record. Technology has become the engine of business strategy, and tech leaders are now expected to act as strategic business partners and transformation enablers. With the rise of digital transformation and AI, the skills and qualities sought in technology executives have shifted from purely technical to profoundly human. The leaders who stand out today combine strategic vision, curiosity, adaptability, and emotional intelligence. They can navigate uncertainty, inspire cross-functional teams, and translate emerging technologies into value creation.

### What about soft skills?

Soft skills have become increasingly decisive. As AI and automation take on more technical complexity, success depends less on coding skills and more on a leader's ability to embrace change, learn continuously, and foster innovation cultures. We look less for pure 'tech' leaders and more for 'transformational' leaders, people who can bridge technology with human potential and help organizations evolve responsibly in an AI-driven world. Any company today is forced to become a technology company, hence the skill set required is no longer exclusive to the tech domain. The best digital leaders today are multidisciplinary thinkers, open to all disciplines, from data ethics and design thinking to sustainability and behavioral science. This shift towards cross-functional, human-centric leadership is redefining what success looks like in technology.

### What emerging technologies—such as AI, cloud, or cybersecurity—are driving the most demand for new executive talent in Europe right now?

We have started preaching clients and candidate back in 2017 about the Tsunami and was about to arrive as many enabling technologies were reaching the maturity stage that would enable the AI to explode. Nowadays, across Europe, AI is undoubtedly the strongest driver of new executive demand. Organizations are racing to define their AI strategies, but many lack the leadership capabilities to make this transition tangible. Companies now seek executives who can transform their businesses into intelligent enterprises, where AI is not an experiment but an integrated, responsible, and scalable part of operations. That's why Hightech Partners developed its AI Readiness Program in 2025, to help clients assess their maturity, identify capability gaps, and define the leadership roadmap required to become truly AI-ready. In parallel, cybersecurity is rising rapidly on the C-suite agenda. The acceleration of generative and agentic AI has dramatically increased exposure to cyber risks, from data breaches to algorithmic manipulation. As a result, the demand for forward-thinking CISOs and cyber risk leaders has surged. Beyond AI and cybersecurity, other domains such as cloud transformation, IoT ecosystems, and data analytics continue to fuel leadership demand. Yet increasingly, success in these fields depends not on technical depth alone, but on the ability to orchestrate complex systems, align stakeholders, and embed a culture of innovation across the enterprise.

### Hightech Partners helps companies in non-tech sectors undergo digital transformation. What are the key challenges traditional industries face in attracting tech-savvy leaders?

Hightech Partners – HTP Group, has long supported traditional industries such as manufacturing, energy, finance, healthcare in their digital transformation journeys. In these sectors, the challenge is rarely just technological. It's human. The biggest obstacle for transformation leaders is often organizational readiness. Many legacy organizations are not yet technology ready. They rely on legacy systems, hierarchical structures, and deeply ingrained ways of working that can slow change. When a tech-savvy executive enters such an environment, success depends on his ability to lead cultural change, to educate, motivate, and gradually shift mindsets. These leaders must communicate not only how to transform, but why transformation is essential. This takes time, empathy, and strong sponsorship from the top. The most successful executives are those who can blend technical credibility with interpersonal influence, bridging generational and cultural divides within the same company. At Hightech Partners, we see these capabilities as essential to what we call AI-Readiness, mentioned above.

### Describe your AI readiness program.

Within our AI readiness program, we've identified 12 power skills that enable leaders to drive transformation (cont'd. to page 15)

in an AI-driven world, among them emotional intelligence, critical and adaptive thinking, and ethical decision-making. These skills are at the heart of modern leadership and define those who can successfully bridge technology and people. We often see that transformation succeeds when leadership teams adopt a long-term view, allowing new digital leaders the space to build trust and drive sustainable, people-first change. With our largest team of certified Birkman consultants in Europe, we also help clients strengthen collaboration and alignment within their leadership teams through our high performing team workshop, a program designed to build mutual understanding, clarify purpose, and translate shared vision into actionable plans.

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*“The future of executive search will continue to evolve toward augmented intelligence, combining the analytical power of data with the empathy, intuition, and discernment of experienced consultants.”*

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#### **How important are cultural intelligence and diversity when recruiting technology executives for multinational organizations across Europe?**

Cultural intelligence and diversity have become central to leadership success in technology. In Europe especially, where executives lead teams spread across multiple countries and cultures, the ability to navigate diversity is not optional, it's essential. Understanding local decision-making norms, communication styles, and organizational expectations directly influences performance and cohesion. Beyond geography, diversity of thought is a powerful driver of innovation. Bringing together leaders from different backgrounds, genders, and experiences leads to more creative problem-solving and better business outcomes. Digital transformation is not one-dimensional; it requires different perspectives, critical debate, and openness to change. That's why Hightech Partners has long integrated cultural intelligence and diversity assessments into its executive search methodology.

#### **With advances in AI and data-driven recruitment tools, how is executive search itself evolving, and how is Hightech Partners leveraging technology in its own processes?**

Just as technology reshapes industries, it is also transforming the field of executive search itself. At Hightech Partners, we see AI and data-driven tools as powerful enablers of efficiency and insight, but never as replacements for human judgment. Today, we use AI in 10 out of the 12 steps of our search process. This includes everything from market mapping and candidate sourcing to competency modeling, predictive analytics, and project management. These technologies, combined with an agile, sprint driven approach, allow us to move faster, uncover hidden talent, and ensure our searches are more inclusive and evidence based, without limiting to the obvious targets. However, the final evaluation and decision-making steps remain entirely human-driven, consistent with our values and in full alignment with the principles of the EU AI Act. Understanding personality, culture, ethics, and potential cannot be automated, and that's where our expertise lies.



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## Why CIOs and CTOs Must Rethink Their Operating Models Now

The emergence of agentic AI represents a pivotal moment for technology leaders. For years, CIOs and CTOs have delivered incremental transformation, digitizing services, migrating to the cloud and embedding data into decisions, according to a recent report from **Leathwaite's** Heather Barnes. "Agentic AI does not offer an increment," the study said. "It introduces a different paradigm altogether."

These systems do not just automate tasks they pursue goals, make decisions, and orchestrate workflows across tools and teams with limited supervision, according to the Leathwaite report. "They are not tools that wait for instruction," it said. "They are agents that act, reason and adapt. For technology leaders, this is not just another evolution in AI capability. It is an operational, cultural, and architectural inflection point."

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*"Agentic AI needs infrastructure that supports decision autonomy, context switching and continuous feedback loops."*

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Unlike traditional AI, which relies on human prompts or predefined decision trees, agentic AI can interpret a business goal, plan how to reach it, act, monitor its impact, and iterate, sometimes across multiple systems and stakeholders, the Leathwaite report explained. A procurement agent, for instance, might scan the supplier landscape, negotiate contracts, align to ESG targets, and loop in finance only when strategic thresholds are breached.

"This shifts AI from a passive function into an autonomous actor," the Leathwaite report said. "The CIO or CTO becomes responsible not only for its performance but also for its alignment, boundaries, and escalation logic. You are no longer just managing code. You are managing intent."

Leathwaite points to the following three impacts on the technology function:

**1. Architecting for autonomy:** Legacy systems are built around request-response logic. Agentic AI needs infrastructure that supports decision autonomy, context switching and continuous feedback loops. This will force a rethink of integration layers, orchestration tools, and how systems signal intent and constraint. CIOs will need to invest in architecture that allows AI agents to traverse functions, legal, finance, operations without fragmenting data or breaching compliance. This is less about data lakes and more about system composability and AI-native permissions.

**2. A new governance mandate:** Autonomous systems can go rogue – quietly and at scale. A procurement agent making unauthorized commitments, or a customer service agent escalating issues incorrectly, can introduce reputational and financial risks before anyone is aware. CTOs will need to design in safeguards.

This includes behavioral audits, escalation *(cont'd. to page 17)*

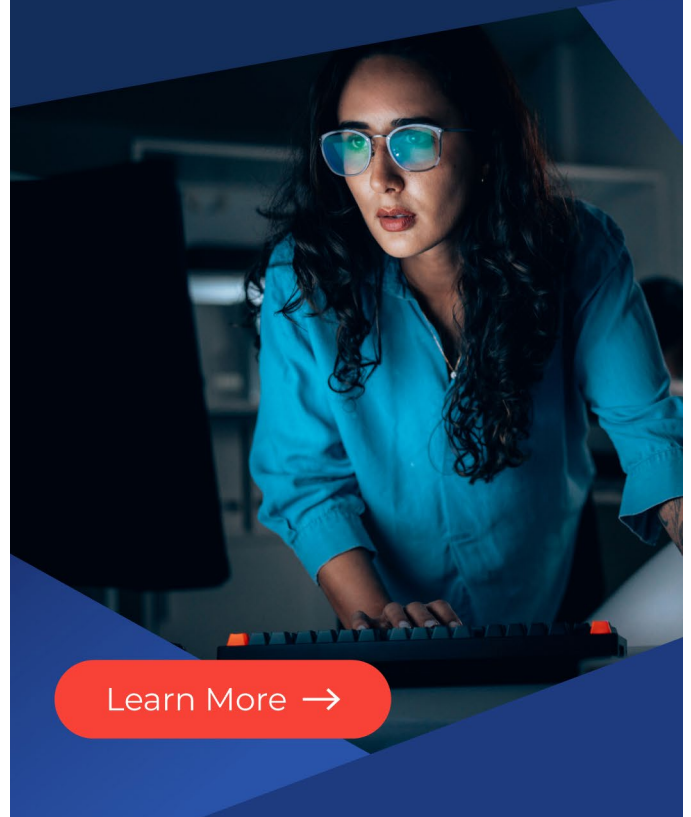


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triggers, traceable decision logs and real-time simulation environments. It also means defining the “why” behind decisions, not just the “what.”

**3. Redefining technology talent:** With agentic AI absorbing much of the process logic and execution work, the technology function will shift toward a mix of orchestration, oversight, and design. Roles like AI product lead, prompt engineer, systems ethicist and simulation strategist will emerge as core to the operating model. Technical fluency alone will no longer be enough. CIOs will need teams who can design for ambiguity, align systems to strategic intent, and interrogate machine-led decisions in real time.

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*“Firms that treat agentic AI as a strategic capability, not just a productivity lever will redefine how value is created.”*

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#### **Strategic Implications for the Business**

The Leathwaite report explained that agentic AI will stretch far beyond the technology team. The firm noted that it will reshape decision rights, workflows, and accountability across the enterprise:

- **Distributed decision-making:** AI agents can triage decisions, identify bottlenecks, and propose changes without waiting for a quarterly review cycle. The Leathwaite report said that this requires a mindset shift in the executive team. If the AI can spot a problem and resolve it, who owns the outcome? Who signs it off?
- **Collapse of traditional hierarchies:** “When a digital agent can escalate to a C-suite dashboard, propose a change, and A/B test the solution all within a morning, the middle layers of oversight begin to shift,” the Leathwaite report said. “CIOs and CTOs must help the organization determine what should be automated, what should remain human, and what should be a hybrid approach.”
- **Speed vs. control:** Agentic AI systems can introduce strategic agility but also operational volatility, according to the Leathwaite report. “Firms that scale too quickly without the right guardrails may find themselves exposed,” it said. “Technology leaders will need to strike a balance between empowerment and containment.”

#### **The Leadership Challenge**

For CIOs and CTOs, agentic AI is not a technical choice, the Leathwaite report continued. “It is a leadership test,” the firm said. “You are no longer just overseeing systems that support business strategy. You are defining how intelligence flows through the organization and how machines and humans make decisions together. This will demand more than architecture diagrams. It will require a new playbook, one that combines engineering rigor with ethical foresight and cultural awareness.”

“Firms that treat agentic AI as a strategic capability, not just a productivity lever will redefine how value is created,” the Leathwaite report concluded. “Those that wait for a best practice template may find themselves playing by someone else’s rules. Now is the moment to lead.”

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## Top Searches Making News...

### DHR Global Recruits CIO for Academy Sports + Outdoors



**DHR Global** has recruited Sumit Anand as EVP and chief information officer at Academy Sports + Outdoors. The search was completed by global managing partners Marcey Rubin Stamas

and Sal DiFranco. "Mr. Anand, a lifelong customer of Academy Sports + Outdoors, brings extensive experience in cybersecurity, IT infrastructure, digital, and operational agility to advance the organization's competitive edge and support the company's continued expansion into new markets and states," DHR said. "The DHR Global team is proud to have assisted Academy Sports + Outdoors in placing Sumit Anand in this key role. We look forward to watching the Academy Sports + Outdoors team continue to grow its footprint with Mr. Anand's value-added technology leadership."

### SPMB Recruits Chief Data Officer for Finastra

**SPMB Executive Search** has recruited Ali Khan as chief data officer for London-based financial services company Finastra. Managing partner Mike Doonan led the assignment. "Congratulations to



Finastra on welcoming Ali Khan as its new chief data officer," SPMB said in a LinkedIn post. "A multi-industry data & AI veteran, Ali has held senior leadership roles at Experian, Verizon, and Scholastic. He has scaled global teams, built transformational data platforms, and consistently delivered business impact across highly regulated industries. Join us, and SPMB Executive Search managing partner Mike Doonan, in congratulating Ali and Finastra on this exciting new chapter of advancing its data-driven future." Mr. Khan has over 25 years of experience in data and AI leadership across multiple industries.

### HARTZ Search Retained by Geisinger to Find New CIO



Charlotte, NC-based **HARTZ Search** has been tapped by Geisinger in Danville, PA, to lead in its search for chief information officer. The CIO will serve as an integral member of the executive leadership team and will

be on-site. They will provide vision and leadership for information technology (IT) in support of the system's mission and strategic priorities. HARTZ Search also noted that the CIO will lead, plan, implement, and maintain IT in support of the clinical enterprise, health plan, academic enterprise, and system affiliates. They will champion process improvement and lean methodologies to execute strategic plans and achieve organizational goals. The successful candidate will have demonstrated experience working and influencing effectively in a highly matrixed and relationship-driven culture.

## ...More Searches Making News

### Partners Retained by Trupanion to Fill Senior Technology Position



**CIO Partners** has been retained by Trupanion to lead their search for the role of vice president of technology operations, located in Seattle. Reporting to the chief information officer, the vice president is

responsible for overseeing IT infrastructure, systems, and service delivery functions and for ensuring optimal performance, security, scalability, and availability of IT services in alignment with business objectives. This individual will lead teams across infrastructure, cloud operations, network engineering, service desk, and IT support, fostering a culture of continuous improvement, innovation, and reliability. Marietta, GA-based CIO Partners is focused on technology leadership searches across all industries and corporate sizes, from start-ups to Fortune 100 organizations.

### RevelOne Completes Search for Cache

**RevelOne** has recruited Angus Kirkby as head of growth for Cache. The search was led by consultant Montse Jungers. “With a strong background in brand, growth, and acquisition within



the fintech space, Angus has an exceptional track record of scaling companies through smart, creative marketing,” RevelOne said in a LinkedIn post. “Cache gives employees with concentrated, large stock positions access to advanced products, tools, and insights that help them make the most of their holdings. Thank you to Srikanth Narayan – founder and CEO at Cache – and Allyson Letteri for partnering with our team as an advisor on this search.” Before joining Cache, Mr. Kirkby served at Titan, where he built and scaled a multi-channel growth engine spanning paid acquisition, content, lifecycle marketing, and brand strategy.

### McDermott + Bull Recruits Chief Technology Officer for ClinNEXUS



**McDermott + Bull** has placed Michael Selberis as chief technology officer at ClinNEXUS. The search was completed by partner Jake Vander Zanden, partner Ken Dropiewski, and executive recruiter Kevin Kim. Mr. Selberis will lead the development

and execution of ClinNEXUS’ technology strategy, overseeing all aspects of technological direction to ensure alignment with the company’s business goals during this critical growth stage. He will be responsible for driving innovation, scalability, and digital transformation across all technical functions, with a particular focus on leveraging AI, ML, and big data to enhance care delivery and improve patient outcomes. Mr. Selberis brings extensive experience in digital platform strategy and technology leadership. He most recently served as CTO for Nobel Procera & Digital Solutions at Envista Holdings Corporation.

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