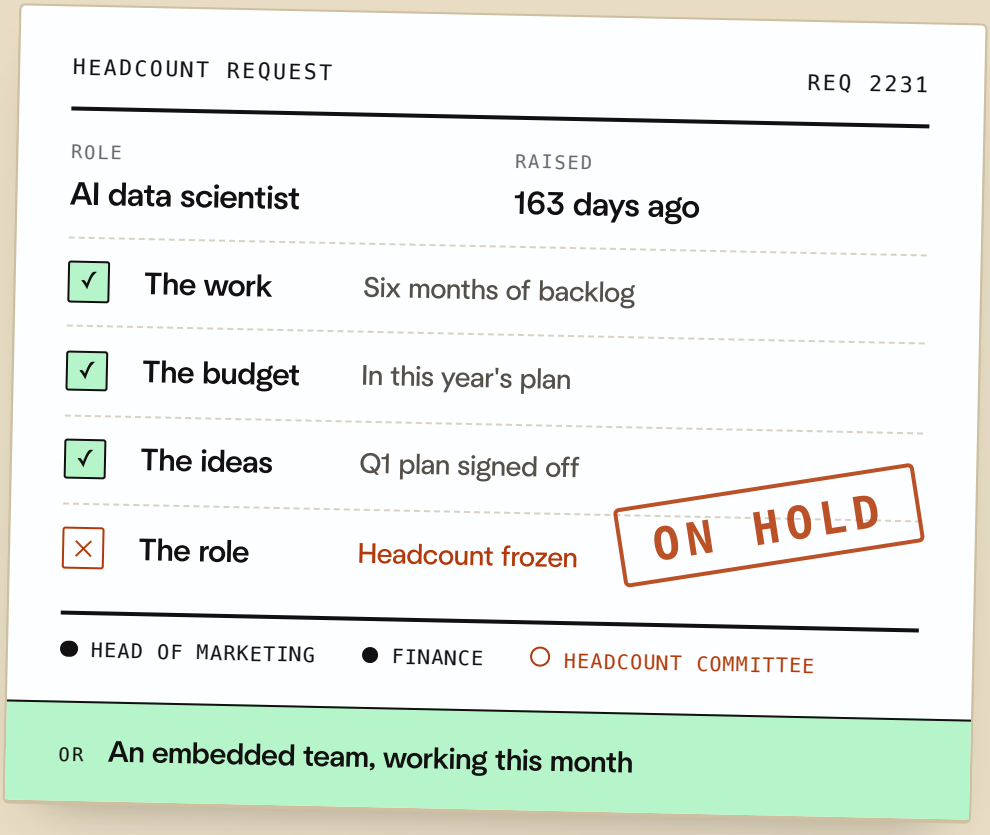
DIJITALLY

A DIJITALLY PAPER FOR MARKETING LEADERS

Headcount without the headache.

How to add marketing capacity when you can't add a head, and what to ask before you sign a fixed-term contract.



The headcount request is illustrative. Dijitally, November 2026.

WHY THIS PAPER

Most teams are short of approved roles, not budget or ideas.

Ask a marketing leader why a piece of work is late and the answer is rarely money. It is a role that has been in approval for two months, or a hiring freeze that nobody will put a date on.

So the work goes one of three ways. It waits. It lands on people who are already full. Or it goes to a fixed-term contract, which is treated as the cautious option.

> “
>
> You rarely need one person for exactly twelve months.
>
> **You need capacity that flexes.**

THE SHORT VERSION

This paper is for the moment before you raise that contract. It covers what a hire really costs before it does any work, what large employers are doing instead, and how to buy marketing capacity as a service without losing control of it.

We have run embedded marketing teams for companies globally for several years. Where we quote research we say where it came from. Where we give a view, it is ours.

01 · THE ROLE YOU CANNOT GET

Why do roles with budget behind them still sit in approval?

Because a permanent role is a commitment the business cannot see the end of. Salary is the smallest part of it. A permanent head brings on-costs, a desk in next year's plan, and a hard conversation if the work shrinks. When the outlook is unclear, finance and HR say "not yet" to that commitment, even when the work is real and the money for it exists.

That is the gap this paper is about: the work is there, the budget is there and the ideas are there. The approved role is not.

02 · THE FIXED-TERM TRAP

Is a fixed-term contract really the cautious option?

It feels cautious because it has an end date. Take the end date away and it looks a lot like a permanent hire:

- **The same recruitment cycle.** Spec, approval, advertising, interviews and notice periods.
- **The same onboarding.** Systems, brand and stakeholders, all paid for again with each new person.
- **One person, one skill set.** You hire a content marketer and find the real gap was CRM or paid media.
- **A cliff edge.** When the contract ends, the knowledge leaves with the person.

Fixed-term staff also have rights that grow with renewals. In Ireland and the UK, successive fixed-term contracts beyond four years can become permanent unless there are objective grounds. In Australia, since December 2023 most fixed-term contracts cannot run past two years or be renewed more than once. Take HR advice before the second contract, not after it.

03 · WHAT LARGE COMPANIES DO

How are big employers getting the work done without adding heads?

They separate the work from the headcount, and in 2026 that has a new twist. Many cut roles in the name of AI, then found the tools could not do the whole job. Ireland's Business Post calls it AI rebounding. Meta's contractor Covalen announced 720 lay-offs in April, while Meta hired hundreds of people through agencies, close to 300 of them from TikTok, mostly on 11-month contracts and some at more than €70,000.

Australia had the cuts first: Atlassian, WiseTech, Telstra and, in November, Qantas, which said around 850 corporate roles would go as Accenture takes over back-office work. The first rebound has already happened: Commonwealth Bank reversed 45 call-centre cuts in 2025 after its AI voice bot added calls instead of removing them. Robert Half found just under one in three North American managers who cut a role for AI later rehired for it, and calls North America a bellwether for Australia.

Permanent headcount stays flat and the work comes back as capacity. The choice is whether you buy it as a string of short contracts or as a team.

04 · COUNT THE REAL COST

How long before a new hire does any useful work?

Fill this in for the role you are about to raise. Most teams have never added the stages together.

STAGE	WEEKS
Business case written and approved	
Role advertised, shortlisted and interviewed	
Offer accepted and notice served	
Onboarding until they work without help	
Weeks before useful output	
As a share of a 12-month contract	

If the total is more than a quarter of the contract, the contract is mostly paying for its own start-up.

05 · CAPACITY, NOT PEOPLE

What are you actually short of over the next six months?

List the work, not the role. Write down every piece of work the team needs done in the next six months, then mark each one by discipline: content, SEO and AI search, paid media, CRM and email, creative, web, analytics.

If the list spans three or more disciplines, one hire will not cover it. If the volume swings month to month around launches and seasons, a fixed salary will be too much in some months and not enough in others. Both are signs you are short of capacity, not of a person.

06 · HOW AN EMBEDDED TEAM WORKS

What does buying capacity look like day to day?

An embedded team works inside your team. Our people use your tools, join your stand-ups and report to your marketing lead, with a wider bench of specialists behind them for launches and for skills you need some of the time.

- **Sized month to month.** More capacity in a launch month, less in a quiet one, without a restructure.
- **More than one skill set.** The gap you find in month three can be filled in month three.
- **Knowledge written down.** Process and context live in shared documents, so nothing walks out with one person.
- **An operating cost, not a head.** It is bought as a service, so it sits outside the headcount plan.

07 · WHERE IT GOES WRONG

What should you lock down before anyone gets a login?

Buying capacity fails in predictable ways. Agree these on day one:

- **Ownership.** Everything made for you is yours: work, accounts, data and documentation.
- **Access.** Named logins on your systems, removed in one step at the end. No shared passwords.
- **One owner on your side.** An embedded team without a clear lead drifts into taking orders from everyone.
- **A written handover standard.** If the arrangement ends, the next person can pick it up in a week.
- **Regular reporting.** Hours and output against the plan every month, so the size of the team is a decision, not a habit.

08 · GET IT APPROVED

How do you make the case when headcount is frozen?

Take the case to finance as an operating cost with an exit, not as a role. Three things help:

- **The worksheet from chapter 04,** showing how long a hire takes to produce anything.
- **The work list from chapter 05,** showing why one person will not cover it.
- **A 90-day pilot** with a clear scope, a monthly review and the right to stop. It is far easier to approve than a twelve-month commitment.

90 DAYS

A starting plan.

Week 1	Write the six-month work list and mark each item by discipline (chapter 05).
Week 2	Fill in the cost worksheet for the role you would otherwise raise (chapter 04).
Weeks 3 to 4	Agree scope, ownership, access and the handover standard (chapter 07). Name the owner on your side.
Weeks 5 to 8	Start with the two or three items that are most overdue. Set up the monthly report.
Weeks 9 to 12	First monthly reviews. Size the team up or down against the work list.
Day 90	Decide: continue, change the mix, or stop. Then raise a permanent role only for the work that proved to be steady and single-discipline.

Sources

- GemPool, Irish tech recruitment market reviews, 2026: gempool.ie/insights (recruiter view).
- Protection of Employees (Fixed-Term Work) Act 2003 (Ireland); Fixed-term Employees Regulations 2002 (UK).
- Fair Work Ombudsman, fixed term contract limits from 6 December 2023: fairwork.gov.au.
- Stopgap and Kindred Talent, Australian marketing hiring reports, 2026 (recruiter views).
- Sydney Morning Herald, "Qantas to cut 850 local jobs as it shifts roles to India", 10 November 2026.
- Business Post (Ireland), "The great rebound: Tech firms seek to woo back workers as AI bets falter", 15 November 2026.
- Information Age (ACS), "Companies now rehiring jobs they cut for AI" (Robert Half research), 1 October 2026; and on the Commonwealth Bank reversal, August 2025.

Much of the trend data comes from recruiters, who have an interest in contract hiring; the direction is consistent across countries, the exact numbers vary by source. This paper is general information, not legal or HR advice.

DIJITALLY™

If it is useful, we can map your backlog with you.

Bring your six-month work list. We will show you what an embedded team would cover, how it would be sized, and what you would keep in house.

Dijitally is a digital agency that runs embedded teams globally. We plan, build and run search, paid media, CRM, creative and websites, inside our clients' teams.

dijitally.com/headcount