

# How to position yourself for approaches (headhunting)

.....

A few touches to your mobile phone and your groceries, an Uber or a pizza come to you. So why not a job? Many of the best jobs are never advertised so how do you hear about them?

Good employers know that the best lawyers are so busy running their practices that they don't have time to trawl through job ads. They also like keeping strategic hires out of the public eye so the marketplace doesn't catch on to what they're doing and where they're headed.

That's why, when it comes to bringing in the big guns, they'll use third party headhunters to track down, sound out and snare the best talent for themselves.

Headhunters don't use a scattergun approach. Once they've been briefed, they usually put feelers out via networks, compile a longlist, then research those

candidates to see who's likely to be a good fit. By the time they approach someone, they pretty much know who they are, what they do and what their reputation is like.

So, if you want to be in their sights, there are six things you should be doing.

## **1. Social networks – make LinkedIn work for you**

Review your LinkedIn profile, make sure it clearly articulates your skills, experience and area of practice. Highlight projects you've worked on and the value you contributed (without of course breaching client confidentiality). Headhunters want to have a good understanding that you've worked on similar kinds of matters to those their client has briefed them about. Don't be shy about blowing your own horn. See Getting your social media profiles ready (Above).

## 2. Be known as an industry expert

You'll never be headhunted if no one has ever heard of you. So, if you're not already building a profile for yourself, start now.

Put yourself forward to present on your areas of expertise wherever possible, especially for industry events or CPD. As an example, check out Bulletpoints for content.

Write about important issues and hot topics affecting your work and share these – not just via your firm's newsletters but directly with contacts by publishing LinkedIn and other social media channels.

To ramp things up, join LinkedIn groups of like-minded people such as Australian Legal Community and start contributing to the conversations. Consider publishing in industry journals – or better still, form relationships with journalists to expand opportunities of being quoted in business or mainstream press as an expert in your field.

## 3. Releasing subtle signals

If you are considering making a move, it's a good idea to start putting your feelers out there. You can even change your LinkedIn settings to discreetly show that you are open to new opportunities (not viewable to your employer).

Also check that your Inmail settings allow you to notify users that you are open to 'career opportunities'.

## 4. Make contacting you easy, not a mystery

While gatekeeping receptionists can be great at shielding you from telemarketing calls, they can act as a block for headhunters who want to sound you out. So make yourself easy to contact by including your mobile number and personal email address on your LinkedIn profile. If a headhunter struggles to reach you, they may bypass you and run the opportunity by the next person on their list.

And, if a headhunter calls and you can't speak freely, set a time to chat when you're out of the office. This also gives you a chance to check out their LinkedIn profile to see whether you want to deal with them.

## 5. Remain professional, don't breach etiquette

Don't tell anyone in your firm – and that means anyone – about your plans to move, even once you've been approached. If the headhunting process isn't handled discreetly, you're likely to jeopardise your current position as well as any new opportunities.

If a headhunter alerts you to an opportunity never approach the employer directly. Not only will your overtures be met with blank stares, you'll be seen as disloyal. They're using a headhunter for a reason and it may be a confidential search.

## 6. But don't be afraid

If you are approached by a headhunter, you can benefit from their expertise. It never hurts to know the state of the market and have a trusted source of intelligence, especially around salary review time. Besides, even if the specific opportunity they wanted to talk about isn't right for you at the time, something may hit their desk in the near future.

Finally, if you've noticed that they've looked at your LinkedIn profile, drop them a line to find out why. Headhunting can be a slow dance of missed calls, profile views and unnoticed messages sitting in your personal email account. So, if you're open to a move, make sure you stay alert and responsive to any headhunter approach.