



RENT A RECRUITER

SCALING SMART IN 2026

HOW FOUNDERS ATTRACT,
HIRE & RETAIN TOP TALENT

A Note to the Founders Who Joined Us

Thank you again for joining us at the Guinness Enterprise Centre for our Scaling Smart in 2026 Lunch & Learn.

The energy in the room said everything about the challenges founders are facing right now:

- hiring slowing growth
- uncertainty around AI
- difficulty finding the right people fast enough
- concerns about retaining A-players
- pressure to scale sustainably

Across three peer-led Roundtables, founders openly shared their hiring bottlenecks, frustrations, wins and war stories.



AI IN RECRUITMENT

Barry Prost
Chair & Chief Strategy Officer



TALENT ATTRACTION

Marwa Hughes
Recruitment Lead



RETENTION & CULTURE

Mark Loughnane
Chief Operating Officer



Why Scaling Smart Matters More Than Ever

Scaling fast is easy. Scaling smart is what separates the success stories from the hiring headaches.

Across all three tables, founders agreed on one thing: the talent landscape has fundamentally changed. SMEs are navigating a recruitment environment where:

- AI is reshaping candidate behaviour and workflow expectations
- CVs and early interviews now reveal less signal than ever as candidates use AI writing and coaching tools
- Retention depends far more on clarity and communication than perks
- Speed of decision-making is a competitive advantage, not a nice-to-have

Founders who thrive in 2026 will be those who stop thinking about headcount and start thinking about capability-per-hire.

Inside the Table Talks: What Founders Told Us



TABLE 1 — AI in Recruitment

Where AI accelerates hiring — and where humans still win

Founders at this table were aligned: AI is no longer optional. It's a strategic differentiator but only when used intentionally.

Key Founder Insights	
<p>1. The Shift to Output-Based Hiring</p> <p>Founders are moving from headcount planning to capability per hire: "The question is no longer how many people we hire, it's how much output each hire can deliver."</p>	<p>4. Keep Human Judgment Where It Matters</p> <p>Culture evaluation, nuanced communication, expectation-setting, and final decisions remain human-led. AI is a co-pilot, not a replacement.</p>
<p>2. The AI Arms Race / Future of hiring</p> <p>Candidates are using AI faster than employers can adapt, so CVs and first-round interviews reveal less real capability; move signal-finding earlier with scenario/work-sample assessments.</p>	<p>5. Governance Matters: Write the Policy</p> <p>Adopt a clear AI-in-Hiring policy covering acceptable use, transparency to candidates, fairness, and compliance.</p>
<p>3. Automate the Right Things</p> <p>Use AI for CV triage, interview scheduling, candidate summaries, and other repetitive pre-interview workflows to gain speed and consistency.</p>	

The path is clear: as CV triage, scheduling, and other first-mile tasks move to AI agents particularly in higher-volume roles. Teams can shift human time to higher-signal assessment (work samples, scenarios) and final decisions.

“Test how people think — not how well they prompt.”



TABLE 2 — Talent Attraction: Winning Top Talent Before Your Competitors Do

This table captured a strong sense of frustration: founders know top talent is out there, but they're losing them too often.

The 3 Barriers Founder Recognised

1. Speed	2. Realistic Expectations	3. Clarity
<p>Top candidates move fast. Every 10-day delay increases drop-off by 15–20%.</p> <p>This is where most SMEs bleed talent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many interviewers • Too many stages • Slow feedback from hiring managers 	<p>The Talent Triangle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience • Salary • Speed <p>Most founders expect all three but the reality is you only get two. If none are flexible, you need to differentiate meaningfully (remote-first, 4-day week, flexibility).</p>	<p>This was the biggest pain point raised:</p> <p>Founders often can't articulate what they really need or change their minds mid-process.</p> <p>This kills momentum and confuses candidates.</p>

Takeaways from the Table

1. Cap interview stages at 3
2. Give CV/interview feedback within 24–48 hours
3. Keep candidates warm after offer. Invite to team lunch; set up their email; share a "first week" plan within 48 hours.
4. Remove decision drag. For standout applicants, skip straight to decision top teams bend their process to win speed-sensitive talent.

“Indecision is the biggest talent-killer.”



TABLE 3 — Retention & Culture: Keeping A-Players in 2026

The strongest insight from this table was clear: retention starts before day one.

Key Founder Insights on Retention

1. Proactive Onboarding	2. Hire for Culture & Attitude (70/30)
<p>Founders unanimously agreed that documented, repeatable onboarding is critical.</p> <p>Without it, knowledge gets diluted, expectations drift, and early momentum is lost.</p>	<p>Skills = teachable. Values & attitude = not.</p> <p>Founders highlighted the tension between hiring urgently vs. hiring right.</p> <p>The ideal ratio: 70% attitude & values / 30% technical skills. Skills are teachable; values misalignment isn't.</p>
3. Communication as Culture	4. Diversity Drift
<p>The strongest retention driver discussed was communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clarity of decisions • clarity of expectations • clarity of performance <p>When communication is poor, engagement collapses.</p>	<p>Founders identified a common risk: hiring "people like us".</p> <p>This unintentionally shrinks the talent pool and limits innovation.</p>

What High-Retention SMEs Do

- Define culture expectations early
- Create a 30-60-90-day plan for every new hire
- Build communication routines (weekly 1:1s, transparent updates)
- Train hiring managers to assess inclusively

“Most retention problems are actually communication problems in disguise.”

What High-Growth Companies Are Doing Differently

Across the three tables, the fastest-growing companies in the room were already:

- Hiring based on impact, not headcount
- Automating early-funnel friction while keeping human connection at the centre
- Using AI as a productivity multiplier
- Making decisions faster
- Investing in documented onboarding
- Building communication systems to eliminate uncertainty

Assess Your Hiring Performance in 3 Minutes

Two powerful tools to benchmark and improve your hiring instantly.

1. Rate Your Recruitment Process

Your 3-minute hiring health check.

Identify your strengths, blind spots, and bottlenecks across:

- Employer Branding
- Hiring Practices
- Candidate Experience
- Diversity & Inclusion

Personalised report & recommendations



[Start Your Free Health Check ->](#)

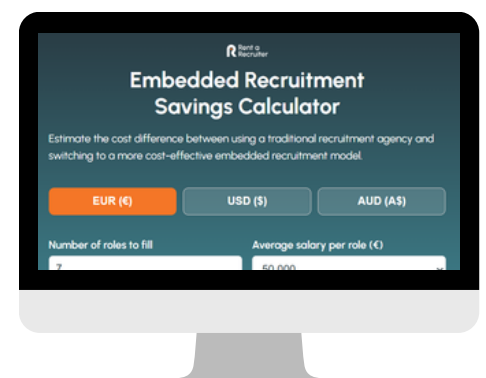
View cost savings breakdown

2. Embedded Recruitment ROI Calculator

See how much you could save by switching from agency recruitment to an embedded model.

Calculate your estimated cost savings instantly by comparing:

- Traditional agency recruitment costs
- Your projected embedded model costs
- Savings difference across your 3/6 month hiring plan



[Compare Your Recruitment Costs ->](#)

Practical Frameworks for SMEs

Founder-ready models to hire, retain, and scale smarter in 2026

The Smart Hiring Funnel

Awareness → Interest → Assessment → Decision → Onboarding

- Where to use AI: top-of-funnel screening, scheduling, and preparation.
- Where to stay human: judgment, culture fit, expectation-setting.

The 3-Stage Maximum Interview Rule

Best-performing SMEs limit the process to:

- Capability & values screening
- Scenario-based work sample
- Final founder/hiring manager conversation

Anything more slows hiring and increases candidate drop-off.

The Output-Per-Hire Model

Before writing a job description, define:

- What impact must this role deliver in 90 days?
- What output signals success?
- What does "excellent" vs "acceptable" look like?

Then design the role backward from those outcomes.

The Inclusive Hiring Checklist

To avoid "diversity drift," ensure:

- Diverse interview panel formats
- Structured scoring
- Behaviour-based questions
- Clear separation of must-have vs nice-to-have
- No over-reliance on "culture similarity"

The Retention Flywheel

Clarity → Connection → Communication → Consistency → (back to Clarity)

Retention strengthens when these four happen in a loop. Break the loop, and retention suffers.

Why Founders Choose Rent a Recruiter



Rent a Recruiter provides embedded, agile recruitment solutions for scaling organisations across Ireland and internationally.

- ✓ Embedded model = lower cost per hire
- ✓ AI-enabled sourcing = faster pipelines
- ✓ Deep experience across 100+ high-growth SMEs
- ✓ Flexible monthly engagement
- ✓ Recruitment, retention, and employer brand support
- ✓ A partner that scales with you

Over 100 companies trust us to help them scale smarter



Looking for a higher-quality recruitment solution at a lower cost per hire?

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sales@rentarecruiter.com | www.rentarecruiter.com



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www.rentarecruiter.com
sales@rentarecruiter.com