



MADGE GIBSON, ODGERS BERNDTSON

IN SEARCH OF DIGITAL LEADERSHIP

If you want to assess just how real a trend is, find out whether the market is buying. *Brainstorm* went in search of the head-hunters.

Russell Reynolds Associates, a global executive search agency, says the number of European search requests for the Chief Digital Officer role has risen by almost a third over the past two years, while US interest has grown at twice that speed.

In South Africa, says Madge Gibson, principal at headhunters Odgers Berndtson, companies are definitely starting to ask for people to fill the digital leadership role for the whole company or group. She says that most demand is coming from the retail and financial services sectors, with fast-moving consumer goods also beginning to show interest.

Gibson says in her experience, CIOs typically don't have the depth of experience needed. "Their focus can be too internal," she says. "You need more of a futurist, with strategic and leadership ability as well as technology and marketing."

Finding this type of person is hard, she says, and her clients tend to be looking outside the organisation to fill the role. "We're looking internationally in places like Silicon Valley," she says.

Tracy Dawson, a partner at Jack Hammer Executive Headhunters, says the CIO role has been evolving to take on the digital space – she is more optimistic about the CIO's potential to tackle the role. However, she says: "Clients aren't yet sure whether the responsibility for digital strategy should lie with marketing or IT. One thing is clear, though, clients are talking about the need for a digital strategy role, and the days of putting in an inexperienced 25-year-old graduate to handle social media are now past."

Dawson agrees that this role is tough to fill because it requires a combination of technical, marketing and commercial experience and flair. Smart CIOs, she says, are keeping up-to-date on developments in the digital space but, she warns, the new role is not really about the nitty-gritty of network architectures and the like: "All that can be outsourced!" she says.