

DATABRICKS TALENT BRIEFING Q2 2026

The Data Engineer Talent Market: *An Insider's View.*

Australia, 2026

A quick note before we dive in:

I recently wrapped up a project mapping out the Senior Databricks market in Australia for a client. Rather than keeping this to myself, I wanted to share the findings. The data landscape is shifting quickly, and if you're planning to hire or retain data talent this year, here is a breakdown of what the market actually looks like right now.

2,315

DATABRICKS PROS (AU)

931

SENIOR / LEAD TITLES

344

VERIFIED SENIORS

27%

YOY MARKET GROWTH

PREPARED BY

ScaleUp Recruitment

0424 301 059 • scaleuprecruitment.com.au

01 The Current Market Reality: The Talent Squeeze

You've probably seen the news: Databricks is pouring AU\$420M into the ANZ region and expanding their Sydney HQ. It's a massive vote of confidence in our market.

While they are investing heavily to upskill the broader market over the next five years, the immediate reality for hiring managers is a bit of a squeeze.

If you need a battle-tested Senior Data Engineer, someone who can actually architect and deploy a production-grade Lakehouse today, the demand is heavily outpacing the supply.

02 Who is Actually Out There? (Market Sizing)

To figure out exactly who is in the market, I spent the last few weeks mapping it out, combining live LinkedIn Talent Insights with my candidate networking.

WHAT WE'RE LOOKING AT	THE NUMBERS
Total Databricks Professionals (AU)	2,315 (Growing fast at 27% YoY)
The "Senior" Market	931 professionals hold a Senior / Lead title
Recently Mapped Cohort	344 verified Senior Databricks Engineers

What this means: This recently mapped cohort gives us a direct line of sight into about 37% of the entire senior market.

- **Where are they?** Melbourne still has the highest volume (857 people), but Sydney is catching up fast with 30% YoY growth. Brisbane is also quietly emerging as a strong talent hub.
- **Diversity:** The talent pool is currently sitting at 27% Female / 73% Male.

03 Flight Risk & Mobility (Why Speed Matters)

This is a highly mobile talent pool. If you aren't actively engaging your top performers, someone else is.

- **The 1.8-Year Average:** The median tenure right now is just 1.8 years. These engineers tend to execute one or two major migration projects, upskill, and then look for the next challenge.
- **Active Movers:** Right now, over 38% of the market (880+ people) are explicitly open to new opportunities, with a solid chunk (480+) open to contracting.
- **Where are they leaving?** We are seeing elevated movement from a few major players. ANZ Bank, for instance, is seeing a notable 73% outward mobility rate in this specific skill set. Coles Group and Macquarie Group are also experiencing significant talent shifts.

04 It's Not Just Databricks: The Surrounding Tech Stack

When I speak to these candidates, they aren't just "Databricks Engineers." Their value comes from the ecosystem they operate in. Here is what this recently mapped cohort of 344 seniors is actually using:

The Cloud Platforms

Azure Databricks is still the absolute default for Microsoft-heavy enterprise environments. Interestingly though, within this specific cohort of actively mobile senior talent, AWS actually had a slight edge. Finding someone with genuine, production-level GCP + Databricks experience? Still very rare.

CLOUD PREFERENCE (RECENTLY MAPPED COHORT)	TOTAL CANDIDATES
AWS Exclusive	45
Azure Exclusive	38
Multi-Cloud (AWS & Azure)	26
GCP (Exclusive & Multi-Cloud)	12

The Tooling Standard

Beyond the cloud, the modern data stack has really consolidated. PySpark is the undisputed processing standard, and dbt has become the absolute default for transformations. Snowflake remains the most common storage counterpart we see sitting alongside Databricks.

05 What Does It Cost to Hire Them in 2026?

The market has settled down from the wild peaks of a few years ago, but a premium still absolutely exists for engineers who can navigate multi-cloud setups or integrate AI/MLOps.

Permanent Hiring (Base Salary Expectations)

WHO YOU ARE HIRING	BASE SALARY (AUD)	WHAT YOU GET
The Transitioning Senior	\$130,000 - \$150,000	Transitioning from traditional ETL into modern Lakehouse setups. Great if you have strong leaders to mentor them.
The Core Senior Engineer	\$155,000 - \$180,000	The engine room. Proven capability to independently design and deploy robust pipelines using AWS/Azure/GCP and dbt.
The Principal / Architect	\$185,000 - \$220,000+	The strategic leader. They own the architecture, lead the squads, and bridge the gap between Data Engineering and AI.

Need a Contractor Instead?

For urgent delivery, daily rates are sitting around \$900 to \$1,100/day for a standard Senior, scaling up to \$1,300 to \$1,500+/day for Architects or those with premium real-time streaming skills (Kafka/Flink).

06 How to Win: Strategic Talent Attraction & Retention

Competing for high-tier Databricks talent in a market expanding this fast means traditional EVPs stop working. Securing this talent requires a split-modality strategy: the drivers for permanent hires and professional contractors are fundamentally different.

Split-Modality Acquisition: Permanent vs. Contracting

TALENT DIMENSION	PERMANENT: "LEGACY & GROWTH" EVP	CONTRACTING: "VELOCITY & TOOLING" EVP
Primary Motivator	Long-term architectural ownership, career progression, and equity or bonus upside.	Day-rate maximisation, exposure to cutting-edge tech stacks, and zero operational bureaucracy.
Technical Pitch	"Build the Foundation" Design the long-term Medallion architecture, establish data governance, and guide the platform's multi-year evolution.	"High-Impact Delivery" Step in to solve a specific, complex problem (e.g. rescuing a migration), then move on.
EVP Hook	Equity & Autonomy Mentorship opportunities, learning budgets, and direct influence over the strategic technology roadmap.	Immediate Access to New Toys Premier partner status, beta features, real-time streaming, or greenfield agentic AI builds pull attention before any other pitch.
Friction Points	Slow onboarding, lengthy interviews, and overly complex technical tests.	Protracted procurement, delayed start dates, and poorly defined project scopes.

Four Levers to Move the Needle

To outmanoeuvre tier-1 consultancies, globally recognised tech brands, and well-funded scale-ups, lean on these four operational pillars:

1 Pitch "Variety & Complexity" over "Maintenance"

The best data engineers are technical purists motivated by solving genuinely tough architectural puzzles.

The Play: If your vacancy involves greenfield builds, real-time inferencing (Kafka/Flink), or foundational infrastructure for agentic AI, this must be the very first line of your job description and outreach. For permanent hires, frame this as their legacy. For contractors, frame it as a high-octane project that will supercharge their portfolio.

2 Weaponise a Flat Structure

Senior engineers frequently leave highly regulated, bureaucratic environments because they are tired of writing change requests instead of writing code.

The Play: If your engineering team operates with high autonomy, flat structures, and minimal red tape, heavily emphasise this. Tell candidates: "Here, you own your pipeline from design to production. There are no CAB meetings or multi-layered approvals between you and deployment." A release valve for engineers seeking relief from enterprise inertia.

3 Leverage Elite Tech Partnerships

Engineers want to work where the partnership tier is highest, because it guarantees their skills remain at the vanguard of the industry.

The Play: If your business has strategic collaboration agreements, premier partner status, or private beta access with Databricks, AWS, or Azure, shout it from the rooftops. High-calibre talent, especially top-tier contractors, will actively prioritise your project if it means they get to play with the newest features (like Lakewatch or Lakebase) before the rest of the market.

4 Speed is an Operational Strategy

Product companies and agile scale-ups move at breakneck speed. The moment a top-tier candidate becomes visible in the market, they are placed.

The Play: If your interview process involves more than three stages or takes longer than two weeks, you will lose the best talent to counter-offers or faster-moving competitors. For contractors, aim for a one-stage, 24-hour turnaround. For permanent hires, compress technical and cultural stages into a single, cohesive half-day session.

07 Where is the Role Going?

If you are planning your team structure for the rest of the year, keep an eye on these two shifts:

01 Security meets Data

With Databricks launching “Lakewatch” (their AI-driven SIEM, currently in private preview), Data Engineers are increasingly being pulled into enterprise security conversations.

02 The Agentic AI Shift

The release of “Lakebase” and “Agent Bricks” means your data team will increasingly be pulled into the infrastructure layer that supports AI agents and production AI applications.

Let's Chat.

Data on a page is helpful, but context is everything.

If you want to know what a \$160k engineer vs. a \$200k engineer actually looks like on paper, or if you just want to benchmark your current team's salaries against the live market, I'm always happy to share what I'm seeing.

CONNECT WITH ME

0424 301 059

scaleuprecruitment.com.au