

2026 PLASTICS AND FLEXIBLE PACKAGING SALARY GUIDE



A comprehensive guide to the latest hiring trends, and compensation insights across the Plastics, Flexible Packaging & Specialty Chemical landscape.

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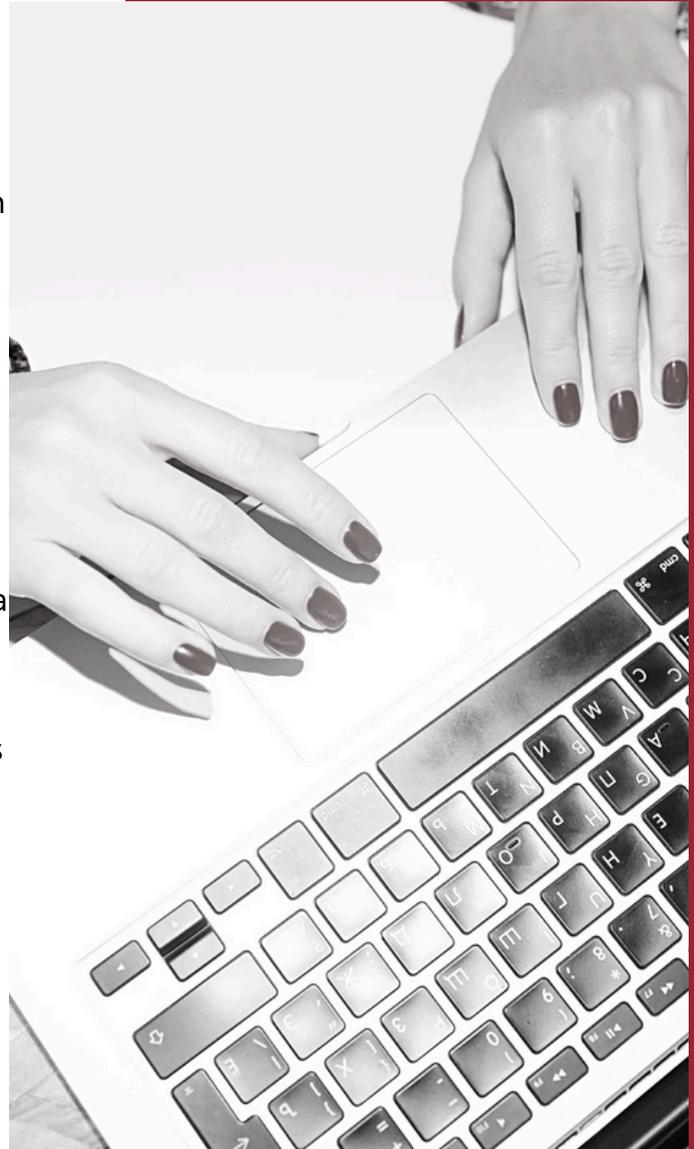
ABOUT DIRECT RECRUITERS, INC.

OVERVIEW

As the hiring landscape is constantly changing in the plastics and flexible packaging industries, employers need to have up-to-date insight into salary trends in the marketplace so that they can correctly position themselves to land top talent.

Direct Recruiters' Salary Guide provides relevant information on hiring in 2026 on market salaries for roles within the plastics and flexible packaging industries. Direct Recruiters' 2026 salary data has been formed from extensive market research, reputable industry sources and the searches our firm completes. Our knowledge of the current hiring trends and what employers are paying today's talent gives us the ability to provide you with accurate, and helpful data.

For more information, or details on Direct Recruiters executive search services, please contact David Peterson, Managing Partner, Plastics & Flexible Packaging at 440-996-0590 or dpeterson@directrecruiters.com.



TALENT TRENDS 2026

Why Today's Leaders Must Do More Than Manage

The leadership landscape is changing. Fast.

As we move into 2026, organizations are rethinking what they truly need from senior leaders—and the shift is profound. Executives are no longer hired simply to oversee functions or maintain day-to-day stability. Instead, they are expected to serve as strategic and transformational catalysts, capable of steering organizations through technological disruption, global uncertainty, and escalating regulatory pressures. Companies want leaders who don't just run the business, they want leaders who can reimagine it.

This evolution is reshaping not only what organizations look for in candidates, but how they define leadership itself.



Why the Role of the Executive Has Transformed

1. Digital & AI Transformation Is Now Mission-Critical

The acceleration of AI adoption, automation, and enterprise technology has fundamentally changed how organizations operate. Leaders are expected to be literate in AI, able to integrate it into strategy, and comfortable using data to guide decisions. These are no longer CIO-only responsibilities. Boards expect every executive to understand the digital landscape.

2. Regulatory and Compliance Pressures Are Intensifying

Between data privacy laws, AI governance standards, ESG scrutiny, and industry-specific regulations, today's leaders need to navigate an increasingly complex compliance environment. Missteps can be costly, both financially and reputationally.

3. Globalization Has Raised the Bar for Leadership Agility

Market expansion, geopolitical unpredictability, and distributed global teams require leaders who can operate across cultures, time zones, and regulatory environments. Cross-border competency is becoming essential—not optional.

4. Organizations Need Operational Transformation, Not Maintenance

Companies aren't just seeking efficiency; they're seeking reinvention. Leaders who can streamline operations, modernize systems, and build adaptability into the business are in especially high demand.

From “Fill-a-Seat” to “Fill-a-Lever”

For years, executive recruitment centered on identifying candidates who met functional requirements. Today, companies recognize that functional competence is only the starting point. They now want executives who can:

- Set strategic direction
- Lead transformation
- Navigate uncertainty
- Influence culture and behaviors
- Drive sustainable, long-term value

This is the difference between filling a seat and pulling a lever that moves the entire organization. This shift is redefining executive search itself. The most effective search partners now act less as recruiters and more as strategic advisors, helping companies determine what kind of leadership they actually need to meet future challenges.



Why This Trend Is Accelerating

Several industry data points confirm the magnitude of this shift:

Executive search demand continues to rise. The global executive search and headhunting market is projected to reach \$58.1 billion in 2025, reflecting growing reliance on external partners to identify senior talent.

C-suite turnover remains high. More than 50% of C-suite leaders say they expect to leave their current role within two years, and 27% anticipate doing so within six months. High turnover is creating more openings—and more competition—for top leadership talent.

Executive hiring is becoming more complex. SHRM reports that cost-per-hire for executives has more than doubled since 2017, underscoring the increased stakes and sophistication required in senior-level hiring.

These shifts are not temporary. They reflect a long-term transformation in what leadership means.

What This Means for Organizations in 2026

For boards, CEOs, and hiring committees, the implications are clear:

- Leadership roles must be defined through a strategic lens, not just a functional one.
- Transformation capability should be a core selection criterion, not a bonus.
- Cultural alignment and adaptability matter more than ever, especially in periods of technological and organizational change.
- Search processes must be rigorous and forward-looking, emphasizing leadership potential and strategic influence.

Organizations that understand this shift—and hire accordingly—position themselves for resilience, innovation, and long-term growth.

Those who don't risk falling behind.

Hiring Without Borders in 2026

The way companies find talent is changing fast. Geography is no longer the primary constraint. Organizations are increasingly tapping global talent pools to fill roles across all levels, from specialist contributors to senior management. This approach allows businesses to access the right skills faster and build more diverse, adaptable teams capable of competing in a globalized market.

Companies are embracing a more global approach to recruitment, leveraging technology, digital communication, and sophisticated search strategies to identify candidates wherever they may be. The result? Teams that are more adaptable, culturally fluent, and capable of operating on a truly global scale.

Several forces are driving the shift toward global hiring:

1. Access to the Best Talent

Looking beyond local talent pools allows companies to find individuals with specialized skills, niche expertise, or unique experience that may not exist domestically.

2. Filling Critical Skill Gaps

With rapid digital transformation, AI adoption, and emerging technologies, organizations increasingly need talent that combines technical proficiency with adaptability. Global hiring widens the candidate pool for roles that are hard to fill locally.

3. Diverse Perspectives Drive Innovation

Globally sourced teams introduce a variety of experiences, cultural perspectives, and problem-solving approaches. Research shows that diverse teams are more innovative and able to anticipate challenges across multiple markets.

4. Flexibility Through Remote and Hybrid Work

Remote and hybrid work models have become mainstream. Key U.S. data from 2025 illustrates the trend:

- **22.8% of U.S. employees worked remotely** at least part-time – roughly 36 million people ([Amra & Delma, 2025](#)).
- Among employees with advanced degrees, **42.8% teleworked**, versus only 9.1% of those with high-school education ([Amra & Delma, 2025](#)).
- Approximately **40% of U.S. jobs** allowed at least some remote work in early 2025 ([Amra & Delma, 2025](#)).
- In a survey of remote-capable workers globally, **52% work hybrid and 26% fully remote** ([Vena Solutions, 2025](#)).
- A 2025 U.S. employer survey found **88% now offer hybrid work options**, while 24% of new postings were hybrid and 12% fully remote ([Robert Half, 2025](#)).

These numbers highlight that remote and hybrid work are mainstream, not temporary, creating a significant opportunity to recruit globally and expand talent pools.

BY THE NUMBERS

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Robert Half

Practical Tips for Hiring Global Talent

To leverage these opportunities, companies can assess global talent readiness using these strategies:

- *Define Global-Ready Roles:* Determine which positions can be remote or hybrid versus those that require local presence.
- *Evaluate Cultural Agility:* Look for candidates who adapt quickly, communicate across cultures, and collaborate effectively in virtual settings.
- *Assess Digital Collaboration Skills:* Ensure comfort with project management tools, video conferencing platforms, and distributed workflows.
- *Consider Legal and Compliance Factors:* Account for work permits, tax implications, labor laws, and relocation requirements early in the hiring process.
- *Leverage Global Recruitment Partners:* Executive search firms and global talent agencies can map international pools, identify candidates, and manage cross-border logistics.

Why Companies Should Care

Global talent mobility offers tangible advantages:

- Access to a larger, more specialized talent pool
- Faster ability to fill critical skill gaps
- Teams with diverse perspectives driving innovation
- Flexibility to adapt to hybrid/remote work models
- Enhanced organizational resilience in a rapidly changing environment

By embracing these practices, companies position themselves to compete for the best talent worldwide, no matter the role or location.

The future of hiring is borderless, flexible, and global. Organizations that integrate international talent mobility and hybrid/remote work into their recruitment strategies gain a strategic advantage – building stronger, more adaptable teams ready for the challenges of 2026 and beyond.



Salary Guide

ANNUAL SALARY

JOB TITLE

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

CEO	\$250,000+
COO	\$175,000+
CHRO	\$175,000+
PRESIDENT	\$225,000+
VP OF SALES	\$150,000+
VP OF OPERATIONS	\$150,000+

Within the context of the 2025 Salary Guide, it's essential to recognize the dynamic nature of salary structures. Salaries can fluctuate based on various factors, including equity arrangements and other long-term incentive programs. This acknowledgement emphasizes the ongoing fluidity in compensation practices, illustrating the multifaceted components that contribute to employees' overall remuneration.



ABOUT DIRECT RECRUITERS, INC.

Since 1983 Direct Recruiters, Inc. has been recognized as the relationship-focused search firm specializing in building customized employment solutions.

DRI Plastics, Flexible Packaging & Specialty Chemical

DRI's Plastics & Flexible Packaging team provides contract staffing, contingency, retained "Direct Retention," board search and private equity search options. We acquire talent within Plastics, Flexible Packaging and Specialty Chemicals for clients looking for key, executive level professionals.

Direct Recruiters is dedicated to customized solutions that include sourcing, identifying, acquiring, onboarding and retaining top-performing professionals to elevate the success of our clients' organizations.





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