**475 profiles mapped. 9 presented. One founding sales leader.**

# From "I'll hire from my network" to a Founding VP of Sales in 56 days

A seed-stage agentic commerce AI company needed its first sales leader, and the founder planned to find one himself. We showed him why a hire this critical needed executive search, then delivered it on an exclusive basis.

| 56 days | 475 | 9 | 100% |
|---|---|---|---|
| from search opening to start date | profiles mapped across 50 companies | candidates on the longlist | headhunted longlist |

**AT A GLANCE**

**CLIENT**
Seed-stage agentic commerce AI company

**ROLE**
Founding VP of Sales

**LOCATION**
United States (remote)

**REMIT**
Build the sales function from scratch and close the first enterprise accounts

**ENGAGEMENT**
Exclusive executive search

**RESULT**
Quota-beating enterprise seller from Salesforce; started 56 days after the search opened

## The challenge: the founder's dilemma

Our client is pioneering agentic commerce: AI agents that help shoppers discover, compare and buy through natural conversation. To take the product to market, the CEO needed a Founding VP of Sales who could build the sales function from scratch and close the company's first enterprise accounts.

> **"No agencies, please. I'll hire from my own network."**
>
> The CEO's first instinct, and one many founders share

He soon ran into three problems:

- **No right people:** the profiles he needed weren't in his network.
- **No time:** sourcing candidates couldn't compete with running the company.
- **No brief:** there wasn't yet a proper job description.

A candid conversation showed him that the person who would build his entire revenue engine needed dedicated executive search. Once convinced, he chose to work exclusively with Optima Search.

## Our approach: map first, then pitch a career move

1. **We mapped the ecosystem before approaching anyone.** A talent map of 50 competitor and adjacent companies across eCommerce search and discovery, AI commerce, MarTech and commerce platforms, ranked by how well their talent would transfer.
2. **We targeted precisely and pitched it as a career move.** We approached 125 sales leaders individually, positioning the role as the chance to build the commercial foundation of a category-defining company.
3. **We co-defined the brief.** We worked with the CEO to turn an idea into a clear role profile and job description, and refined it as candidates responded.
4. **We kept a weekly two-way rhythm with the founders.** Regular calls let us move fast, share market feedback, handle objections and keep interested candidates engaged.

## Why founding sales hires are hard

### The role takes shape as you hire

In a start-up, scope, profile and priorities sharpen as market feedback comes in.

### The best people aren't looking

Proven eCom tech sellers are well rewarded and wary of early-stage risk; some expect packages well above budget.

### A great AE ≠ a founding VP

The role needs a builder who creates pipeline, sets up process and partners the founders, not just a closer.

## Precision at every stage

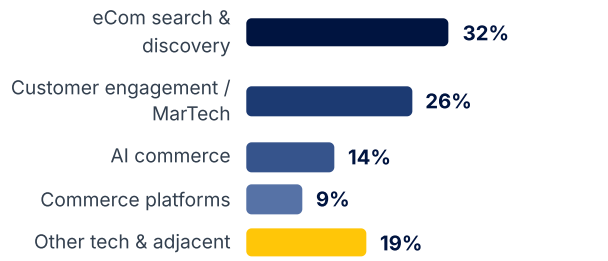
### One hire from 475 mapped profiles

Candidates at each stage of the exclusive search




### Where the candidates came from

Share of approached candidates by source sector




**84%** of the candidates we approached came from the target ecosystem.

From 475 profiles mapped, we presented a longlist of 9 candidates. **6 were invited to a first interview, 4 progressed to a second, and 2 reached the final.** Both finalists were strong enough to offer, which gave the client a genuine choice and took the risk out of the final decision.

## The hire: a builder who had done it before

**WHAT THE CEO NEEDED**

A Founding VP of Sales to build the sales function from scratch, create pipeline, set up process, partner the founders and close the first enterprise accounts.

**WHAT OUR CANDIDATE BROUGHT**

A quota-beating enterprise seller from Salesforce who had been on the founding sales team of an AI retail start-up, where he self-sourced millions in pipeline in his first year.

## The results

**Founding VP of Sales in seat** 56 days after the search opened.

**Two offer-ready finalists,** so the client made a genuine choice, not a compromise.

**100% headhunted longlist,** none of it from job ads or inbound applications.

**Founder time protected:** one exclusive partner instead of sourcing alongside running the company.

## Hiring your first sales leader?

Thinking of filling your first sales leadership role through your own network? So was our client. A key business hire deserves a dedicated search partner who knows the eCommerce tech market.

optimaeurope.com
optimaamerica.com

Book a free 30-min call →