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ENCORE

2025 Top Trends in Executive Search Technology

White Paper

Cluen has once again collected the survey results for search professionals around the world, to help you always stay a step ahead.

As we head into the year 2026, the executive search industry has reached a pivotal moment. What was once considered "experimental" technology (AI-powered sourcing, workflow automation, and predictive analytics) has quickly become foundational. In Cluen's 2025 survey, a majority of firms reported not only adopting these tools but reshaping entire business models around them.

Yet with maturity comes new challenges. How do you balance speed with accuracy? Where do you draw the line between automation and human insight? Which tools are creating measurable ROI, and which are distractions?

This year's white paper goes beyond adoption trends to uncover how forward-thinking firms are leveraging technology to drive client trust, candidate experience, and long-term business growth. By comparing your practices with your peers, you'll gain a sharper view of what's working, what's fading, and what's next.

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## What generative AI products is your firm using?

We all know that ChatGPT adoption has surged the last couple years. This year, it's not just about trying AI but about integrating it into every stage of the search process.

Cluen's 2025 survey data confirms the leap in generative AI usage. 73.5% of executive search firms reported using ChatGPT, with Microsoft Copilot (45%) and Google Gemini (12%) also gaining traction. Remarkably, only 9% of firms said they use none of the major Large Language Models, which is down from 22% last year.

This signals a critical shift in mindset that AI is no longer a novelty. It's becoming foundational infrastructure for executive search professionals to reach maximum potential.

Cluen's customers are using **built-in OpenAI** features in its industry-leading platform, Encore, to eliminate redundant admin work, enrich candidate insights, and even power client-facing reporting.

They also extend their Cluen Encore system to their own AI tools and integrate through Cluen's partnerships with the leading providers of executive search specific AI offerings.
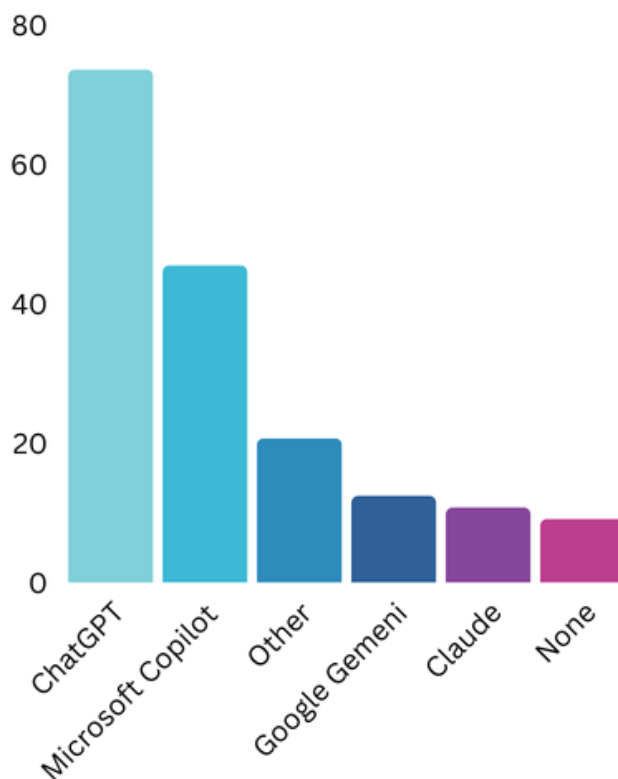
Where AI is gaining the most traction:

✓ Candidate outreach personalization

✓ Market mapping and research

✓ Meeting summaries and prep

✓ Status report generation

Which of the following are you most interested in using generative AI for in your process? Check all that apply.

Firms reported the top AI use cases as:

✓ Candidate write-ups (73%)

✓ Employer role description writing (69%)

✓ Business Development research (55%)

✓ Progress reporting & interview prep (34%+)

The trend is clear: firms are moving beyond "experimenting" with AI toward integrated daily use across the search lifecycle.

Compared to last year, fewer firms reported "data entry" as a major pain point, suggesting automation is already relieving some of the most repetitive tasks. However, the challenge has shifted to higher-order processes like research and reporting, areas where smarter AI and workflow tools are now being applied.

AI Hub

As the pioneer in executive search technology, Cluen is providing features that empower you to build your own best practices for incorporating AI into Encore, or your recruiting process.

Stay at the forefront of AI technology in recruiting, with some of **Encore's AI Features** evolving in each update. This is all done using a secure implementations of OpenAI's GPT systems. When using this feature through Encore, Open AI doesn't store the info and won't be used in their further training, whereas if you were to use public ChatGPT directly, your inputs would be used in future iterations of the AI.

Workflows

Eliminate repetitive tasks by automating your workflows. One complete task triggers the next task, working for you behind the scenes.

Hive

Encore centralizes communication so every client and candidate interaction is automatically captured and organized in one place. This gives executive search professionals instant visibility into relationships and ensures **data is always accessible, searchable, and actionable**, without extra effort.

Survey responses reveal that the top time drains in 2025 are:

✓ Online research and candidate sourcing
✓ Client reporting and documentation
✓ Interview scheduling

Integrations

Encore continues to evolve as the central hub of executive search technology. Our LinkedIn Plug-in powered by **NIXZ** remains a favorite, allowing you to **capture and update candidate data directly from LinkedIn** without breaking focus or juggling multiple tabs.

This year, we're expanding that power with new AI-driven integrations designed to reduce manual work and sharpen your competitive edge. With **SourceWhale**, you can **automate outreach campaigns** that sync directly into Encore, combining AI-driven engagement with Cluen's deep relationship intelligence to strengthen connections and move seamlessly from outreach to signed engagement.

We've also partnered with Quil and Noon.ai to bring automation and intelligence deeper into the search lifecycle. **Quil's AI-powered note-taking** automatically captures and drafts call notes directly into Encore, eliminating administrative burdens and keeping documentation complete and searchable.

Noon.ai takes sourcing to the next level with **fully autonomous candidate discovery, screening, and ranking**, learning your preferences and delivering results up to 20× faster than manual methods. Together, these integrations transform Encore into a strategic command center that helps your firm complete searches faster, engage top talent more effectively, and deliver lasting client impact.

NIXZ LinkedIn Plugin
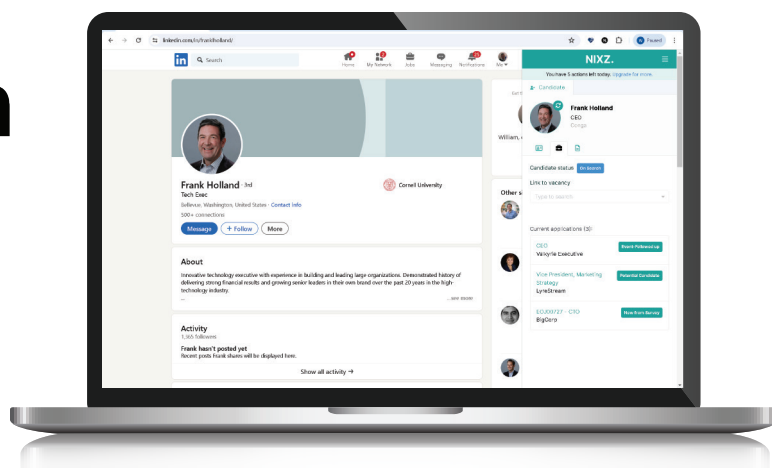
Email Marketing

Track email analytics natively with **Encore's Email Blast tool**, fully integrated with your Microsoft or Google mailbox. Instead of sending blind bulk messages, you can now see who opens and clicks, connect with the most engaged contacts at the right time, and trigger automated data updates or follow-up actions in real time. While the majority of survey respondents still rely on Outlook for bulk email, the lack of built-in performance metrics leaves valuable insights untapped.

Encore closes this gap, and takes it further with **AI-powered resume parsing, automated outreach via email, and rules-based automations** for all phases of the information lifecycle. Together, these tools save recruiters time while keeping them focused on the prospects and candidates most likely to move searches forward.

What email blasting tools does your firm use?

RocketReach Apollo.io MailChimp
Constant Contact ENCORE
Microsoft Outlook
SourceWhale LinkedIn
Lusha SalesHandy
Katalyst Built into my executive Smartlead
ActiveCampaign search database HubSpot
Go High Level SendGrid ZoomInfo MailerLite

Seamless Data Entry

The power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) continues to do the heavy lifting for you by automatically **connecting the dots between LinkedIn data, team communications, search execution efforts, and documents**. All is found in one hub, so you gain more insight with less effort. Updating Search Status is simple with Encore's Kanban-style drag-and-drop "Card View," making pipeline management intuitive and transparent.

Pipeline Card View
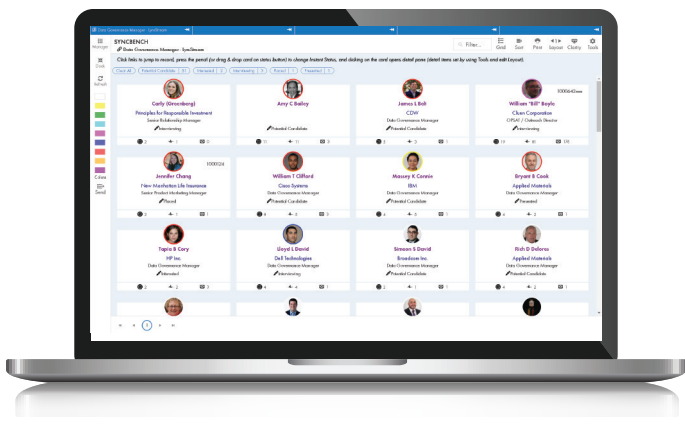
Managing data is just as seamless: integrate data with internal tools to enrich progress tracking with clear visualizations.

By consolidating workflows and data entry into just a few clicks, **Encore keeps your system clean, centralized, and ready to drive smarter, more strategic insights.**

Automated Compliance

Stay in compliance with GDPR and your local regulations through fully automated sequences with updates reflected across the system.

Status Reporting

Setting automation rules and pre-set templates allows you to create branded, customized client status reports in one click, or even rely on rules-based automation for real-time web reporting portals with zero clicks.

We've taken automation further with Synbench email blasts that include dynamic links, enabling recipients to provide direct feedback. (For example, indicating whether they are interested in discussing a certain opportunity).

Your team can predefine how responses update candidate records, so when a recipient clicks, their **Status in Encore is automatically updated.** These features not only save time but also keep your data current, accurate, and actionable without extra effort.

Are you using the latest AI safely and effectively?

With great power comes new caution. 73% of firms still report ethical or practical concerns, especially around:

✓ Data privacy

✓ Bias in output

✓ Overreliance on generative summaries

This underscores the need for responsible integration: tools must augment, not replace, human judgment.

Many search firms have made it their policy to always double-check AI-generated summaries before client delivery. Still, with 55% of firms investing in AI training and 40% having formal policies in place, the professionalization of AI is well underway.

What concerns, if any, do you have regarding the ethical implications of AI usage in Executive Search?
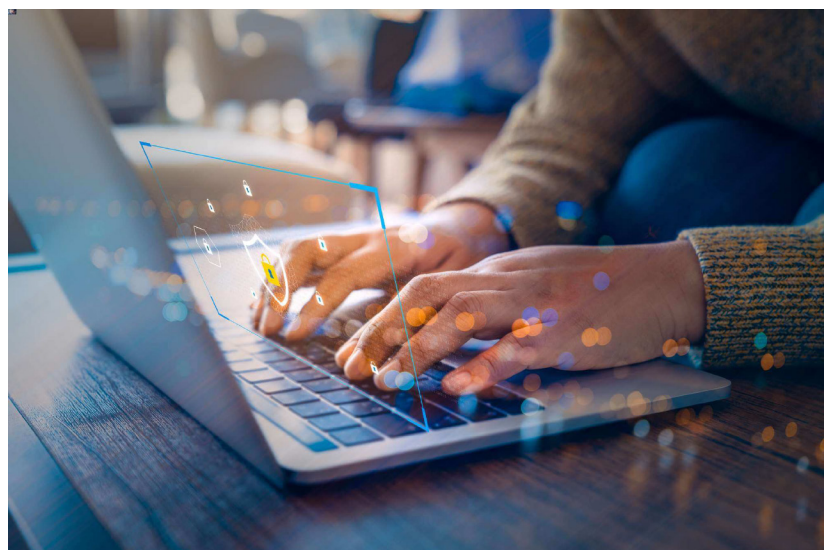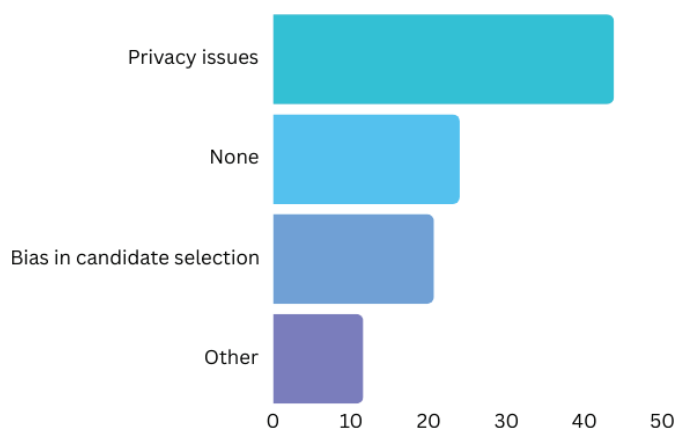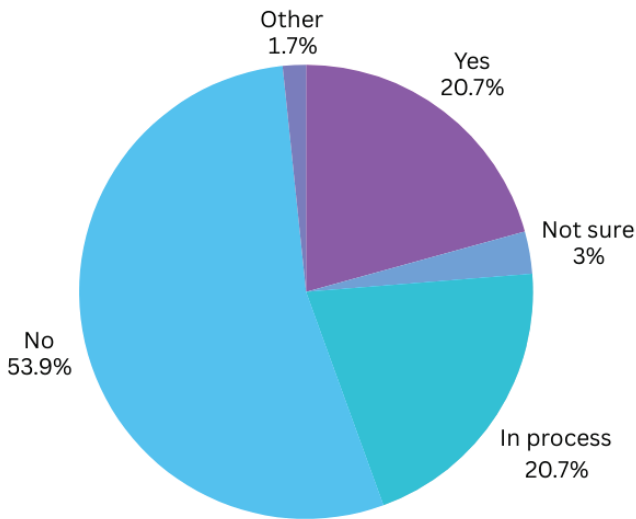
Effective since February of this year, the EU's AI Act requires companies to ensure employees reach a baseline level of AI literacy. For executive search professionals, this means going beyond knowing how to use AI tools. Recruiters and researchers will need to understand how AI generates outputs, recognize potential bias in candidate scoring, and apply ethical and legal standards when using AI to handle sensitive client or candidate information.

Firms that implement structured training will be better positioned to build trust with clients, avoid compliance risks, and unlock the full value of AI in search workflows.

EU Artificial Intelligence Act

Does your firm have an AI policy in place?

Other
1.7%

Yes
20.7%

Not sure
3%

No
53.9%

In process
20.7%

The same amount of respondents stated either already having an established AI policy, or having one in progress. However, more than half of the respondents do not have an AI policy in place. With the growing need to stay abreast of the possible risks AI could pose, search firms are turning to training courses to sharpen their confidence in safely using AI to grow their business.

To win new business, having key data at your fingertips is crucial. More firms are recognizing this, with 70% of survey respondents now managing their Business Development directly in their executive search database, a sharp increase from prior years.

This marks a meaningful shift away from manual tools like Excel (13%) and general CRMs like HubSpot or Salesforce (under 6% combined). By centralizing BD alongside search activity, firms are ensuring stronger data integrity, clearer reporting, and more actionable insights.

HubSpot 2.6%
None 8.7%
Excel 13%
Other 5.2%
In my executive search database 70.4%
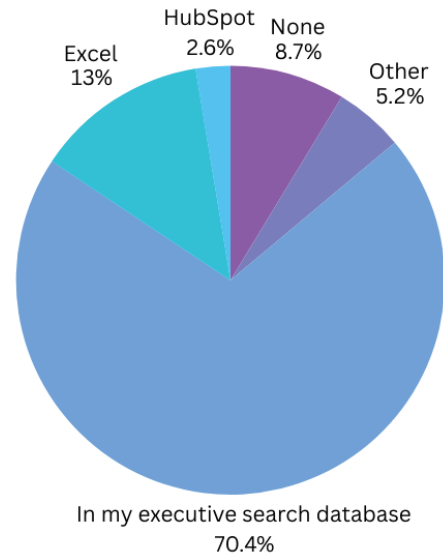
Encore's BD Dashboard

✓ Focus on the most important prospects

✓ View a pipeline of potential business

✓ Forecast revenues by consultant, practice or whole team

✓ Support your internal BD reporting and team meetings
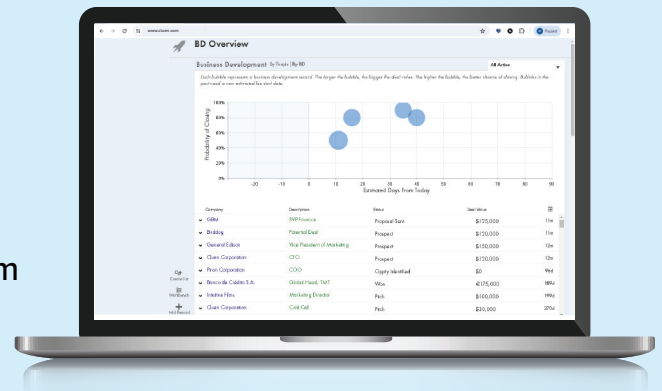
Encore's **Business Development Insights** panel continues to evolve as the industry standard, helping firms track opportunities, **connect the dots with existing relationships, and manage pipelines seamlessly** within its core search management system.

The takeaway is clear: integrating BD into your executive search platform doesn't just save time, it drives smarter decisions, higher conversion rates, and long-term growth.

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Does your firm share client reports via a web portal?

The majority of firms are not maximizing their productivity by not sharing client reports via a web portal. Tedious, manual report building is a thing of the past when an automated web reporting tool can do the heavy-lifting for you and your team.
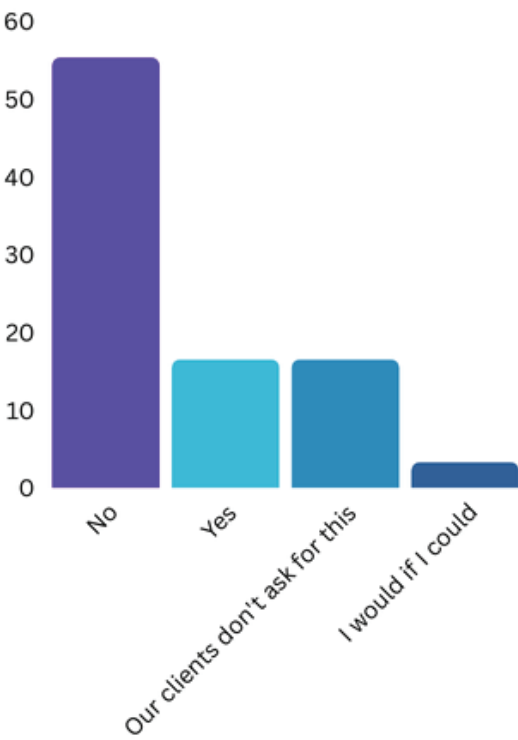
Client Portal
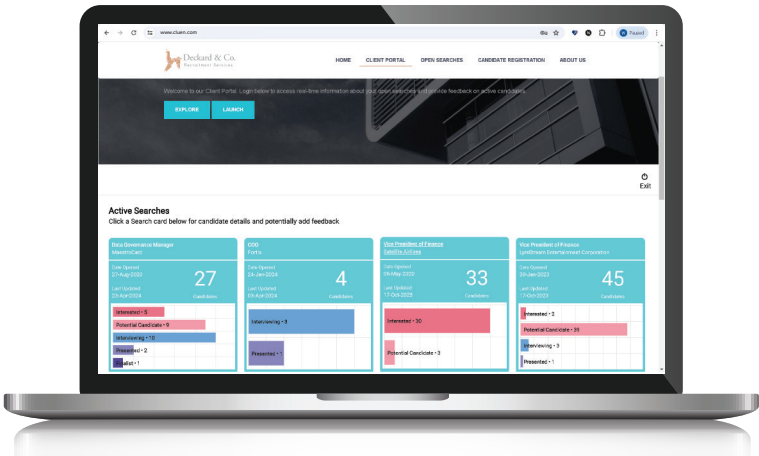
Automated Web Reporting

"Zero" clicks. Since your clients are probably reading your reports on a screen anyway, why not give them a secure way to see (only what you want to share, only on selected Searches) on their laptops/tablets/smartphones?

No more concerns about needing to send out revisions or fitting data to a certain Letter/A4 paper size, or including other documents, charts, or web links. Include client feedback scorecards to engage search committees on their own timelines.

Your Templates Built In

Pre-set templates let you create branded, **customized client status reports in one click**, pulling all needed data from the system, including client-facing notes.
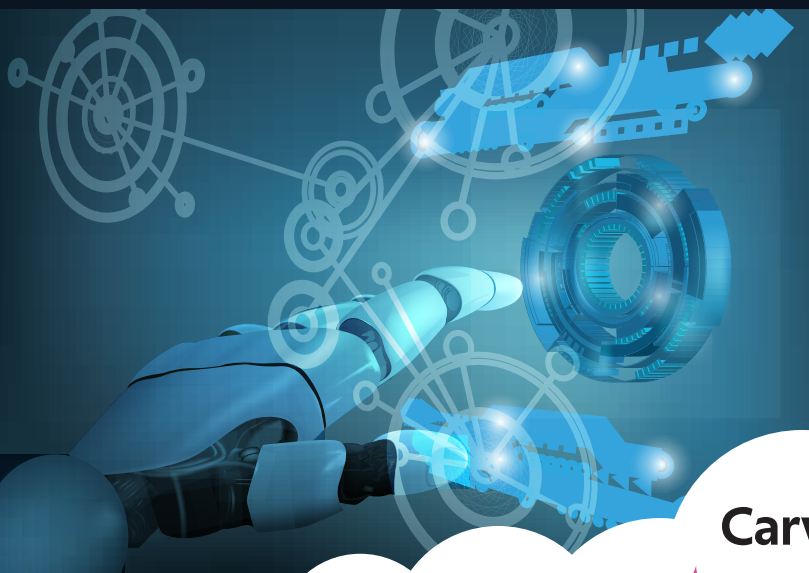
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AI Meeting transcribers

These are the top AI tools executive search professionals are using to transcribe meetings and save time with note-taking.

Otter.ai Sana.ai Fathom Teams Carv MeetGeek Fireflies.ai Quil Zoom Speak RingCentral Transcribe Interviewer.ai Elly.ai Metaview

AI Presentation-makers

These are the top AI tools executive search professionals are using to make beautiful presentations in seconds.

Gamma Microsoft Copilot Canva Magic Design 24 Slides Beautiful.ai

Third Party Research

These are the top tools executive search professionals are using to conduct third party research to supplement their process. Where do your tools rank against your peers?

RocketReach

LinkedIn Sales Navigator

Apollo.io

S&P Capital IQ

HireEZ

Perplexity

Seamless.ai

ZoomInfo

Talentis

ContactOut

NIXZ.

Boardex

Lusha

LinkedIn Recruiter

FoundMe

Google/Boolean Search

SourceWhale

Owler

LeopardSolutions

A SurePoint® Company

Pitchbook

SalesQL

SeekOut

Nymeria.io

D&B Hoovers

Document Storage

These are the top tools executive search professionals are using to keep their documents safely stored and organized
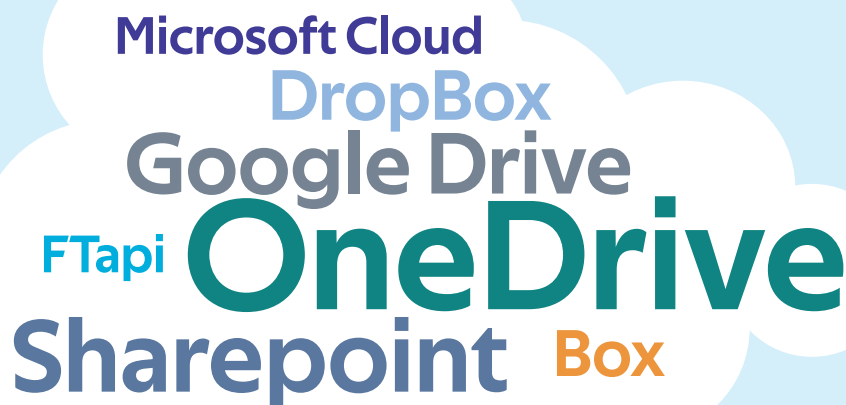
Microsoft Cloud

DropBox

Google Drive

FTapi

OneDrive

Sharepoint

Box

Candidate Assessment

These are the top tools executive search professionals are using to assess their candidates. Year over year, the Hogan Assessment ranks as widely used. Check out the other tools your peers are using and perhaps learn of a new one you'd like your firm to start using.

SurveyMonkey
Criteria   Placement Partner   Logiks
Hogan Assessment
Caliper   The Predictive Index
ENCORE   DiSC   The Birkman Method   McQuaig
Interviews
Myers-Briggs   Orxestra

Internal & External Communication

Finally, we have the preferred communication tools that different firms are using both internally and externally. Teams and Zoom have ranked as most widely used for both efforts, year over year.

Loom
Cliq   Zoom   Slack
JoinMe   Teams
RingCentral   GoToMeeting
ZohoOne   GoogleMeet   WhatsApp

Key takeaways

As this year's survey results show, executive search firms are making real progress in adopting technology to centralize data, streamline business development, and harness the power of AI. With more firms managing BD directly in their search platforms, and new integrations eliminating manual work, the industry is shifting toward smarter, more efficient ways of working.

The message is clear: **firms that embrace these tools are not just keeping pace, they're setting the pace.** By leveraging technology to reduce administrative burden and sharpen client and candidate engagement, you position your team to deliver faster, deeper, and more impactful results. In a market where speed and insight define success, those who invest in innovation today will lead the search industry of tomorrow.

Since last year...

LLM adoption up from 78% to 91%

9% more firms are managing their BD in their executive search database

7% more firms have an AI policy in place or in process

AI-Enabled Technology
to stay ahead of the competition

Eliminate Repetitive Tasks
through process automation

Integrations and Partnerships
with the best tools for executive search

ENCORE

Executive search technology that's always a step ahead.

Who we are

cluen®

Cluen has decades of recruitment database development and implementation experience spanning six continents. Our technology helps organizations nurture important relationships, track historical data, and win new business.

Cluen's AI-driven browser-based solution, Encore Max, is used by executive search professionals around the world, with solutions for one-person boutiques and global enterprise deployments.

What we offer

ENCORE

Encore Max has the leading technology that goes beyond simple time savings, to nurture important relationships, track historical data, and win new business. Automating key administrative steps in your search process allows for long-term achievement of your key business goals with less wasted time.

Our experts are here to share their findings in relationship-driven recruiting and data management, regardless of which software you use. If you have ever had the feeling that "there's got to be a better way," then we probably have some vital information for you. Contact us today.

Contact us

Not a client?
Email our team directly
info@cluen.com

Already a client?
Schedule more training
moretraining@cluen.com

For a quick response
support@cluen.com

Schedule a test drive