

# How to Identify a Great Headhunter?

*The 6 defining quality criteria – and how to tell the difference.*

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A guide by Wirz & Partners · [Top 1% Headhunter Switzerland](#) · since 2009 · [wirz-partners.ch](#)

## Introduction

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Choosing the right headhunter is one of the most consequential decisions a company can make. Yet the market is opaque: hundreds of recruitment consultants call themselves headhunters – very few genuinely meet the demands of executive search at the highest level. This guide shows what really matters.

### 1. A great headhunter is a brand in their own right – not their clients'

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#### — Own substance over borrowed names

A headhunter who primarily relies on client logos to build credibility is signalling one thing: they have no profile of their own. An excellent executive search partner has a clearly recognisable positioning, a proven methodology and measurable results. They are the brand.

#### — Independent recognition as a benchmark

Wirz & Partners has been recognised annually since 2020 by Handelszeitung/Statista as one of the Top 1% Headhunters in Switzerland – based on independent peer and client evaluation, not self-promotion. Quality that must be earned, not bought.

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### 2. No job postings on the website

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#### — A true headhunter searches actively – not passively

Job postings on a headhunter's website are a clear red flag: advertising on the open market is recruiting – not executive search. Senior leaders at board and C-level are not actively looking. They are approached directly and discreetly.

#### — Systematic direct search – not chance encounters

The Wirz & Partners research team of ten systematically maps every market in full – ensuring no top candidate is missed. The reason is straightforward: a job-posting approach structurally reaches only around 2% of the relevant market – those who happen to be actively looking at the time of the advert. The remaining 98% – often the strongest profiles – are simply never reached. There is also a qualitative dimension: someone who applies via a posting is primarily looking for a new job. Someone who is approached directly makes a deliberate choice to consider your company. That is a fundamentally different motivational starting point – and a decisive factor in long-term success in the role.

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### 3. They advise on the search brief – before they search

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#### — Strategic value from the outset

A good headhunter listens first. In over 90% of Wirz & Partners mandates, sector and functional expertise delivers strategic value in shaping the search brief. The result: sharper profiles, more realistic expectations and candidates who truly fit.

#### — Cultural fit is not a coincidence

A placement is only truly successful when it lasts. Wirz & Partners therefore places particular emphasis on company culture and values, leadership style and team dynamics. The result is measurable: 3.6× longer tenure than the market average.

### 4. They deliver measurable results within a clear timeframe

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#### — Numbers that speak for themselves

Quality in executive search is measurable: How long does a mandate take? How often do placed leaders succeed long-term? How many clients return? Anyone who cannot answer these questions clearly does not have compelling answers.

#### — Wirz & Partners key figures

Average time-to-fill 4 months · First-Shortlist-Hire-Ratio 99.8% · Tenure 3.6× longer than market average · 8/10 clients place a follow-on mandate · 4.9 stars on Google · 30% of mandates lead to multiple placements · 98% of clients become reference clients

## 5. They create a positive candidate experience

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### — Access to the best depends on how you treat people

The strongest leaders are not on the market – they are approached. How a headhunter engages with these individuals directly determines their access to top talent. A great headhunter treats every candidate professionally, reliably and as an equal – regardless of whether they progress in the process or not.

### — Candidate experience as protection for your employer brand

A search process brings numerous individuals into contact with your company. How that experience is shaped leaves a lasting impression – well beyond the placement itself. Through respectful, professional and reliable communication with all candidates – including those who do not progress – a positive candidate experience is created that actively strengthens your employer brand. Wirz & Partners manages this process so that your company is perceived positively in the market.

## 6. They bring genuine functional and industry expertise

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### — Without knowing the role, you cannot find the right person

A headhunter who searches for a CFO today and a Head of Marketing tomorrow – without deep knowledge of either function – is working with surface-level understanding. Real functional expertise means the advisor understands not just the job description, but the demands, tensions and success criteria of a role from practical experience. Only someone who knows what distinguishes an exceptional CFO from a good one can identify the right candidates – and filter out the wrong ones before they reach the shortlist.

### — Industry expertise is not a nice-to-have

Every market has its own logic: without understanding sector dynamics, a headhunter can neither truly assess candidates nor the context in which they need to succeed. With 17 years of market experience and deep sector expertise across Banking, Life Sciences & Pharma, Technology, Private Equity and Insurance, Wirz & Partners does not simply match profiles – it assesses with conviction whether someone will genuinely thrive in the environment where they are expected to make an impact.

## Key warning signs at a glance

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✗ **Job postings on the website**

A true headhunter searches directly and discreetly – not through public job adverts.

✗ **Relying on client logos instead of own substance**

If client names are the only reference, own profile and provable quality are absent.

✗ **Accepting the client's brief without challenge**

No strategic input, no market context, no advisory on the requirements – the consultant simply nods and starts searching.

✗ **No measurable results**

Anyone unable to cite retention figures, time-to-fill or repeat-mandate rates simply does not have them.

✗ **No regard for candidate experience**

Candidates are not followed up after rejection, receive no feedback and leave the process with a negative impression – one that reflects directly on your company.

✗ **No industry or functional expertise**

Anyone who fills every market and every role equally well excels at none. Without sector knowledge, candidates are matched on profile – not on fit.

## Wirz & Partners

*Top 1% Headhunter Switzerland · Board & C-Level · since 2009*

17 years of experience · 3× longer tenure · 4.9★ Google · recognised 6×

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