

# Interview for Entrepreneurial Club - Irina Vasile

## Country Manager Antal International Network - Romania

**You run Antal International Network - Romania since 2003. What led you to specialize in this field - recruitment services for middle and top management positions?**

First of all, I didn't like what I was doing before as chief financial officer and at the age of 38, I said that there was still a major change in career specialization. Then that I myself had been in the position of a candidate and that I already knew what would be missing or rather what competitive advantages a business man, with his set of experience, can bring in this market. But the decisive factor was the parent company Antal from London, whose team seemed to me to be super professional and deeply human, and I haven't been wrong until today. It was like a well-deserved respite, although I worked hard and then I don't regret a second in the big family of Antal International. Last but not least, I became my own master by acquiring the master franchise license in Romania.

**Antal International Network is present globally in over 35 countries. What benefits does the Romanian team have from collaborating with this network?**

It's the game changer for us. We work in a business share system, dividing clients and candidates for existing roles - thousands of roles open worldwide at any given time - is a unique model for the world of executive search agencies. The quality of continuing education as well as the "spirit of Antal" I think are also quite unique in the industry. The fact that we are trained in the 360 model and people are really motivated to grow. The fact that we have the motto "Candidate First" that we are increasingly striving to implement. Our meetings of 400-500 recruiters at the international conferences of Antal that took place annually, and not only in London but in totally special locations, such as Abu Dhabi, India, etc. where we



were all able to network "live" intertwining so many cultures, learning so many new patterns of action, communication, and why not making friends everywhere. And more...

**What industry do your clients come from?**

They come from multiple industries, mainly from cutting-edge technologies, production, energy, distribution, FMCG, ecology, banks, etc.

**What are the steps in a book-based recruitment process?**

There's a lot to tell, a whole book of preparation. In short, there are 30 steps, from discussing the vacancy, calibrating the desired profile according to the employer's requirements but also to market availability, approving the recruitment strategy specific to that job and signing the offer, accompanying the candidate to the start of the new job and successfully completing at least the probationary period at the new job, and evaluating the results together with the employer.

**What was the longest recruitment process you coordinated?**

The longest recruitment process took almost a year for a CEO position at the world's largest pharmaceutical company. It is not we who can decide the success of such a choice, only those who make the decision themselves, but I never give up. I am particularly proud of that placement of more than ten years as CEO at the helm of this company, which at the time was the best, if not the only possible combination of the parties. I had such great mentors within Antal and I can think of one of them who hired a research and development director at a large US vaccine company a few years ago. It took him more than a year to convince the Danish candidate to accept the offer (more than 1 million euros a year...) and move to the US with his family. A process that seemed impossible at first - but which today I believe has saved many lives with COVID vaccines (brilliant minds intertwined with cutting edge technology).

**How is the post-pandemic talent market both in Romania and in the global context?**

I wrote years ago about a growing talent crisis (even a war) (Talent War) and explained its causes. Almost 19 years ago, no one would have read such an article with interest. But now, I think it has become increasingly credible. There is such a crisis going on. And it is not generated (at most accentuated) by the pandemic. It has other causes too which have to do with the increasingly poor quality of education in schools/universities, the decreasing willingness of many young people to invest in their long-term training by choosing quick/short-term gains, the phenomenon of an ageing population, huge niches in certain industries such as IT, not to mention countries like ours

where there is a permanent exodus of talent... But what I notice most in recent years is the following paradox: while employers are more and more interested in having employees who work for the same time in the same company, highly trained and experienced in all the components of a job, serious in everything they do, ready as they say "tomorrow" if they can step into the perfect new role, ready-made - as the English say, even at the lower end of the market, at the same time, candidates are increasingly unhappy with this inflexibility, too little room to make changes, converting areas of expertise (industries) and/or offering packages that are motivating enough to make a job move wholeheartedly. They also complain about the hasty conclusions drawn about them at first glance, such as lack of confidence at the outset, lack of career prospects at the job offer stage, etc. Other motivations include the flexibility of working hours or, more importantly, the opportunity to keep the ease of working from home granted during the pandemic. It is also more efficient for most people. In short, everyone is "on short notice", everyone feels pressured, but, at the same time, everyone has been surprised that time is passing too quickly and that there is not enough seriousness ... Therefore, the battle is getting sharper and sharper.

#### **What are the most requested jobs by candidates and employers? But the rarest / most exotic?**

Candidates are looking for remote jobs or with as little travel as possible, regardless of the nature of their work, allowing them a predictable but professional financial advancement. Generally speaking, there are more applications in marketing, sales, and control roles, especially if they send such messages, and in companies with high stability. Employers are most of the time looking for IT engineers (Software), semiconductor engineers, and automation engineers. They are also looking for recruiters (especially in the IT area), financial analysts, accountants, new business salespeople, eCommerce, digital, online specialists, etc. More exotic/rare in our country would be jobs in the quality management segment, R&D, high tech, and renewable energy. The epidemic has boosted the process of digitalization and teleworking.

#### **How did you perceive the productivity of employees who worked / worked from home during this period?**

From our clients and our conclusions (although many avoid openly admitting this), it appears that teleworking has boosted the productivity of good employees. A mediocre or poor employee doesn't work at all. In addition, time wasted commuting, especially in big cities, is a factor in inefficiency and fatigue. Many of our bosses are obsessed with visual control, but there are many other management methods. Indeed, it's also linked to the disadvantage of face-to-face, but for the most part, it's turned out to be more of a myth in the workplace these days, with Teams, Zoom, Whatsup, etc. We encourage that anything that doesn't necessarily require travel doesn't become a must-do without good reason. At the same time, let's keep people's wishes in mind. Some may be more "OK" than others with these conditions. The HR function in companies has the task of adapting to the new normal for each person and role. By no means do I want to recommend an old "all or none of us" mentality for our times today.

#### **What estimates do you have of the percentage of wages that will increase next year, given the very high inflation we are facing?**

There are jobs where these packages have increased very recently (in IT, finance/accounting, some engineering, etc.), and for other types of jobs that have largely stagnated. Some benefits start to disappear in our country (like the company car). I can't say there is a downward trend in wages and benefits, quite the opposite. It is challenging to estimate the percentage of salaries that will increase. We expect layoffs, job reshuffles, and stacking, and only then package increases.

#### **What challenges do you face in executive search?**

As I said above, the biggest difficulty is the increasing pressure on emphasizing the set of job requirements, high requirements with budgets as low as possible compared to the real opportunities of the candidate market. Hopefully this will not become a "black hole" in recruitment that swallows us all

up. The short time it takes for the agency to perform - another constraint in the vast process and one that only reflects an unrealistic pressure, at least for a while - that management also puts on its people.

#### **What are the trends that will dominate the labor market and human capital in the coming years?**

In my opinion, there are more alternatives to the traditional way that will be needed in the labor market. For example temporary work, part-time work, working via platforms with people of different nationalities or from all around the world, working on a B2B basis as opposed to contract work, interim managers on projects, outsourcing of many current functions, targeting an increasingly older age segment (it has been happening for a few years now), conversions and reintroduction of many on-the-job training programs. The "2 in 1" phenomenon will intensify (1-2 or even three disciplines to be performed by one person is already widespread).

#### **In cities and counties, is there the greatest potential for the development of the executive search segment?**

At present, recruitment is less focused on areas and regions. My colleagues from Iasi - Camelia Bîrzanu, with 15 years in Antal Moldova, and the one from Cluj - Roxana Carabadache, with more than 6 years in Antal, both have projects in different cities or even countries. However, there is a lot of regional potential for expansion in Brasov, Oradea, Sibiu, etc.

