2026

Digital Marketing for Recruitment Agencies

The channels that win clients, what to spend, and what to skip.

Written for recruitment, search and staffing firms planning their marketing. It sets out what the market looks like now, which channels return, how to sequence the first quarter, and where a marketing agency adds something a tool cannot.

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1. The market you are marketing into

The recruitment industry has been hit hard across the UK, the US and Europe. Everyone has had to work harder to secure clients and fill the roles available, and we are a long way from the candidate-driven market of a few years ago. The figures back it up: the sector's gross value added fell to £40.6 billion in 2024, from £44.4 billion the year before, and permanent placements dropped by a third to 536,400. Yet the number of UK recruitment enterprises still grew, to 31,345 in 2025.

Figure 1 More agencies, chasing fewer placements

Permanent placements	Sector gross value added	UK recruitment enterprises
536,400	£40.6bn	31,345
▼ down a third	▼ from £44.4bn	▲ still growing
In 2024, against the year before.	A smaller pot to compete over.	In 2025. The only line moving up.

Source: REC, Recruitment Industry Status Report.

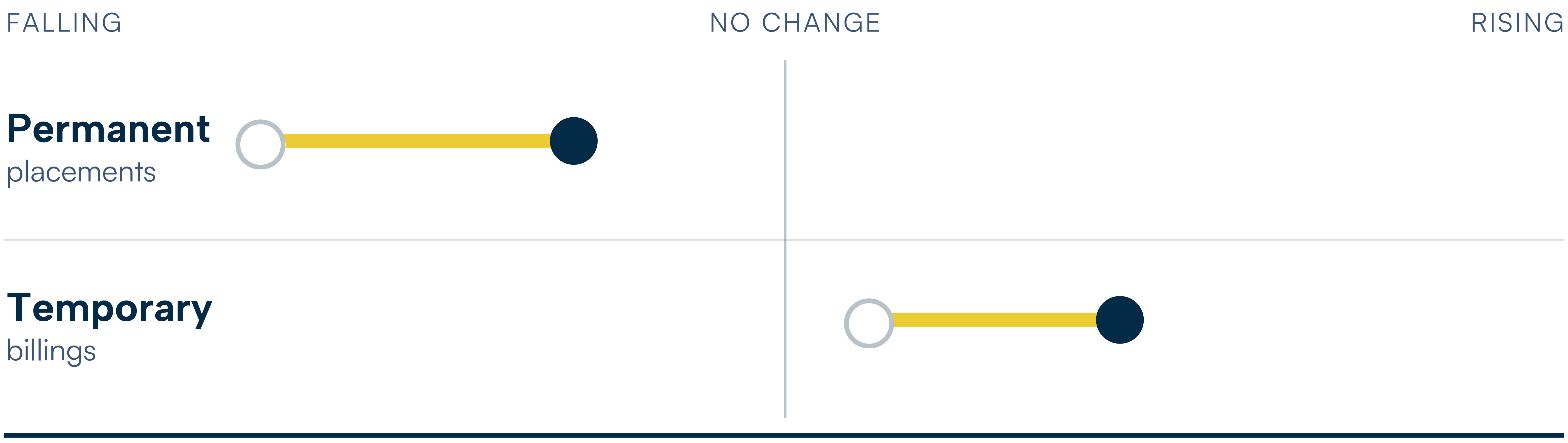
To make it harder, tens of thousands of agencies are competing for the same clients and candidates, most of them using the same language: a hundred years of experience, industry specialists, deep networks. If everyone says the same thing, none of it lands.

A two-speed market, not a crash and not a recovery

The headline figures still look cautious. UK vacancies sat at 705,000 in spring 2026, the lowest since early 2021. Payrolled employment fell by 210,000 over the year to April. Unemployment is around 5%, and regular pay growth has cooled to roughly 3.4%, a five-year low. Employers are not hiring freely; they are weighing every decision.

Look under the headline and the picture shifts. Through early 2026 the monthly KPMG and REC Report on Jobs showed permanent placement declines easing to their softest rate in eighteen months, with the REC declaring the wait-and-see period over. A wobble followed in spring as costs and global uncertainty bit again. Then in June, temporary billings rose at their fastest rate in more than three years. The market has not stopped hiring. It has changed how it hires.

Figure 2 Two speeds, not one



Softest in 18 months

The rate of decline in permanent placements, with the wait-and-see period declared over.

Fastest in 3+ years

Growth in temporary billings in June 2026. Employers are protecting flexibility, not stopping hiring.

Source: KPMG and REC, Report on Jobs, 2026.

What that means for your marketing

Three things. First, deliberate buyers research more before they commit, which raises the value of credibility and proof. Second, a rich candidate market rewards agencies that already own talent communities, not those scrambling to build them. Third, when budgets are watched, marketing has to show commercial return, not activity.

The agencies that kept investing in their brand through the dip are the ones best placed as conditions improve. Candidate availability has risen sharply, helped by redundancies and job-security nerves, which means talent pools are fuller than they have been in years. Clients who are still hiring, and plenty are, have more choice and more at stake in getting each hire right.

> ### *The credibility threshold*
>
> Any service-based company has to clear a credibility threshold to succeed in its market, and that threshold rises with the size of the client and the value of the contract. It is why more established firms, or the ones that appear more established, consistently do better than a brand that looks like it was put together on the back of an envelope.
>
> Three quarters of B2B decision-makers say a piece of thought leadership has led them to research a service they were not previously considering, and over half say that when thought leadership is strong, brand recognition matters less.

There is a risk in the alternative. When an agency's success relies too heavily on its immediate network and referrals, it becomes more vulnerable to a downturn than an established brand does. We call it hopium marketing: hoping something new will come in soon. A strong brand with a solid online presence is not invincible to market turbulence, but it is afforded a cushion.

2. Who you are marketing to

Every tactic starts with a clear audience. It is a challenge to disqualify large segments of your addressable market, but getting audience selection right at the beginning changes everything that follows. Look for the small ponds others think are too small: they hold a far higher concentration of opportunity than the regions everybody is overfishing.

Trying to appeal to everyone means appealing to no one. And your cold target market is only half the picture. The rest is already sitting in your CRM or applicant tracking system.

Your database is an operating asset

A clean ATS is not a mailing list. When founders eventually look to sell, a clean, current and well-structured database makes relationships, repeat business and market reach easier to evidence in due diligence. It will not set the value of the company on its own, but it is worth far more than a pile of duplicates and dormant records nobody trusts.

The quickest way to weaken it is to treat every record as one audience. Adding a first name does not make an irrelevant email personal. If recipients learn that your messages have little to do with their work, they stop opening them.

Before you remarket, separate clients from candidates, current relationships from old ones, and active opportunities from records that need checking. Remove duplicates, record preferences, respect opt-outs, and find where key information is missing. Recruiters should refresh records through their normal conversations, not in an annual clean-up.

Segment around meaningful similarities

For clients: company type, sector, hiring function, seniority, geography, relationship stage, the roles they recruit. For candidates: discipline, level, location, availability, career intent. A useful segment is specific enough that you can explain the decision its members make, the problem they have before a brief exists, and the piece of content they would save or forward.

In practice: one sector, two propositions

For Quay Group's Quay Crew division, Captains are the primary decision-makers for crew, so rather than vacancy emails we built a dedicated Captain portal with exclusive reports and practical tools, giving them a reason to return between assignments. Chief Stews are also high-value hiring decision-makers, but their needs differ, so they got a hiring toolbox running from writing a brief through to interviews, references, trials, offer and onboarding. Same market, two audiences, two propositions.

Segmentation does not always mean narrowing to a single ideal customer profile. An agency with the bandwidth can serve several valuable segments, provided each has its own proposition and content plan. The test is whether you can create something genuinely useful for that group, not whether you can swap the job title in a template.

As a starting rule, send no more than one genuinely useful marketing email per month to each segment. Frequency matters, but relevance matters more. One strong monthly email will do more for the relationship than a weekly update assembled because the calendar said something must go out.

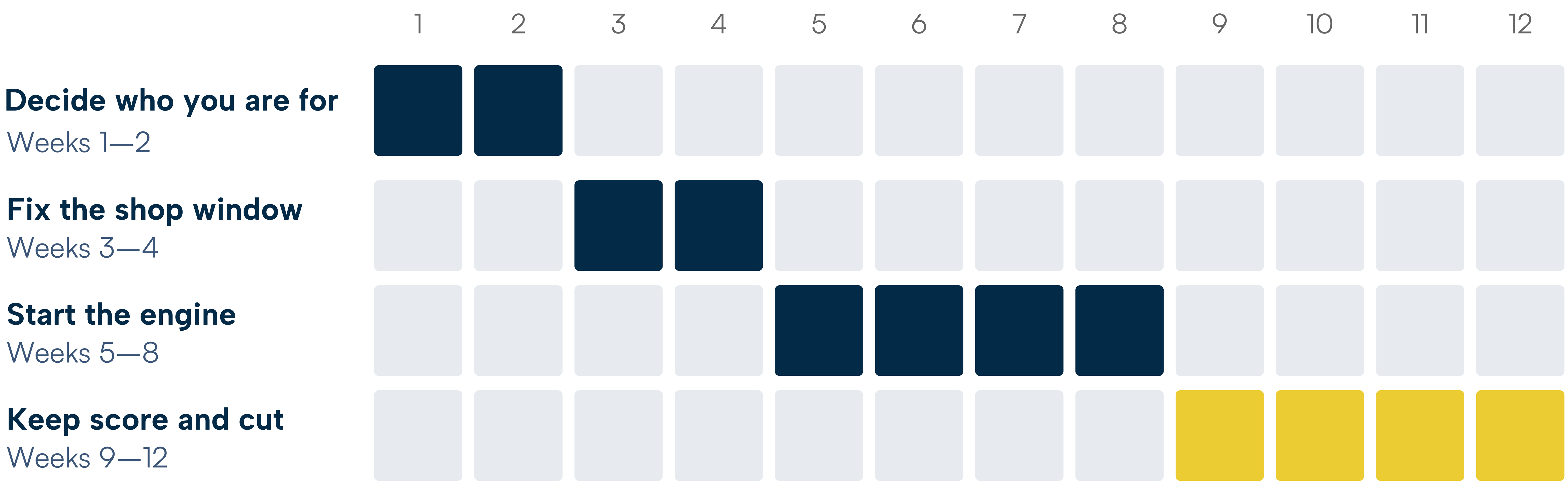
Five questions your audience plan must answer

Who is in each segment. What decision they influence. What problem they need help with. What content would earn their attention. What data or permission needs refreshing.

3. The first 90 days

A strategy only counts once it has dates on it. Founders ask us for a marketing plan more than they ask for anything else, so this is the structure we run with new clients, compressed to a quarter.

Figure 3 Twelve weeks, four decisions



One square per week.

Decide who you are for
Weeks 1—2

Pick the niche, write the one-line promise, and audit what you already spend on marketing against what it returned. Most firms find money in this fortnight before they spend any.

Fix the shop window
Weeks 3—4

Your website should say precisely who you place and prove it, and every consultant's LinkedIn profile should read like it was written for clients. Gather the case studies now, because everything later leans on them.

Start the engine
Weeks 5—8

Two substantial pieces of content a month answering questions hiring managers genuinely ask. Consultants posting weekly. One email sequence waking up the dormant client list you already own.

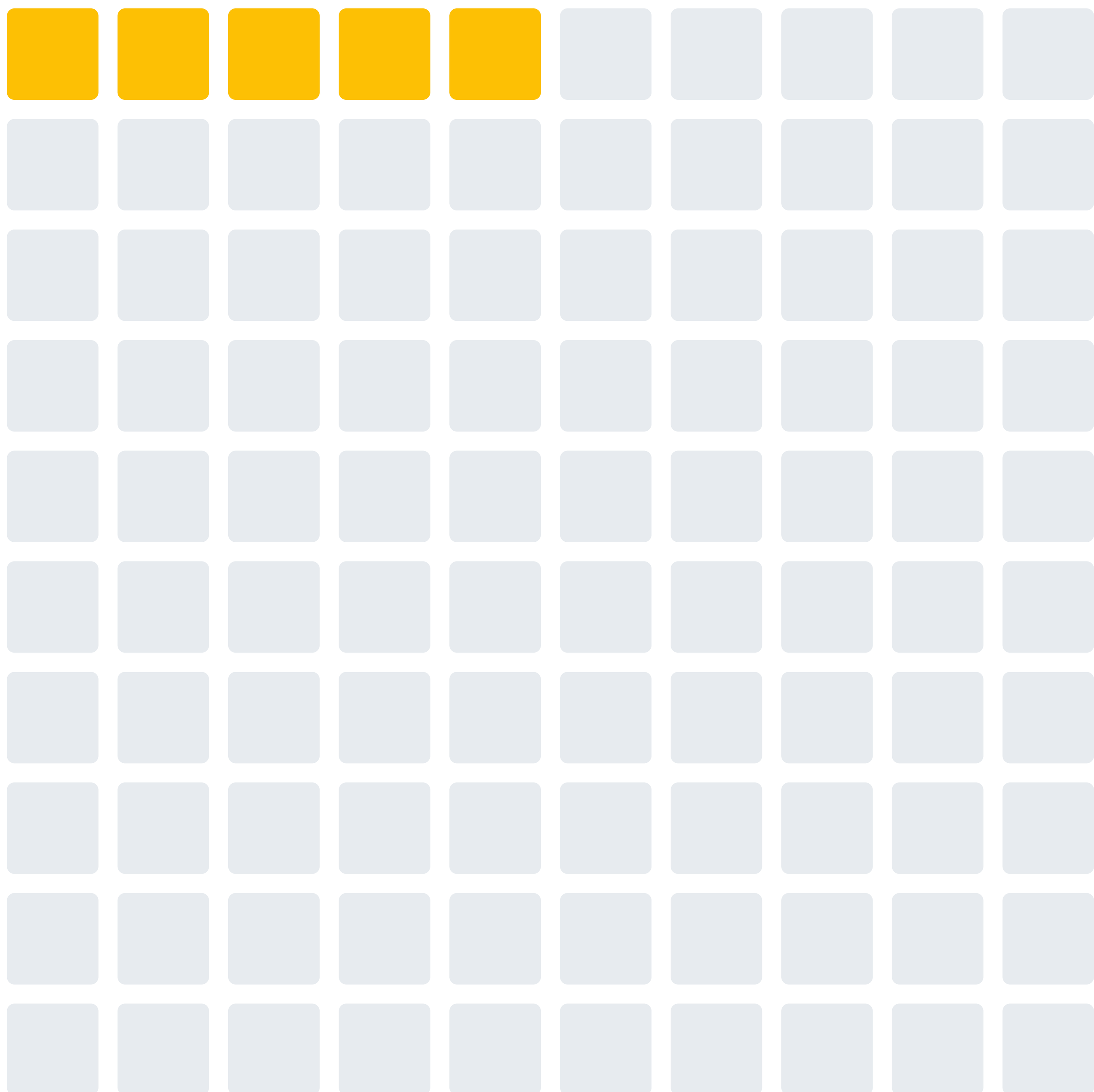
Keep score and cut
Weeks 9—12

Count mandates influenced, replies earned and meetings booked, never impressions. Kill whatever produced nothing and put its budget behind whatever did.

4. Content that earns attention

Compelling content is the linchpin of the strategy. Not a short post about your weekend, but long-form pillar content that builds credibility with the person reading it. There is a hard number behind the case for consistency.

Figure 4 Five buyers in a hundred are ready today



5% in-market

Actively looking for a recruitment partner right now. The sliver every agency in your niche is emailing.

95% future buyers

Not looking yet, but they will be. Consistent content is how you stay known to them until the brief exists.

Source: LinkedIn B2B Institute.

Understand the intent behind someone engaging with a piece of content and the format follows. Volume falls as you move down the funnel; intent rises. We would never suggest creating all of it and gating it on your website in the hope prospects find it.

Three tiers, three different asks

Figure 5 The content funnel

Top	Create awareness with people who have no brief yet.	EXAMPLE *Salary Guide 2026, ungated and refreshed every year.*
Middle	Help with a problem they already have.	EXAMPLE *How to select an executive search firm.*
Bottom	Remove the last objection.	EXAMPLE *How we cut time to hire by 50%.*

Top of funnel

Non-promotional content that introduces you to a wide audience and starts the relationship.

Salary guides. Hiring trend commentary. Visual guides to the hiring process. Webinars.

Middle of funnel

Content that helps a prospect overcome a specific challenge they already know they have.

How to select a search firm. Screening process guides. ROI calculators. Email courses.

Bottom of funnel

Content that removes the last objection for someone close to deciding.

Detailed case studies. Video testimonials. Service overviews with guarantees.

OUTREACH EXAMPLE

We have just completed our latest salary guide, benchmarking mid-senior tech roles including DevOps specialists and Full Stack Developers. We have also included some narrative on engaging a more diverse talent pool. Would you mind so much if I sent you a copy?

Always A/B test messaging across a small audience before going all in.

5. Channels, and what each is for

LinkedIn

The scale is hard to ignore: LinkedIn passed one billion members, and its own research says 81% of B2B buyers purchase from brands they already know on day one. Familiarity is the entry ticket.

Two channels matter: the company page and the personal profiles of your consultants. On the company page, consistency is everything, so set clear brand guidelines and give everyone a template. Blogs, industry news, job ads, infographics, events, career advice, success stories and employee spotlights all work. Organic reach is much lower than on a personal profile, so treat the page as support for the wider strategy rather than a pillar of it.

Personal profiles set the tone for who a consultant is and how they think. The most overlooked tactic on the platform is engaging with other people's content: it lifts the reach of your own posts, puts you in your audience's feed for content you did not create, and a genuinely insightful comment builds credibility on its own. If you are not comfortable posting yet, start by commenting.

Facebook, Instagram and X

Facebook is a candidate channel, not a client one, and it runs on groups rather than pages. If you place data engineers, UX developers or construction workers, your own well-moderated group with a clear title builds a talent pool you can tap when roles land. If client acquisition is the goal, Facebook is not the best use of your time or money.

Instagram and X rarely offer a trackable return, but they form part of an always-on brand presence. If you have the resource, be there, if only to funnel traffic to your website. If you are focused only on high-impact work, put them on hold.

Website and SEO

Your website is where clients and candidates form their first impression, and filling it with stock images is not the way to create a memorable brand experience. For every recruiter who believes hiring managers are not searching for recruitment agencies, there are a thousand hiring managers doing exactly that.

Organic and paid search together account for 68% of all trackable website traffic, and the top organic result captures roughly 27.6% of clicks. When a hiring manager needs a supplier, search is the first room they walk into.

SEO is a longer-term play, and if you are not doing something about it today your competitors are moving another step ahead. If you are working without a senior performance marketer, spend your time on keyword research: low-difficulty keywords with a mid to high cost per click are where the quicker wins sit.

> *The best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The second best time is today.*

Email

Not cold outreach: regular monthly or quarterly newsletters carrying your latest articles and market commentary. It has the best-documented return in the mix, at an average of $36 for every $1 spent and above $70 for the best programmes.

Repurpose the blogs already on your site or expand a high-performing LinkedIn post. Once the template exists, each send takes about an hour. Segment as the list grows, so the right content reaches the right audience and engagement holds.

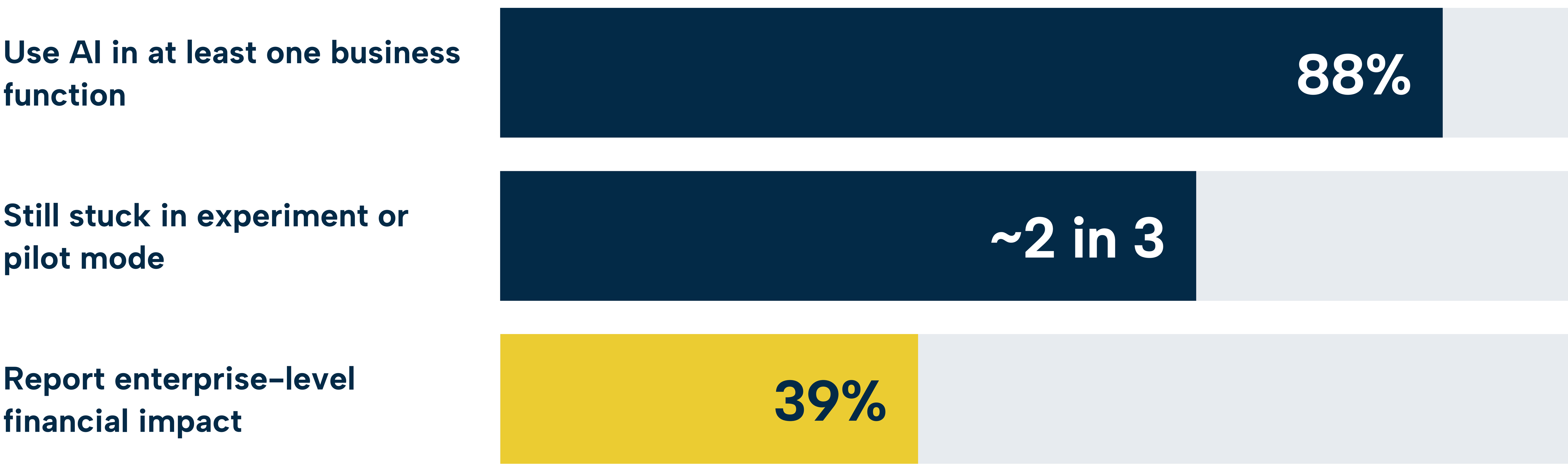
Measuring the activity

Data-driven decision making is what separates the firms growing their marketing from the firms guessing at it. There are good tools for the activity side, including OneUp Sales for team performance reporting.

6. AI: a tool, not a strategist

Every firm is being told the same thing: just use AI. Some have handed it the keys, letting it plan, write, design and publish the whole marketing output. It shows. Their content reads like everyone else's, because it is everyone else's. Our position, from people who use these tools every day: AI is excellent at executing tactics and hopeless at constructing strategy.

Figure 6 Nearly everyone uses AI. Few profit from it.



Source: McKinsey, State of AI, 2025. Nearly 2,000 organisations across 105 countries.

The gap between using AI and profiting from it is exactly the gap between tactics and strategy. AI has no understanding of your market, your desk economics, your clients' internal politics or your reputation. Ask it to plan next quarter and it will hand you a tidy, generic plan that could belong to any agency anywhere. Tidy and generic is what your competitors are already doing.

One away day, four commercial assets

An AI can transcribe the video and crop the photos. What it cannot do is see an employer value proposition page built from real people doing real things, a client-winning story about the culture candidates will be placed into, a month of micro-content with a different angle for each consultant, and a culture chapter in the market report you are about to publish. AI sees a photo. A strategist sees a funnel.

Where AI genuinely earns its keep

First drafts a human then rewrites, image resizing and variations, transcription, tidying data, testing headline variants, scheduling and admin. It compresses hours of production into minutes. The mistake is not using AI. The mistake is letting it decide what good is.

AI graphics without the slop

Graphics are where most AI output goes wrong and where it is easiest to fix. A well-constructed master prompt with your colours, fonts, logo rules, layout examples and approved styles baked in lets any consultant generate on-brand graphics without waiting for a designer.

That does two things at once: it gives consultants ownership of their own publishing, which is how you scale an authentic presence beyond one marketing person, and it keeps the brand intact, because a human designed the kit and reviews what comes out of it.

Slop versus AI-assisted content

There is a real difference. Slop is what happens when nobody asked why we are publishing this: generic, interchangeable, obviously machine-made. Your buyers can smell it, and so can Google, which has spent two years rewarding first-hand experience and deprioritising scaled, unreviewed content.

Reviewed content is different: a human decides the angle, the audience and the commercial purpose, then uses AI to accelerate production and checks the output before it ships. The tool is the same. The judgement is not.

> ***AI can write the post. It cannot decide what the post should achieve. That decision is the strategy, and the strategy is the job.***

7. Twelve ideas that pay their way

Every list of marketing ideas pads itself to fifty with “start a podcast”. These twelve we have watched produce actual mandates or placements, roughly in order of effort.

1. Rewrite every consultant's LinkedIn headline around the clients they serve, not the roles they fill.
2. Publish a salary guide for your niche, ungated, and refresh it every year. It earns links, and hiring managers keep it.
3. One case study per desk, with numbers a client would recognise as real.
4. Turn the ten questions you answer on every client call into ten articles.
5. Take a public position against one lazy industry practice. Differentiation is a stance, not a font.
6. A reactivation sequence for dormant clients, run properly. The cheapest revenue you will find this year.
7. Rewrite your job ads as if the client's brand depended on them. Clients notice, and candidates convert.
8. Claim and complete your Google Business Profile, then build local SEO around it if you serve a city.
9. Placement announcements with the client tagged, permission asked, every time it lands.
10. A quarterly market pulse email built from your own desk data. Nobody else has your numbers.
11. One industry event a quarter where your clients gather, written up afterwards for the ones who were not there.
12. A structured referral ask at placement and again at ninety days, when the hire has stuck and you are a hero.

Not one requires a new tool. Most require somebody senior deciding they matter, which is the actual gap in most firms.

8. Why traditional lead generation does not work here

Traditional lead generation means spamming a lot of people in the hope somebody agrees to a meeting. Three reasons it fails for search and recruitment firms.

The credibility threshold

As a service business you have to clear a credibility threshold, and it rises with the size of the client and the value of the contract. Nobody wins a retained CEO search by cold-calling board members.

The competitive marketplace

The Head of Data you are emailing has been approached by five other firms this month, all explaining how experienced they are, and already has relationships with a handful of agencies. Cold outreach alone gives them no reason to see you differently.

The job seeker

There is real value in candidate relationships, particularly in executive search where today's job seeker is tomorrow's hiring manager. But run cold outreach to everyone with a pulse and your diary fills with people who want a new job, and your days go on qualifying rather than selling.

9. Measuring whether it worked

Agree the measures before the work starts, so success is defined by something other than whether everyone likes the homepage. Count mandates influenced, replies earned and meetings booked. Never impressions. Kill whatever produced nothing and put its budget behind whatever did.

10. When to bring in help

Do it yourself if you are pre-revenue, if you need something live this month, or if your marketing is genuinely a placeholder while business comes from an existing network.

Bring in help when marketing has to earn its keep: when you are competing against firms with real budgets, when a single extra mandate is worth more than the investment, when you have a niche worth being known for, or when you have tried internally twice and it is still half finished because fee earners are quite reasonably prioritising fees.

What you get from an agency that you cannot get from a tool is the part that happens before the work starts. Someone who works out what makes you different, builds a visual and verbal identity around it, and then makes every asset serve a commercial objective agreed at the outset. Execution is the easy half. Knowing what to execute is the half that determines whether it works.

How we work

Fractional CMO

Senior marketing leadership with the team to deliver it, led personally rather than delegated.

Brand and website

A design system that belongs to you, built around your positioning rather than the average of the internet.

Content marketing

Pillar content, salary guides and market reports that build credibility and earn search traffic.

SEO

Technical work, ranked service pages, and content built for the commercial searches your buyers run.

LinkedIn and social

Company page and consultant profiles, with the brand kit that lets your team publish without waiting.

Email marketing

Segmentation, deliverability and the monthly programme that keeps your database warm.

Onboarding starts with deep market research, competitor analysis, audience insight and the real considerations your buyers have when choosing a recruitment agency. It ends with a clear marketing strategy built with you, before anything is executed.

Ready when you are

Turn these ideas into pipeline

We help recruitment and search firms put this thinking to work, from brand and content to the campaigns that fill the diary. We take on a small number of firms at a time.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

01

Discovery call

Thirty minutes on your desks, your market and where marketing is currently losing you mandates.

02

Strategy built with you

Market research, competitor analysis and audience insight, ending in a plan you have agreed before anything is executed.

03

Delivery

Brand, content, website, SEO, LinkedIn and email, measured on mandates influenced rather than activity.

Applications open

We need to be sure of a fit from the very beginning, so we start with an application rather than a pitch. It takes a few minutes and tells us whether we are the right agency for your firm.

limivex.co.uk/apply

The build is the easy half. Knowing what to build is the half that decides whether it works.

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