

Q1 MARKET UPDATE

Accounting & Finance

Q1 Overview

Q1 opened with noticeably stronger momentum compared to both Q4 and this time last year. Vacancy volumes are up, driven by renewed confidence in growth sectors, particularly technology, AI-led businesses, and private equity-backed environments, where we are seeing active build-out of IPO readiness and scale-up finance teams.

This marks a shift from the steadier, more cautious hiring environment seen across 2025, where demand remained stable, but hiring was often tied to replacement or tightly controlled growth. In Q1, confidence has moved toward selective expansion, with hiring increasingly linked to strategic initiatives rather than purely backfill.

Hiring mix is skewed toward new roles, with roughly a 2:1 ratio of newly created positions versus replacements, particularly in FP&A, controllership, and strategic finance. Permanent hiring continues to dominate, though there has been a modest uptick in conversations around interim and temp-to-perm solutions as companies look to retain flexibility.

Major finance hubs such as New York and other tech-centric markets continue to lead activity, but demand is closely tied to sector exposure rather than geography alone. Notable skill spikes include professionals with a “builder” mindset, those who have implemented processes, improved reporting cycles, or supported scale, reflecting a broader focus on operational maturity.

Demand Trends

The fastest interview-to-offer timelines are being seen at the senior end of the market, including Director, VP Finance, and CFO searches, where urgency is linked to growth milestones such as fundraising, acquisitions, or public readiness. In some cases, processes are concluded in as little as two weeks when decision-making is aligned.

Multiple-offer situations remain common for those with experience building finance infrastructure in high-growth environments. Newly created roles continue to outpace backfills, especially within venture-backed technology businesses and

independent media organizations responding to industry change.

While permanent hiring remains the default, the recent increase in contract and interim conversations suggests companies are maintaining optionality as they assess market conditions.

Key drivers include:

- Increased investment in AI and digital capabilities
- Renewed VC and private equity activity
- Consolidation and restructuring across media and advertising

These trends reflect a broader shift from cost control in 2025 toward targeted investment in capability.

Compensation

Compensation in Q1 is best described as selectively competitive. Salary ranges are broadly consistent with where the market settled last year, but hiring outcomes are increasingly dependent on flexibility around budget.

There remains a clear disconnect between employer expectations and talent salary requirements, particularly for top performers with transformation or scaling experience. Organizations willing to stretch are securing talent quickly, while those holding firm are seeing roles remain open for longer.

Counteroffers are becoming more frequent, especially for high performers in stable environments. Bonuses are generally being set with greater realism and closer alignment to performance, reflecting a continued normalization after the volatility seen in previous years.

Equity remains a meaningful differentiator in growth companies, while larger corporates continue to emphasize base stability and long-term incentives.

Candidate Behavior

Overall, sentiment remains mixed. Senior leaders, including Controllers through to CFOs, are demonstrating increased willingness to move, including openness to relocation or more time in office for the right opportunity. By contrast, mid-level professionals remain more sensitive to flexibility and are more likely to decline roles with rigid in-office requirements.

Flexibility continues to be a decisive factor, consistent with themes seen throughout last year. Job search activity is largely proactive among top performers, particularly those seeking exposure to growth environments or clearer progression.

Professionals are prioritizing:

- Career trajectory and scope
- Organizational stability
- Leadership visibility
- Flexible working arrangements

Counteroffers are often accepted in the short term but rarely address deeper drivers such as progression limitations or workload pressures.

Hiring Process Trends

Time-to-offer varies significantly by organization. Some employers are moving quickly and securing talent within weeks, while others are experiencing delays due to extended interview processes and internal decision-making, a pattern that has persisted since last year.

Common stall points include:

- Budget approvals
- Too many interview stages
- Lack of alignment among stakeholders

Drop-out risk increases when processes extend beyond three to four weeks without clear communication.

Organizations that are winning talent are those that align decision-makers early, communicate transparently, and move with conviction once the right individual is identified.

Q2 Outlook

Looking ahead, competition is expected to intensify for finance leaders with transformation and scaling experience, particularly as capital markets activity and AI investment continue to drive growth.

Likely pressure points include:

- Strategic FP&A talent
- Technical accounting leaders
- Finance professionals with IPO or transaction exposure
- Professionals who can combine finance expertise with systems and data capability

Sectors poised for continued momentum include technology, private equity-backed businesses, and niche media firms navigating industry change.

Key risks include ongoing budget discipline, macroeconomic uncertainty, and continued gaps between salary expectations and employer willingness to flex.

For organizations, the priority should be aligning budgets early, maintaining pace in hiring processes, and clearly articulating flexibility. Delayed decision-making or rigid compensation structures will increasingly result in lost talent.

For professionals, the market remains opportunity-rich, particularly for those who can demonstrate measurable impact and a track record of building or improving finance functions.

KEY TRENDS



Vacancy volumes have increased in Q1



New role creation outpacing replacement hiring



“Builder” profiles are in highest demand



Salary expectations remain misaligned



Speed and decisiveness are securing top talent