



HIRING IN TIMES OF ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY

Table of Contents ::

Introduction	2
Understanding the Current Landscape	3
How Hiring Behavior is Changing	6
Sector Focus: IT & Marketing	10
Candidate Behavior in 2025	15
Smart Hiring Tactics for Uncertain Times	19
Conclusion + CRB Perspective	23
Bonus Section: Hiring Models by Department & Scenario	25

Feel free to click a link above
to go straight to what you are looking for.

Introduction

Navigating Uncertainty with Strategic Talent Planning

The hiring landscape in 2025 is defined by contradiction: while economic signals are mixed and headcount approvals are harder to secure, the pressure to deliver on tech, marketing, and innovation initiatives hasn't gone away. For internal hiring teams, executives, and people leaders, this moment requires a shift in mindset, not toward inaction, but toward smarter, more adaptable hiring strategies.

This guide was created for companies that are still building, even if more cautiously. Whether you're an IT leader trying to complete a backlog of digital projects or a marketing director juggling brand priorities with budget freezes, your hiring challenges aren't unique, but your solutions can be.

At CRB Workforce, we specialize in helping companies staff efficiently through uncertain times. Drawing from labor market data, client conversations, and trends across IT and Marketing teams, this guide breaks down what's happening, what's working, and how to move forward with confidence, even when the market feels unstable.

Because hiring doesn't stop in times of uncertainty. It just evolves.

In this guide you will learn how to:

- Adapt hiring strategies in uncertain markets
- Balance W2 contractors and full-time roles effectively
- Attract and retain cautious candidates in 2025

Understanding the Current Landscape

Why Hiring Feels Harder and What's
Actually Happening





The term “market uncertainty” gets used often, but in 2025, it’s more than just a buzzword; it reflects real hesitation among employers, investors, and job seekers alike.

After years of rapid post-pandemic growth, the U.S. economy is showing signs of cooling. Inflation remains stubborn in certain sectors, interest rates are still elevated, and the most recent job reports point to slower hiring across nearly every industry. In fact, LinkedIn’s June data showed a **12% drop in hiring year-over-year**, with sharp declines in both tech and creative roles.

But here’s what’s critical: despite this slowdown, **the need for execution hasn’t disappeared**, especially in IT and Marketing. Companies still need to modernize infrastructure, launch new digital campaigns, and respond to evolving customer needs. The challenge is doing all of that without overcommitting headcount or taking unnecessary risks.

Where the Labor Market Stands:

- Job openings are still high in specialized areas like software development, cybersecurity, and digital marketing, but filling them takes longer.
- Hiring pipelines have slowed, with more steps added to the interview process and greater scrutiny on budget approvals.
- Teams are cautious about direct hires, often opting for contract or project-based roles to retain flexibility.

This dynamic has created a push-and-pull between long-term workforce planning and short-term execution pressure. And it's precisely in this space, between caution and capability, where strategic hiring decisions make the biggest impact.

CRB Perspective

“We’re seeing fewer job reqs, but better-aligned ones. The companies that are still hiring are doing so with precision and intent.”

Common Pain Points

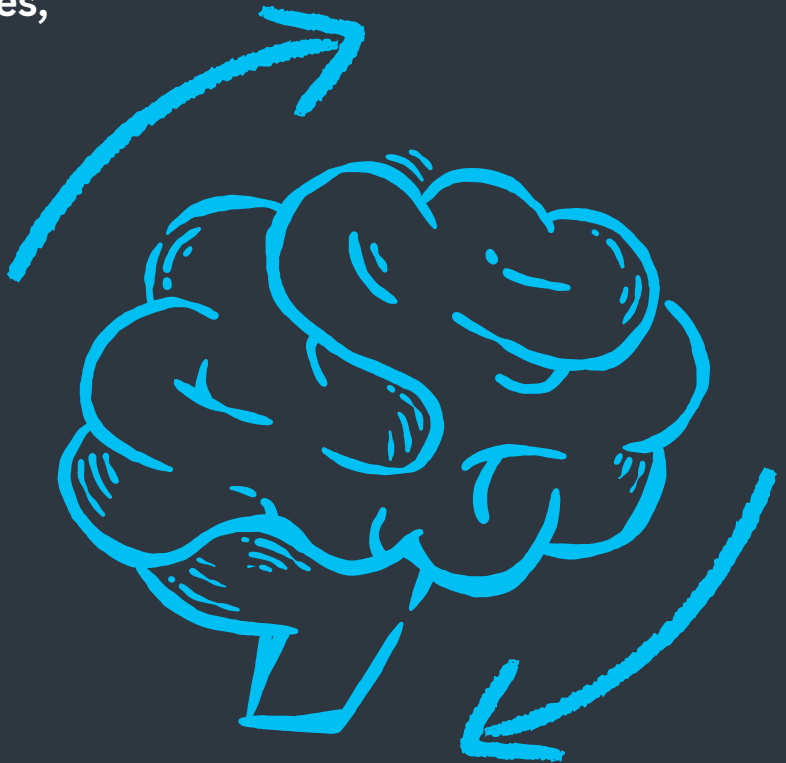
- Long Approval Cycles
- Hiring Freezes
- Over-Dependence on Full-Time Hires

Action Items

- If your headcount approvals are stuck, start building contractor pipelines now.
- If projects are at risk due to freezes, lean on short-term W2 contractors to keep delivery on track.

How Hiring Behavior is Changing

Fewer Roles, Longer Timelines,
Smarter Decisions



As economic caution sets in, hiring behavior is shifting, not stopping, but slowing and becoming more intentional. Across both IT and Marketing departments, the old “grow fast and figure it out later” model has given way to something more measured. And for internal teams trying to hire the right people at the right time, the changes are real:

What's Changed:



Hiring Pipelines Are Longer

More interviews. More approvals. More deliberation. Roles that used to close in 3-4 weeks are now taking 6-8 weeks, especially for full-time hires.



Contract Roles Are Rising

Companies are leaning into contract and contract-to-hire models as a way to stay productive without locking into long-term headcount. It's not just for backfill anymore; it's a proactive strategy.



Budgets Are Tighter or Uncertain

Even when teams *want* to hire full-time, they may not have clarity on when budgets will be released or what final approval will look like. Contracts offer a way to move forward while staying within current constraints.



Executive Involvement is Increasing

More hiring decisions are being escalated to C-levels or finance leaders, especially for new roles. That creates delays and forces teams to be clearer about the ROI of each new hire.



What This Means for Hiring Teams:

Speed Matters

Even with slower pipelines, the best candidates aren't waiting. Companies that move decisively, especially with contract offers, win talent that others miss.

Flexibility is Strategic

Blending W2 contractors with key full-time roles allows teams to stay productive without overextending. It also helps reduce burnout for existing team members.

Pausing = Risk

It's similar to technical debt – deferring the “cost” of hiring now can slow velocity later, especially when project timelines or client demands shift unexpectedly. In uncertain times, the risk isn't actually hiring, it's not hiring fast or flexibly enough.

CRB Perspective

“We’re seeing more teams get creative: extending short-term offers, running pilot projects, or using contract-to-hire as a way to move forward while still protecting budget.”

Common Pain Points

- More oversight
- Long decision-making cycles
- Leadership second-guessing hires

Action Items

- If your executive team is slowing down hiring decisions, prepare candidate shortlists with ROI justification upfront.
- If approvals are getting delayed, position contract-to-hire as a lower-risk alternative that executives can sign off on faster

Sector Focus: IT & Marketing

How Two Critical Teams are Adapting
Their Hiring Playbooks





While every department is feeling the pressure of economic uncertainty, IT and Marketing teams face especially complex challenges. They're under constant demand to execute, launching infrastructure upgrades, campaigns, platforms, and systems, while navigating tighter budgets, leaner teams, and shifting expectations around headcount.

Despite these constraints, both departments are finding smart, flexible ways to keep moving forward.

IT Teams: Hiring for Urgency, Not Just Growth

Even with slower overall hiring, the demand for specialized tech talent remains strong, particularly in AI, cloud infrastructure, DevOps, and cybersecurity. These are not “nice to have” roles. They're business-critical. But that doesn't mean companies are rushing to add full-time headcount.

Instead, IT leaders are increasingly blending permanent hires with W2 contractors who bring high-impact expertise on short notice.



Key Trends

Contract-to-hire Models

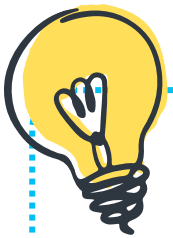
Growing in popularity, especially for DevOps, security engineers, and project-based development work.

Speed and Specialization

Driving hiring decisions. Internal teams want to move fast and tap talent that can hit the ground running, even if just for 6-12 months.

Upskilling and Certifications

Playing a retention role. Many companies are investing in learning and development as a way to keep technical teams engaged when promotions or raises are on hold.



Insight

In software, waiting to ship until every edge case is solved delays the impact. In hiring, the same is true; shipping a strong contractor to the team now is often better than the perfect hire months later. In contrast, W2 contractors can typically start within days, giving teams forward momentum and buying time for longer-term hiring decisions.



Marketing Teams: Balancing Agility with Creative Depth

Marketing leaders are facing pressure from two sides: they're expected to do more with less, but they also can't afford to lose ground in branding, content, or campaign velocity.

The result? A strategic lean into contract and freelance support, particularly in roles that can flex with campaign cycles or fill temporary gaps in creative expertise.



Key Trends

77% of Marketing Leaders

Plan to increase their use of contractors in 2025, particularly for content strategy, performance marketing, UX/UI, and campaign execution.

Short-term Creative Needs (e.g., video, social media, paid ads)

Often staffed via contract to keep internal teams focused on long-term brand and product work.

Hybrid Team Models

Common, with a lean full-time marketing team supported by a rotating bench of specialists.



Insight

It's similar to how modern campaigns use multi-channel marketing: not every channel is always active, but each one is deployed strategically when the moment is right.

Think of your marketing team like a modular campaign stack, full-timers manage the brand foundation, while contractors act as paid media, influencers, or email blasts: targeted, time-bound, and built for impact.

Common Pain Points

- IT urgency vs. marketing campaign cycles
- Competing for specialized skill sets

Action Items

- If your IT projects are stalled while waiting for full-time hires, deploy contractors to hit near-term delivery deadlines.
- If your marketing team is struggling to cover spikes in workload, flex with contractors for campaign execution while FTEs manage brand strategy.

Candidate Behavior in 2025

Cautious, Selective, and Still Willing to
Move, With the Right Offer



In a more volatile hiring market, candidates aren't acting irrationally, they're acting carefully. After years of layoffs, restructurings, and shifting priorities, many job seekers are focused less on chasing the next big title and more on stability, purpose, and fit.

This doesn't mean people aren't open to making a move. But it does mean that the bar is higher, and that how you position your opportunity matters more than ever.

What Candidates Want Right Now:



Clarity and Confidence

Job seekers are evaluating employers as much as employers are evaluating them. They want clear expectations, transparent timelines, and confidence that the team and business are stable.

Long interview cycles, vague job scopes, or “we’re hiring for the future” messaging can spook top candidates who don’t want to take unnecessary risks.



Career Security Over Flashy Perks

In both IT and Marketing, we’re seeing a shift from “growth at all costs” mindsets to candidates asking:

- “Will this company still be hiring in six months?”
- “Will I get to work on real, high-impact projects?”
- “Will I have stability *and* the chance to grow?”

This is true for both full-time and contract roles. Even contractors are asking about extension likelihood, team culture, and long-term vision.



Hybrid or Remote Work Options

Flexibility remains one of the most important drivers of candidate decisions, especially for experienced professionals in tech and creative. If your role doesn't offer hybrid or remote work, you'll need to lead with something equally compelling (career growth, exciting projects, premium pay).



Contract Work with Benefits

The stigma around contract roles is fading, especially as more candidates realize that W2 contracts (especially 6–12 months) offer:

- Faster hiring timelines
- Direct access to impactful work
- Flexibility *without* sacrificing healthcare or 401(k) access (when working with firms like CRB)



Insight

Think of it like using open-source libraries or APIs, you're not building from scratch, you're bringing in a proven solution to move faster, scale smarter, and reduce internal strain. For many job seekers, it's the preferred model, as long as the project is engaging, the pay is competitive, and the agency provides strong support.



Common Pain Points

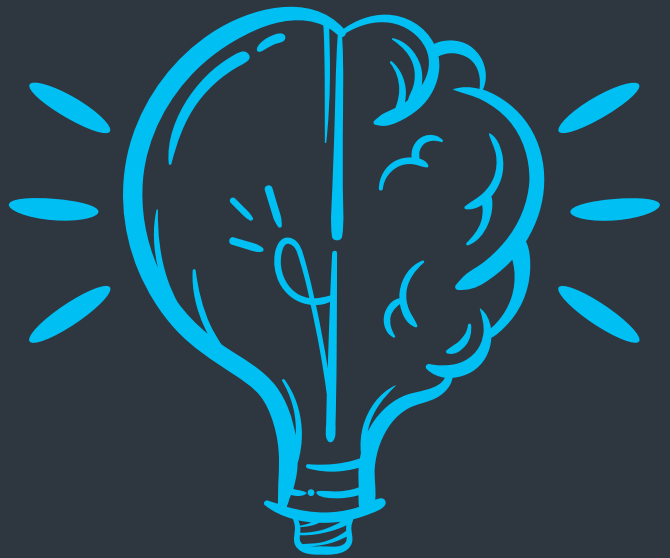
- Candidates are more cautious about leaving stable jobs.
- Some drop out late in the process due to long hiring cycles.
- Misconceptions about contract roles lacking stability or benefits.

Action Items

- **If candidates are hesitant to move**, highlight contract stability (6–12 months with extension potential) and clear conversion paths.
- **If you're losing candidates** late in the process, tighten timelines or use pre-vetted pipeline sources like CRB Workforce to maintain momentum.
- **If candidates are concerned about security**, emphasize available W2 healthcare and 401k benefits when working with a staffing agency.

Smart Hiring Tactics for Uncertain Times

How High-Performing Teams are Staying
Flexible without Falling Behind





If the past year has taught us anything, it's that headcount decisions can't live in extremes. Hiring freezes stall momentum. Over-hiring creates future risk. The companies navigating this moment most effectively aren't choosing between growth and caution, they're building teams that can scale *strategically*.

That means choosing the right mix of full-time, contract, and contract-to-hire talent based on timelines, urgency, and long-term goals.

What's Working in the Field



Blended Workforce Models

More teams are structuring headcount like a portfolio, blending:

- A core team of full-time, strategic hires
- W2 contractors for urgent, time-bound needs
- Contract-to-hire roles that allow for longer evaluation before committing

This structure supports delivery without locking teams into fixed costs or long onboarding cycles.

It's the talent equivalent of microservices architecture: build the core once, then flex and scale around it based on changing needs, without overhauling the whole system.



Contract-to-Hire as a Risk Management Tool

In a market where job descriptions evolve faster than budgets, contract-to-hire offers breathing room. It gives hiring managers time to:

- Assess skill fit and team chemistry
- Validate the business need
- Avoid backfilling prematurely or hiring reactively

Especially for technical and creative roles, the ability to “try before you commit” can be a key advantage for both sides.

Resource Spotlight:

For a deeper look at when to use contract, direct-hire, or contract-to-hire and the myths surrounding each, check our “[Contract vs. Direct-Hire Guide](#).” It’s designed to help leaders weigh their options with clarity.



Staffing Partnerships that Prioritize Speed

Working with a staffing partner isn’t just about filling roles, it’s about moving faster and smarter. Internal teams are turning to agencies like CRB to:

- Access passive candidates they can’t reach on their own
- Reduce time-to-fill on high-priority roles
- Offload admin (compliance, benefits, payroll) so hiring teams can focus on delivery

One common model: let the internal team own full-time hiring while the agency covers contract and contract-to-hire needs.



Proactive Pipeline Building

Even when teams are cautious about opening new roles, they're still building a pipeline. That means:

- Conducting informal interviews
- Staying connected with standout candidates from past searches
- Setting up “just-in-time” talent lists for likely future needs

In a market where hiring windows open and close quickly, being prepared matters.

CRB Perspective

“We’re seeing the best hiring teams work in phases, open what’s critical, build a pipeline for what’s next, and use contractors to keep business moving in the meantime.”

Conclusion + CRB Perspective

Uncertainty Doesn't Mean Inaction,
It Just Demands Smarter Hiring



The hiring landscape in 2025 may feel slower, more cautious, and harder to predict, but it's far from inactive. For IT and Marketing leaders, the work hasn't stopped. Projects still need to launch. Infrastructure still needs to evolve. Brands still need to grow.

What's changed isn't the *need* to hire, it's the *how*.

The companies moving forward are those embracing flexibility, speed, and alignment. They're blending full-time and contract models. They're building a pipeline before roles are officially open. They're choosing partners who understand how to staff intelligently, not just fill seats.

At CRB Workforce, we work with hiring teams to navigate uncertainty without stalling momentum. Whether you're filling a critical full-time role or assembling a 6-12 month contract team, our model is built for movement. We've helped IT teams stay on track during budget freezes, and we've helped marketing orgs keep launches on schedule with the right creative experts, fast.

If you're making headcount decisions in today's market, here's our take:

- 1** Don't default to freeze: get more flexible
- 2** Don't wait for perfect: build right now
- 3** Don't go it alone: the right partner accelerates everything

Partner Spotlight:

That's also why we've partnered with [M10 Labs](#). Together, CRB and M10 help companies execute the kinds of projects that often stall in uncertain markets, the ones that need specialized delivery without overextending headcount. From whiteboard ideas to finished execution, we combine strategy, talent, and delivery to keep critical initiatives moving. Check out our [case studies and pitch deck](#) to learn more.

Bonus Section: Hiring Models by Department & Scenario

When to Use Contract vs. Direct-Hire
in IT and Marketing



In unpredictable markets, teams that build *modularly*, like their technology or campaign strategies, stay more agile, resilient, and efficient.

- In IT, this looks like **microservices**: deploy talent where needed, scale quickly, avoid overcommitting the core.
- In Marketing, it's like **multi-channel campaigns**: activate different talent streams for different messages, timing, and outcomes.

Here's how smart teams are structuring talent across different business scenarios:

Hiring Matrix: IT and Marketing Models by Need		
Business Need	IT Team Strategy	Marketing Team Strategy
Short-term Workload Spike	W2 Contract Engineer	Contract Content Strategist
New Initiative Launch	Contract-to-hire Engineer	Contract Marketer
Long-term Department Growth	Full-time Engineer	Full-time Marketing Director
Specialized Project	Consultant (W2 Preferred)	UX/UI Contractor
Uncertain Budgets	W2 Contract Workforce	Contract Marketing Manager
Post-layoff Rebuild	Blend: Core Direct-hire + Specialized Contractors	Blend: FTE Managers + Contract Creatives

Ready to Build or be Part of a Stronger Team?

If you're navigating the decision between contract and direct-hire roles, CRB Workforce is here to help. With deep expertise in both hiring models, we provide the guidance and support needed to build the right team or take the next step in your career—on your terms.



Let's talk through your goals
and find the right fit for your
team or career.