

INSIGHT

Passive Talent and Modern FM Recruitment



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One of the biggest misconceptions in recruitment is the belief that the best candidates are actively searching for jobs. In reality, the opposite is often true.

The strongest Facilities Management professionals are usually busy delivering results, leading teams, managing complex estates, improving workplace experiences, driving sustainability initiatives, and supporting organisational performance.

They are not spending evenings browsing job boards. They are not applying for multiple vacancies. They are not uploading their CV every few weeks. In fact, many of the most successful Facilities Managers have not formally applied for a role in years.

This creates a challenge for employers. If the best talent rarely applies, how do organisations find them?

The answer lies in understanding passive talent. Modern Facilities Management recruitment increasingly revolves around identifying, engaging, and attracting professionals who were not actively looking for a new role before the conversation began.

This shift has transformed recruitment from an advertising exercise into a relationship-driven discipline built around trust, market knowledge, and proactive search. As FM continues to evolve into a strategic business function, organisations that master passive talent recruitment gain a significant competitive advantage.

Chapter 1: The Hidden FM Talent Market

Most organisations focus their recruitment efforts on visible candidates. These are individuals who are already part of the active talent market — those who apply for vacancies, upload CVs to job boards, contact recruiters directly, or publicly indicate they are seeking opportunities.

However, this group represents only a fraction of the available workforce.

The much larger segment consists of passive talent — professionals who are employed, successful, and not actively searching for a new role. Yet many would consider the right opportunity. The hidden talent market often contains:

- Top-performing Facilities Managers
- Senior Estates Professionals
- Workplace Leaders
- Head of Facilities candidates
- Facilities Directors
- Workplace Transformation Specialists
- Sustainability-focused FM professionals

These individuals are frequently delivering excellent results for their current employers. As a result, they are largely invisible to traditional recruitment approaches. Understanding this hidden market is the first step towards accessing it.

—
A fine
position
to be in
—



Chapter 2: Why Great FM Professionals Rarely Apply

The best Facilities Management professionals typically possess a combination of qualities that make them highly sought after — and simultaneously unlikely to be found through conventional advertising.

They are highly employable, in demand, trusted internally, well connected, and professionally established. Because of this, they often have little reason to actively search for new positions. Many enjoy:

- Competitive compensation
- Strong relationships
- Professional autonomy
- Meaningful responsibilities
- Career progression

When organisations advertise roles and wait for applications, they often miss this entire segment of the market. The absence of an application should not be interpreted as a lack of interest — it usually reflects satisfaction.

Many exceptional professionals would consider a move if presented with an opportunity that clearly improves their career trajectory. However, they are unlikely to discover that opportunity through conventional job-search behaviour. Proactive search is required.

Chapter 3: The Growing Scarcity of FM Talent

Facilities Management has become significantly more complex. Modern FM leaders are expected to manage a broad and expanding range of responsibilities:

- Workplace strategy and employee experience
- Sustainability programmes and ESG initiatives
- Technology integration and smart buildings
- Risk management, compliance, and business continuity
- Contractor ecosystems and operational delivery

As responsibilities expand, demand for experienced FM professionals continues to rise. Unfortunately, talent supply has not expanded at the same pace.

01 Increasing Complexity

The role now requires broader leadership capabilities than ever before, combining operational expertise with strategic thinking and people leadership.

02 Limited Leadership Pipelines

Many organisations have not invested sufficiently in developing future FM leaders, creating gaps that are difficult to fill from within.

03 Retirement of Experienced Professionals

Senior FM leaders leaving the workforce create additional gaps. As a result, organisations frequently compete for the same candidates, intensifying the importance of proactive talent identification.

Facilities
leadership
is a board
decision



Chapter 4: Understanding Candidate Psychology

Recruitment success depends heavily on understanding how candidates think. Active candidates and passive candidates operate from entirely different psychological positions.

An active candidate often asks: "*Can I get a better job?*" A passive candidate asks: "*Why should I leave a role I already enjoy?*" This distinction changes everything.

Passive professionals are evaluating a range of factors before they will seriously consider a move:

- Risk and personal exposure
- Opportunity and future potential
- Leadership quality of the hiring organisation
- Organisational stability and long-term vision
- Personal and professional growth

They are rarely motivated by urgency. Instead, they are motivated by possibility. The strongest recruiters understand this difference and shape conversations accordingly — leading with insight, reputation, and career potential rather than vacancy details and deadlines.

Chapter 5: What Passive Candidates Actually Want

Employers frequently assume salary is the primary driver of movement. While compensation matters, it is rarely the sole factor. Many passive FM professionals are already well compensated. Their motivations are often more sophisticated.

01 Strategic Influence

Will I have greater impact and scope to shape outcomes at a senior level?

02 Leadership Quality

Who will I work for, and does the leadership team inspire confidence?

03 Career Development

Will this role help me grow into new areas of expertise and responsibility?

04 Workplace Culture

Will I enjoy being part of this organisation and its working environment?

05 Purpose and Challenge

Will my work matter, and will this role stretch me professionally?

The most compelling opportunities combine multiple factors rather than relying solely on financial incentives. Employers who understand this construct more persuasive propositions.

—
Quiet
operators,
visible
results
—



Chapter 6: Why Job Advertisements Have Limitations

Job advertisements remain useful. However, they are inherently reactive. They depend upon candidates finding the vacancy. They rely on the individual already being open to change. They attract those who are already looking.

This creates a natural limitation. The strongest FM professionals are often focused on delivering results rather than searching job boards. Consequently, many never see the opportunity. Even if they do, they may not feel sufficiently motivated to engage.

The gap between advertising and search-led recruitment becomes clear when you consider what advertising cannot reach:

- Professionals satisfied in their current role
- Candidates not actively monitoring the market
- Individuals who would move for the right opportunity, but would never apply
- Senior leaders whose next step requires a direct, personal approach

Search-led recruitment overcomes this challenge by bringing opportunities directly to the candidate — starting conversations that advertising alone could never initiate. This is where exceptional placements are made.

Chapter 7: The Evolution of Search Strategy

Search strategy has become increasingly important in Facilities Management recruitment. Modern search involves systematically identifying talent across the market through a structured and intelligence-driven process.

This process may include a combination of the following disciplines:

- Competitor analysis and industry mapping
- Talent identification and candidate profiling
- Network intelligence and professional referrals
- Market research and sector benchmarking

The objective is not simply to find available candidates. The objective is to identify the best candidates — regardless of whether they are actively looking. This distinction separates strategic recruitment from transactional recruitment.

Search-led hiring shifts the fundamental question from "*Who applied?*" to "*Who is best suited to succeed?*" This mindset dramatically expands the talent pool available to employers and consistently produces stronger outcomes than reactive approaches.

Senior FM hiring is a judgement call



Chapter 8: Relationship-Led Recruitment

The most effective FM recruitment strategies are built on relationships. Relationships create access. Relationships create trust. Relationships create insight. A recruiter who has maintained relationships across the FM market for years often understands far more than a vacancy description can convey.

Deep relationship intelligence allows recruiters to understand candidates at a level that goes beyond their CV:

- Career ambitions and long-term goals
- Professional strengths and leadership style
- Personal motivations and values
- Future aspirations and appetite for change

This knowledge allows far more meaningful conversations. The strongest placements rarely begin with *"I have a job for you."* They often begin with *"How is your career progressing?"*

Relationship-led recruitment focuses on long-term engagement rather than short-term transactions. It builds the trust and credibility required to present opportunities to individuals who have not been thinking about moving — and to do so in a way that feels natural and considered, not intrusive.

Chapter 9: Trust as a Competitive Advantage

Passive candidates are naturally cautious. They have more to lose. Changing employers involves risk. Questions frequently include whether the organisation is stable, whether leadership will be supportive, and whether the opportunity is genuine.

Trust becomes essential in this context. Candidates are more likely to engage when recruiters consistently demonstrate:

- Market expertise and deep knowledge of Facilities Management
- Professional integrity and respect for confidentiality
- Transparency and honesty in all conversations
- Long-term thinking that prioritises career outcomes over placements

Trust cannot be manufactured. It must be earned. And in passive recruitment, trust often determines whether a candidate engages at all — or simply declines to continue the conversation.

Organisations that partner with recruiters who carry genuine market credibility benefit from access to candidates who would otherwise remain unreachable. The recruiter's reputation becomes part of the employer's proposition.

—
If search
is not the
answer,
we say so
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Chapter 10: Employer Brand and Passive Talent

Passive candidates conduct extensive research. Before engaging seriously, many will review company websites, leadership teams, LinkedIn profiles, industry reputation, employee feedback, and market standing.

This makes employer brand increasingly important in passive recruitment. A strong employer brand creates attraction. A weak employer brand creates hesitation.

The strongest organisations understand that every touchpoint contributes to employer perception. Their brand communicates:

- Organisational stability and long-term ambition
- A culture that values FM as a strategic function
- Leadership that is credible and professionally respected
- An environment where talented professionals can grow

The best organisations recognise that recruitment begins long before a vacancy exists. Their reputation is continuously influencing future hiring outcomes. Every interaction — with candidates, contractors, industry peers — contributes to the employer brand that passive talent will eventually evaluate.

Chapter 11: Why Speed Still Wins

Some organisations assume passive candidates are willing to wait indefinitely. This is rarely true. Top performers are often busy professionals with multiple opportunities, and slow recruitment processes create significant risk.

Common consequences of slow decision-making include:

- Candidate disengagement and loss of momentum
- Reduced confidence in the hiring organisation
- Competitive offers from faster-moving employers
- Reversion to the security of the existing role

Speed communicates commitment. Decisiveness signals organisational competence. Passive candidates who are already in stable, well-compensated positions will not wait for organisations that appear uncertain or slow to act.

The strongest hiring organisations combine rigorous assessment with efficient decision-making. This balance is increasingly important in competitive FM markets, where the gap between identifying a candidate and losing them to a competitor can be measured in days rather than weeks.

Strategic
recruitment
for the
people behind
operations



Chapter 12: The Future of FM Recruitment

Facilities Management recruitment is becoming progressively more relationship-based. Several trends are accelerating this shift across the sector.

01 Greater Talent Scarcity

Competition for experienced FM professionals continues to increase as the breadth of the role expands and the pipeline of experienced leaders remains constrained.

02 Stronger Candidate Expectations

Professionals expect meaningful, personalised engagement — not transactional vacancy-filling. The quality of the recruitment experience influences whether exceptional candidates proceed.

03 Technology-Driven Search

Data and market intelligence continue to improve talent identification, enabling recruiters to locate and approach candidates with greater precision and relevance.

04 Employer Branding as Strategy

Organisations increasingly compete on reputation, recognising that passive talent assesses them before a conversation has even begun.

Future recruitment success will depend less on advertising and more on network strength, relationship quality, market credibility, search capability, and candidate experience. Organisations that build these capabilities will consistently outperform those relying solely on traditional methods.

Conclusion

The best Facilities Management talent rarely applies. Not because they lack ambition. Not because they are unavailable. But because they are already succeeding — leading teams, managing estates, improving workplaces, driving operational performance, and supporting business strategy.

Waiting for these individuals to submit applications is increasingly ineffective. Modern FM recruitment requires a different approach. One built around search, relationships, trust, market intelligence, and long-term engagement.

The organisations that consistently secure exceptional FM talent understand a simple truth: the strongest candidates are rarely looking. But they may be listening. And those who know how to start the right conversation gain access to a talent pool that many competitors never reach.

The brief
decides the
outcome



Key Takeaways

The following principles summarise the core themes of passive talent recruitment in Facilities Management:

- The majority of top FM professionals are passive candidates not actively seeking roles
- Passive talent rarely searches job boards or submits unsolicited applications
- FM talent scarcity continues to increase across many sectors as complexity grows
- Understanding candidate psychology is critical for successful passive recruitment
- Search-led recruitment identifies talent beyond active applicants and job boards
- Relationship-led hiring delivers stronger, more durable long-term outcomes
- Trust is essential when engaging professionals who have more to lose
- Employer brand significantly influences passive candidate interest before contact
- Speed and decisiveness remain key competitive advantages in tight markets
- The future of FM recruitment will be driven by relationships, search capability, and market intelligence

About Maxwell Stephens

Maxwell Stephens is a specialist Facilities Management recruitment consultancy focused exclusively on Facilities Management, Workplace, Estates, and Property leadership recruitment across the UK.

Through relationship-led search, market mapping, and specialist FM expertise, Maxwell Stephens helps organisations identify, engage, and secure exceptional Facilities Management professionals who are often invisible to traditional recruitment methods.

For support with Facilities Manager, Head of Facilities, Estates Manager, Workplace Leader, and Facilities Director recruitment, contact the Maxwell Stephens team:

- Website: maxwellstephens.com
- Telephone: 0207 118 4848
- Email: info@maxwellstephens.com

What the Data Says

The evidence on passive talent: how many UK workers are open to moving without applying, the value of search and counteroffer outcomes.

- 66% of UK workers are passively open to moving (not applying but willing for the right offer); only 18% are active jobseekers.
Source: [Totaljobs Hiring Trends Update, 2026](#)
- 84% of UK workers say they're open to a new opportunity, the highest Totaljobs has recorded.
Source: [Totaljobs Hiring Trends Update, 2026](#)
- 30% of UK organisations that recruited rated recruitment/search consultants among their most effective attraction methods.
Source: [CIPD, Resourcing and talent planning report 2024](#)
- Of UK employees who accepted a counteroffer, 34% had left within six months and 74% within a year.
Source: [Robert Half, Half of counteroffers successful as hiring crisis continues, 2022](#)
- Maxwell Stephens has a network of more than 50,000 FM professionals across the UK and Europe.
Source: [Maxwell Stephens, 2026](#)

Sources were checked in September 2026. Select a source to open the original research. Maxwell Stephens figures are drawn from our own published vacancies and placement records.

See It in Practice

Supporting the Expansion of Campbell Lutyens' FM Department

Campbell Lutyens appointed Maxwell Stephens to recruit an Operations Facilities Manager for its London-based global operations team. We ran a personalised headhunting campaign reaching both active and passive talent, directly approaching 46 potential candidates after detailed market research. From these we presented six strong candidates; three progressed to interview and two reached the second stage.

It shows how direct approaches to passive candidates produce a focused, high-quality shortlist.

[Read the full case study at maxwellstephens.com/case-studies/campbell-lutyens](https://maxwellstephens.com/case-studies/campbell-lutyens)

Related Reading

- **How to Attract the Best Facilities Management Talent**
maxwellstephens.com/blog/ways-to-attract-the-best-talent-in-the-facilities-management-industry
- **Why Changing Jobs Can Accelerate Your Facilities Management Career**
maxwellstephens.com/blog/why-facilities-managers-should-consider-new-opportunities-despite-job-security
- **Should You Stay in Your Job or Look for a New Opportunity?**
maxwellstephens.com/blog/am-i-in-the-right-job-should-i-stay-or-should-i-go

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A FINE POSITION TO BE IN



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stephens**
Recruitment

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