



Interview

P&P INTERSEARCH CELEBRATES 25 YEARS IN ROMANIA

ANA BER, Managing Partner, PENDL & PISWANGER

1. Looking back at 25 years of activity in Romania, what were the main challenges at the very beginning, and what motivated you to remain consistent in building a reference company in executive search?

In 2000, when Pendl & Piswanger (P&P) joined InterSearch, the Romanian market was still very young. Many international companies were just entering the country, and their expectations were strongly influenced by their home markets. Austrian and German investors, for example, wanted German-speaking executives; French companies required fluency in French. At the same time, there was a prevailing bias in recruitment—age, gender, and even family status often limited opportunities.

Our challenge was to professionalize the market, introduce international standards, and demonstrate that long-term success depends on matching leaders with organizations on values, not just résumés. Our goal was to change mindsets, introduce global standards, and prove that merit and leadership skills outweigh stereotypes. What kept me consistent was the conviction that Romania deserved the same level of professionalism in executive search as any mature economy, and that we could make a real impact on organizations by placing the right leaders.

2. What were the key milestones that shaped P&P InterSearch Romania's evolution – whether through complex projects or paradigm

shifts in the local market – and how did you manage to turn them into growth opportunities?

Our journey has been defined by moments of transformation. Joining the global InterSearch network in 2000 was more than just a milestone – it placed Romania on the global executive search map and allowed us to bring international standards to a market that was still taking shape. A few years later, Romania's EU accession opened the door to a new era: suddenly, companies needed leaders who could operate seamlessly in cross-border environments, and we were there to connect them with the right talent.

Over the past 25 years, we have placed more than 2,000 executives, with retention rates above 85% after three years and over 50% promoted within that timeframe – proof that we build not only careers but also long-lasting leadership matches.

Another turning point was 2021, when we launched our Interim Management division. We anticipated that organizations would increasingly need agile leaders who can step in during moments of crisis or transformation, and the results confirmed this trend.

For us, every disruption – from financial crises to digital transformation and now AI and sustainability – has been an opportunity to innovate. We never stood still; instead, we kept expanding our services and challenging ourselves to anticipate the next big shift. That ability to look ahead, rather than simply react, is what shaped our growth.

3. As part of the global InterSearch Worldwide network, what competitive advantages do your Romanian clients benefit from, and how have you managed to connect the local market with international trends and practices?

For our clients, the advantage lies in a unique balance: global reach with local depth. Through InterSearch, we are connected to more than 90 offices worldwide, which means we can run cross-border assignments with the same precision and cultural alignment as in Romania. At the same time, we bring more than two decades of deep understanding of the local business culture – the nuances that make a leadership appointment successful here.

This dual perspective has changed the narrative: Romania is no longer just importing leaders, it is exporting leadership talent. Increasingly, executives selected here are promoted into regional or global roles. It shows that the market has matured, and Romanian managers are now competitive at European standards.

Another strong differentiator is our ability to bring global trends directly into the Romanian market. Whether it is ESG and sustainability, AI adoption in leadership assessment, or new diversity practices, our role is to make sure Romanian organizations are not one step behind but aligned with international best practices. At the same time, we also act as ambassadors for Romanian talent abroad, promoting local leaders as part of international shortlists. This is why many multinational clients see P&P InterSearch not just as a recruiter, but as their trusted strategic partner in building leadership pipelines fit for the future.

European and global value chains, leadership here evolved from command-and-control to collaboration, adaptability, and cross-cultural fluency.

Today, leaders in Romania are not just managers of processes – they are architects of transformation. They are expected to inspire people, drive digitalization, embed sustainability into strategy, and navigate constant change. More importantly, Romanian leaders are increasingly trusted to run complex operations across Central and Eastern Europe, and even global functions. This shift from “importing leadership” to “exporting leadership” is perhaps the most powerful sign of maturity of our market.

Organizational culture in Romania has also made a remarkable journey. We are now much closer to Western European standards of governance, transparency, and people-centric management, while still retaining a valuable local advantage: agility, entrepreneurial spirit, and the ability to thrive in uncertainty. These qualities, forged through years of transition and crisis, make Romanian leaders uniquely resilient. And that resilience is exactly what the world needs today.

5. Today, the competencies of a successful leader go far beyond professional expertise, encompassing agility, emotional intelligence, and strategic vision. Which skills are most essential for leaders in Romania now, and how do they differ from what companies sought two decades ago?

Twenty years ago, companies looked mainly at résumés filled with technical know-how. A good engineer could become a director simply because expertise was enough. Today, the equation is very different: the leaders who stand out are those who combine strategic agility with empathy, digital literacy with vision, and the courage to navigate uncertainty. In Romania, this shift has been profound – from process managers to leaders who can inspire people, anticipate change, and embed sustainability into strategy. It's not about having all the answers anymore, but about creating the right context for teams to find them.

6. Female leadership is an increasingly visible topic. How do you evaluate the evolution of

4. How has the concept of leadership in Romania evolved over the past 25 years, from the 1990s until today, and to what extent has the local organizational culture aligned with European and global standards?

In the early 2000s, leadership in Romania was largely associated with authority, technical expertise, and hierarchical control. Many executives were expatriates brought in by multinational companies, while local managers were still building their confidence and exposure. But the story of the last 25 years is one of transformation: as Romania integrated into



*Cum nectis
que nobistrum
et odi dem
asimus
molorenist,
odi autet
arum quam.*



Romania is no longer just importing leaders, it is exporting leadership talent.

women's presence in executive and board positions in Romania, and what role has P&P InterSearch played in promoting diversity and inclusion in leadership?

At the beginning of the 2000s, women in boardrooms were the exception, not the rule. Today, we see accomplished female executives leading complex organizations in Romania and abroad, proving that talent has no gender. At P&P InterSearch, we make sure every shortlist reflects this reality—female leaders are visible, equally evaluated, and often the ones driving transformation. Beyond recruitment, we advise clients on building inclusive cultures, because diversity is not a “nice to have,” it is a source of innovation, better decision-making, and long-term performance.

7. P&P InterSearch is known not only as a recruiter but as a strategic advisor. How do you help organizations define and develop their leadership culture, addressing today's challenges related to sustainability, digitalization, and globalization?

For us, executive search is only the beginning of the conversation. Once a leader joins, the real challenge is shaping a culture that endures. That's why we advise clients on leadership assessments, succession planning, and intercultural alignment. In recent years, we've helped organizations identify leaders who not only understand sustainability, but integrate it into core strategy; who not only adopt digital tools, but lead people through transformation; who not only manage across cultures, but create a sense of unity.

Beyond recruitment, we have supported many foreign companies entering the Romanian market, facilitating intercultural understanding that helps executives adapt their leadership style, communication, and internal policies to the local context.

Our role is to future-proof leadership teams so that they can navigate complexity and remain resilient in the long run.

8. In the digital era, how the technology influences the executive search processes while maintaining human touch and confidentiality in relationships with leaders?

Our philosophy is “high-tech, high-touch”: we

embrace technology to bring efficiency, but we never compromise the discreet, human side of our work. Confidential discussions, cultural fit, and leadership potential cannot be evaluated by algorithms alone. Leadership decisions change organizations, and they must always rest on judgment, empathy, and integrity, not just on algorithms.

9. Looking ahead, what are the main development directions you foresee for P&P InterSearch Romania in the next 5–10 years, and what role do you believe Romania will play within the global InterSearch network?

We see three strategic directions. First, strengthening Executive Search as our core expertise. Second, scaling Interim Management, which has become essential for companies navigating transition. Third, consolidating our role in Sustainability Leadership, a practice where Romania is already contributing globally.

At the same time, we believe Romania will continue to grow as a regional leadership hub, exporting executives into global roles. The megatrends are clear: geopolitics, AI, and sustainability are redefining board agendas. Our mission is to prepare leadership teams for this new reality—bridging local markets with global opportunities and building knowledge centers in areas like green transition, digital talent, and interim leadership.

10. If you were to send a message to the younger generations of entrepreneurs and leaders in Romania, who want to build sustainable organizations, what leadership and integrity lessons would you share after a quarter of a century of experience?

My message is simple: lead with integrity, stay curious, and build for long-term. True success does not come from shortcuts, but from the ability to inspire people, uphold values, and adapt to change. Romania's next generation has the chance not only to build sustainable businesses at home, but also to project Romanian leadership internationally. The world is ready to listen; it is your turn to step forward. After 25 years in leadership consulting, I know one thing for certain: the leaders who endure are those who never stop learning, listening, and leading by example.