



MARKET RESEARCH

The Marketing Jobseeker Survey, Q4 2024

Nearly 200 UK marketing jobseekers told us how their search is really going — ghosting, oversubscribed roles, and a tougher picture the higher up you go.

We're naturally upbeat people, but we found it hard to find green shoots in our survey results. We asked nearly 200 marketing jobseekers how they felt about their current search, and we discovered ghosting galore, enormous competition for roles, and a talent acquisition sector that is often overwhelmed with candidates who often don't even fit the bill.

AT A GLANCE

Snapshot

25%

of marketers won't apply to roles with 100+ applicants on LinkedIn

50.3%

are pessimistic or very pessimistic about the market; only 15% are optimistic

35%

of marketers have been searching for more than 6 months

PESSIMISM BY SALARY

The Squeezed Top End

One of the key findings of our survey was that pessimism increases with experience. Those fighting it out for senior roles tend towards pessimism, while those applying for junior to midweight marketing roles are more neutral in their outlook. 60% of those seeking roles between £60k and £80k reported feeling pessimistic about the market, with 56% of those above that band saying the same. That compares to around 38% of those in the £45k–£60k bracket, where 17% also said they felt optimistic. Optimism is obviously in short supply at the top end — only 12.5% of the £80k–£120k bracket reported back positively.

Pessimism climbs with the salary you're chasing

Share of jobseekers in each salary band who feel pessimistic about the market

£45k–£60k

38%

£60k–£80k

60%

Above £80k

56%

The £45k–£60k figure is reported as "around 38%". Source: Example Recruitment survey

IN THEIR WORDS



I've never known the market so tough for senior marketers — oversubscribed with many good people on the market.

— SURVEY RESPONDENT



I think that there's a lot of talent on the market, but very few senior positions available.

— SURVEY RESPONDENT

This is backed up by the Office for National Statistics, which reports a 4.7% drop in job vacancies being posted between June and August, with marketing particularly affected. However, 35% of UK marketing departments told us they're ready to hire before the year ends.

THE 100-APPLICANT CLIFF

One in Four Not Applying



of marketers won't apply to a role once LinkedIn shows 100 or more applicants.

LinkedIn is obviously the most popular job platform, but one in four marketers told us they won't apply to a role once it shows 100 or more applicants. That means hiring managers are losing out on a quarter of the market — but do they even notice? With hundreds of applicants per role, Talent Acquisition professionals are flooded with candidates, many of them irrelevant, which implies the better candidates are being put off applying at all.

Ashby reports a 300% increase in applications for marketing roles between January 2021 and January 2024. Combined with the reported drop in roles available, many candidates are stuck in a loop of endless applications, often not hearing back at all, and even being ghosted by recruiters and hiring managers who are simply overwhelmed by the sheer number of applications.



We often see the same candidates applying for every role we advertise. How can these people be suitable for every role we have open?

— TALENT ACQUISITION RESPONDENT

GHOSTING

Giving Up the Ghosting

We found an interesting, and yet altogether obvious statistic — the more candidates are ghosted, the more pessimistic they feel about the job market. While ghosting spans every salary level, it's especially prevalent at the executive end: 87.5% of people seeking a CMO or VP role said they'd been ghosted. Below £45k, that figure rises above 92%.

87.5% of people seeking a **CMO or VP role** said they'd been ghosted.

“The more candidates are ghosted, the more pessimistic they feel about the job market — and it gets worse the higher up you go.”



Companies want the absolute world from candidates — 3 interviews and a task, then we're ghosted! It took me 8 months and hundreds of rejections to finally get the job I'm in now.

— SURVEY RESPONDENT

THE LONGER THE SEARCH

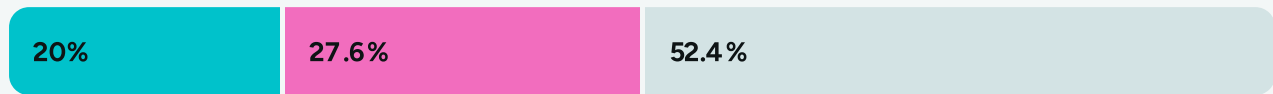
Time on the Market

If we're to look for any optimism, it tends to be found among those who've only been on the market for 1–3 months: 20% feel optimistic and just 27.6% feel pessimistic right now — perhaps an early sign the market is picking up a little in mid-range roles, where most of these respondents sit. Optimism declines sharply from there. Of those on the market for 3–6 months, 63.6% report pessimism and just 4.5% say they feel optimistic. Those who've been searching longer tend to be seeking higher salaries too — 38.9% of people on the market for more than a year are seeking roles above £120k, backing up the finding that the squeeze is worst at the top end. Most worrying of all: 67% of people who've been job-hunting for less than a month say they've already been ghosted at least once.

Optimism fades fast after the first three months

How jobseekers feel about the market, by time spent searching

On the market 1–3 months



On the market 3–6 months



■ Optimistic ■ Pessimistic ■ Everyone else

"Everyone else" is the remainder who reported neither optimism nor pessimism. Source: Example Recruitment survey

PAY

A Result of the Squeeze? Lowball Offers

Looking into the qualitative data, we saw a sizeable number of respondents reporting lowball offers — being offered a salary below what they perceive as market value, particularly in the senior market where expectations and competition are both highest. That runs against some of the official data: Hays reports 78% of marketing employers gave salary increases over the past year, with marketing salaries up 2.6% overall, albeit lower than the UK average increase of 3.5%. Interestingly, a number of Example candidates have recently been offered salaries above the stated band without prompting — the first time we've noticed this internally, and possibly an early sign the market is loosening.

Marketing pay rises lag the UK average

Salary increase over the past year (Hays)

Marketing salaries

2.6%

UK average

3.5%

Source: Example Recruitment research



Be selective about applications. Find joy in not working. Think about other revenue streams. Mentor and give back. Things will pick up — but not if we work for silly low rates.

— SURVEY RESPONDENT

ADVICE FROM TA TEAMS

What You Can Do About It



Both recruiters and hiring companies are treating applicants poorly, probably due to sheer volume of applicants, but many companies that I have reached the final interview stage with have seemed confused about what they are looking for and ask for a lot from candidates in terms of tasks and presentations, only to reject with a simple email at the end. I have lost a lot of confidence and self-esteem over the last year of job searching.

— SURVEY RESPONDENT

We get you. With 20 years' experience as marketers ourselves, we've been there — and now we're on the other side, we can see why some of this bad behaviour exists. We spoke to Talent Acquisition managers around the UK to find out their advice for job seekers.

Stop applying for everything. The experience of many in the profession is that candidates aren't even reading the full job description — the resulting clutter is off-

putting both to candidates who can see hundreds of applications, and to hiring managers sifting through inordinate numbers of unsuitable candidates. We tend not to use job boards ourselves, simply because we get better candidates when headhunting — and the mirror of that sentiment shows in our survey, where applicants are put off by excessive application volumes, and 58% say they'd prefer to go through recruiters than job boards.

- Think about what hiring managers actually want — relate directly to what the company needs, which is often hidden in the job description or implied in company news and press releases (mergers, acquisitions, new clients). Demonstrate something extra that other candidates aren't.
- Differentiate yourself — pick up the phone. We can count on one hand the number of candidates who've called us speculatively this year, and yet we receive 10–20 CVs every single day, often with no message at all. It's no longer about 'getting on a database' — everyone is already on one somewhere. It's about establishing real conversations with the right people.
- Think about traditional and modern skills together — digital skills are the most sought after, but it's those who combine them with traditional marketing fundamentals who rise to the top. Display the mix of skills, not just the stats.
- Nobody sets out to ghost you — most recruiters and hiring managers are stretched, handling multiple roles without a full team, and things fall down the cracks despite best intentions. Follow up, nudge people, ask for feedback — it's often there.
- Move with the market if you're entering it at junior level — the market currently doesn't need more social media managers, for instance, and that hasn't changed in nearly a year. Ask what will give you an edge: is it Python? Is it AI agents?

WHY IT'S HAPPENING

The Underlying Causes

A continual 'wait and see' policy is partly to blame. There should be confidence — the UK has a new government backed by big business — but a delayed budget with messages of doom and gloom has left many hiring managers told to sit tight until employment legislation and tax regimes are adjusted. The result: a high volume of people 'open to

work' but still in employment, on teams that are increasingly stretched, in both marketing and Talent Acquisition alike.



Economic factors mean companies are risk averse and holding on to cash. Companies hire to grow, and growing requires taking some level of risk. No risk, no growth, no hire.

Technology isn't helping either. One in four candidates won't apply to roles that already show 100+ candidates on LinkedIn Jobs — except that number often just reflects Easy Apply clicks, not real submissions. Easy Apply being so easy has left the field open to applicants submitting the same CV everywhere, including one candidate who built an AI system generating bespoke cover letters and CVs for every job going. Imagine the ATS that automatically funnels him into a talent pool — a world where the technology does everything, badly.



I think there will be a stabilisation of tech in the market, but I also think there'll be a need for a more human touch as the economy starts to grow and your normal recruiter stops treating candidates like cattle. I have heard some real horror stories in recent months.

— TALENT ACQUISITION RESPONDENT

There's also what we're calling precision hiring. A frequent candidate complaint is losing out for being too 'generalist' — over 60% of respondents described themselves as generalist digital marketers, the rest specialising in SEO, PPC or content. As companies do more with less and hire smaller teams, they're looking for the ideal background with the ideal experience, and with a high availability of talent, hiring managers can afford to be choosy. Where 'transferable skills' once sold a career change, that's no longer enough — there's simply an excess of talent. Interestingly, AI tools are starting to cut through this mess and surface the right candidates faster, but that doesn't reduce the volume of applications — if anything it may increase the tendency towards hyper-specificity, leaving good candidates behind.



Companies are very prescriptive on what they are looking for and unfortunately do not always see how transferrable skills may be from one industry to another.

OUTLOOK

The Final Word

Markets are cyclical, even when they don't feel like it — and this one has been on a downturn since the days of Liz Truss. Marketing can often be seen as a nice-to-have, and when budgets tighten, it's the first thing stripped back to essentials. That's what's happened over the last two years: teams flattened, senior leaders cast aside as specialists take on multiple responsibilities, and marketers imported into a market that doesn't have the need. The post-pandemic boom, led by tech firms assuming growth would carry on forever, cut marketing along with everything else once that assumption broke.

And now AI is on the horizon. There's little evidence yet that it's replacing marketing roles — it may even underpin the next phase of growth, and tech companies hiring tech roles again could be a leading indicator. Until that happens, though, the only real answer is to stay hyper-specific, because that's currently what employers want, and can get, given the excess of talent in the marketplace. You can always pick up new technology skills to respond to market needs and then align them with your background.

OUR VIEW

A Manifesto for the Human Touch

I only joined the recruitment industry in 2022, after 20 years in digital marketing and experiencing poor recruitment practices myself — that's where I saw the opportunity. There are some very good recruiters who offer real value to both candidates and hiring managers alike. Too many, though, treat candidates like cattle to be traded, and as their markets dry up, they become desperate. That, combined with increased use of AI, means

poor recruiters can mass-mail candidates, offer hope, then disappear once they've got a list of CVs to upload to a system that goes unchecked for days or weeks — if at all. Add the sheer volume of applicants who never get a response, and you have a recruitment market broken by recruiters and by technology, with the good work of the few clouded by the poor behaviour of the many.

We aren't alone in wanting to be different. We don't want to use job ads for marketing roles unless we absolutely have to, and we'll continue to make personal outreach to candidates we think are a good fit. We'll only take on roles we've done ourselves or line-managed, because it helps to speak to a recruiter who's actually done what you're doing. We can't help everyone, but we recognise we're dealing with people's lives, and that's a huge responsibility. Many of the market's problems come down to technology taking away the human element, making it easier to hide behind a screen — from mass applications to ghosting. Only human interaction can improve it.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

The TL;DR

OK, so the market hasn't improved much and many people are still searching and being ghosted. The important thing is what you — the candidate — can actually do about it.

- ☐ If you feel you're right for the role and you're being ghosted, pick up the phone. We get hundreds of CVs a month, but often just one or two calls.
- ☐ Find new areas of differentiation and new skills — the next wave of marketing will likely be AI-driven. Can you use Python? Can you build AI agents?
- ☐ If you're a digital specialist, don't forget traditional marketing skills — brush up on your PESTLE and your brand marketing. It can be a huge differentiator.
- ☐ Really try to relate to what hiring managers and companies are trying to do with their hiring. Get under the skin of the company and relate back to it.



Example Recruitment — marketing-led headhunters for SaaS and FinTech startups and scaleups in New York and London.

Read the live report and get in touch at theexample.co/reports/marketing-jobs-market-q4-2024