

The fractional executive boom is real. Are you hiring the right person for the right reasons?

The ones getting results hire against a clear problem, with real authority and a defined finish line.

Fractional used to be a workaround.

A few years ago, a part-time senior executive was a move for startups that couldn't afford the real thing. Today it is a standard play.

38%

Mid-market companies that used at least one fractional executive in the prior 12 months, up from 11% in 2021.

30 to 40%

Estimated annual growth in the fractional CMO market since 2021 (market reports; directional).

\$8K to \$15K

Typical 2026 monthly retainer for a fractional CMO, versus a full-time CMO who commonly costs \$300K or more a year.

WHY THE MARKET IS GROWING

Senior judgment, before a senior payroll.

Boards and private equity sponsors now understand the model. More experienced operators have chosen the fractional path. The talent pool is deeper than ever.

AI changed what one senior executive can do.

Research a market, build a forecast, draft a brand platform, model a promotion or map a supply chain in a fraction of the time. With no large supporting team, a solo operator can execute immediately and deliver in weeks, not quarters.

More supply also means more noise.

Many people calling themselves fractional executives are consultants with a new title. A consultant delivers a recommendation. You need someone who owns the result.

BEFORE YOU HIRE

Run five tests before you sign.

- 1** Can you name the problem in one sentence?
- 2** Will this person have real authority?
- 3** Does their experience match your stage?
- 4** Are you hiring the person or the title?
- 5** Is there a defined finish line?

When fractional is the wrong answer.

The role needs daily full-time presence. You want a long-term cultural leader for a decade. Or the real issue is a founder who won't delegate authority.

MARC DRUCKER

Senior judgment, sized to the problem.

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