Bridging the Internal Communications Gap: What Frontline Employees Really Want & Need

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S speakap

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INTRODUCTION

According to Google, 80 percent of the global workforce, or approximately 3 billion, are performing physical or non-desk work on a daily basis. When we say non-desk work, we are referring to people who typically work on their feet in settings like retail stores, hotels, restaurants, bars, production facilities, warehouses and hospitals. These employees are often the first point of interaction with customers and sit on the frontline of the business. The roles they work in can vary from store associates to store supervisors to regional managers to hotel check-in staff, cleaning staff and other similar roles.

Communicating to and with frontline employees can be difficult and complicated for a variety of reasons. To start, there isn't one single way to discuss internal communications. It can be referred to as internal or employee communications. It can also extend into employee engagement and employee experience. Beyond that, it can also touch upon and be managed by multiple functions within the business – from human resources (HR) to internal communications and marketing to operations to information technology (IT). There isn't always one specific function or team who is responsible for developing the strategy, implementing the necessary technologies and tools, executing the tactics and measuring performance. Because of these variations, confusion can often arise as to how to improve internal communications and employee engagement.

More often than not, technology can play a vital role in improving the quality, style and efficiencies of internal communications and employee engagement within organizations. But this can only happen if the right internal communications platform is implemented and integrated across existing CRM, HR, payroll and workforce management tools – and if the technology addresses the major communications challenges and pain points faced by the frontline employees themselves.

In this research study, we will uncover key internal communications and employee engagement methods, channels, preferences and frustrations that frontline employees face and experience from businesses in the retail, hospitality and entertainment sectors.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY & OBJECTIVES

We surveyed over 1,000 non-desk employees in the United States, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Spain and Germany to understand their existing internal communications practices as well as their needs, frustrations and preferences for employee engagement. The survey was fielded in December 2018 and targeted non-desk employees (i.e. retail store associates, front of house staff, customer service staff, etc.) across a variety of business categories, including retail, hospitality and entertainment.

KEY FINDINGS & TRENDS

To Win Over Your Frontline, Connect & Engage Via Mobile

According to our findings, almost two-thirds (64 percent) of the respondents use their mobile devices for work-related communications. It makes sense when you consider the type of work frontline employees are performing daily. They're greeting customers inside brick-and-mortar retail stores; they're ringing up sales transactions at cash registers (or tills); they're providing on-the-spot customer service to help customers choose the right products and styles; they're checking in guests at hotels and spas; they're cleaning hotel rooms while guests are out exploring their holiday destinations; they're preparing meals in the kitchen for restaurant guests; they're diagnosing illnesses at the hospital; and so much more.

In all of these scenarios, there is one common denominator: these frontline employees aren't sitting in front of a desk or computer. They're standing on their feet and need to be able to move quickly depending on the needs of their customer, guest or patient. Because of the nature of the roles/jobs, it goes without saying that these frontline employees must be mobile-first and have instant access to communications from their mobile devices.

But what we found surprising in our research is that despite this need to be always on and mobile-first, 32 percent of the respondents said they aren't permitted to use their mobile devices during work shifts. This is often the case for certain types of businesses and is dependent on internal HR and/or operations protocols that have been set by the company.

Frontline employees are the face of the business and act as both the first and last touch points with customers. So some companies may not want these employees to be staring at their mobile devices and taking their attention away from the needs of their customers in real-time.

For example, Penny Grivea, UK managing director for global beauty retailer, Rituals, recently chatted with us about how Rituals handles this. According to Grivea, "We actually make it mandatory for our employees to download the Speakap app (iOS or Android) onto their mobile devices when they accept a job with Rituals. More specifically, the store managers have their mobile devices (and Speakap app) on the shop floors all day/during their shifts, while store associates switch off their phones during the peak hours of 12 pm to 6 pm."

Chart 1

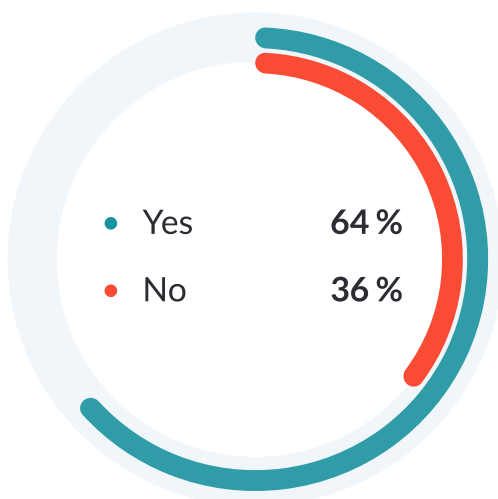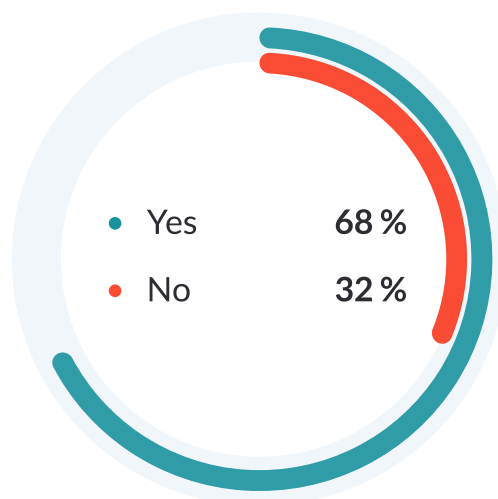**Do you use your personal mobile device for work-related purposes?**

- Yes   **64 %**
- No   **36 %**

Chart 2

Are you permitted to use your personal mobile device during work shifts?

- Yes   **68 %**
- No   **32 %**

Much to HR's Surprise, Messaging Apps & Social Media Sites Are in Heavy Rotation (Up to Six Times Daily)

We speak to HR managers, internal communicators, employee engagement managers and operations managers on a daily basis to understand the current communications behaviors and preferences of their frontline employees. What's astonishing is the jarring difference between corporate perceptions about what communications methods and tools are being used and the realities of what employees are actually doing and using to communicate about work-related matters.

As our research study found, 18 percent of non-desk workers use messaging apps (i.e. WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Skype, Telegram) as the primary channel to communicate with fellow colleagues, managers and the head office. On top of this, over half (53 percent) of the respondents said they use messaging apps for work-related matters between one and six times each day. However, 16 percent of the respondents answered 'no' when we asked if their HR/internal communications departments are aware of this usage.

Now consider this: nearly half (47 percent) of the respondents confirmed that they use social media sites to communicate with fellow colleagues, managers and the head office. This isn't just a once a week or once a month occurrence either. In fact, 38 percent of the respondents admitted to using social media sites between one and six times each day for work-related matters. Once again, the respondents said their HR/internal communications departments aren't aware (20 percent) this is occurring.

So the question is: Why is there such a big gap between what HR/internal communications departments perceive to be happening and what is really occurring among non-desk workers? One reason is because there can sometimes be too much of a walled relationship between the HR/internal communications departments and the non-desk workforce. This can lead to indirect, infrequent and siloed communications, which can lead to a lack of understanding as to what employees are actually doing, what communications channels they are using in their daily roles and how they prefer to be reached and engaged. Another reason can be a lack of education and training so that employees understand why using messaging apps and social media sites can be detrimental to their performance, efficiency, data privacy, customer satisfaction and even sales.

Whatever the reason, this needs to change. One key to solving this problem is implementing a single technology platform that can replace all of the combined messaging apps and social media sites. Essentially, an internal communications platform that acts as a one-stop shop and can integrate with hundreds of CRM, HR, payroll and workforce management tools will make things run a lot smoother within your organization – and make it easier to minimize this huge gap between what HR believes is occurring and what actually is occurring among your employees.

Chart 3

Which one of the following do you use as your primary channel to communicate with fellow colleagues, managers and the head office?

Company email	31%
Messaging apps (WhatsApp, Messenger, etc.)	18%
Personal email	17%
Text/SMS messages	12%
Social media	6%
Internal communications platform provided by company	6%
Intranet	5%
Other	5%
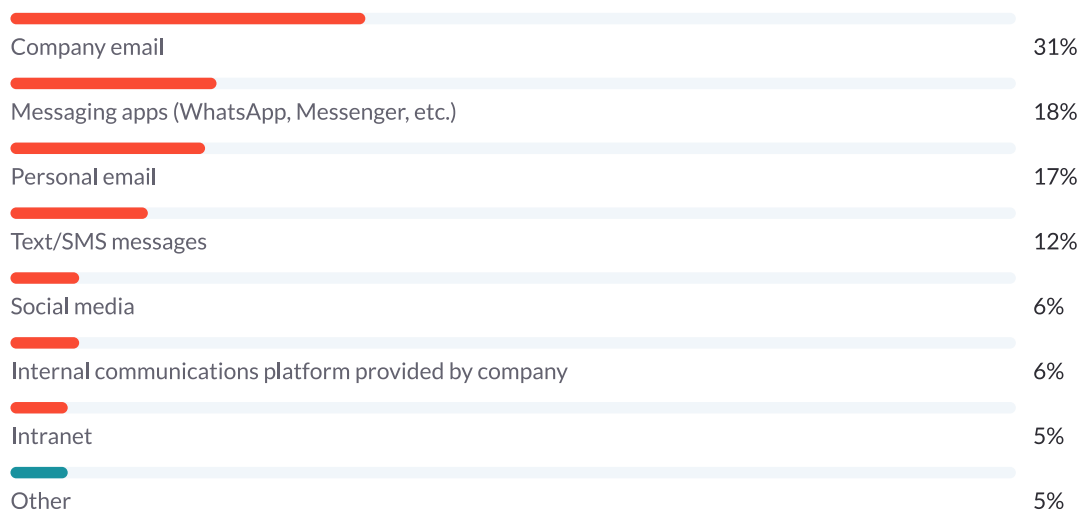
Chart 4

On average, how often do you use messaging apps to communicate with colleagues, managers and the head office?

Once a day	20%
At least 2-3 times a day	22%
At least 4-6 times a day	11%
More than 6 times a day	9%
Every 2-3 days	5%
Every 3-5 days	3%
Once a week	4%
2-3 times a week	3%
4-6 times a week	1%
Once every 2 weeks	2%
Once every 3 weeks	0.5%
Monthly	1%
Rarely	8%
Never	11%

Note: Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Chart 5

Do your HR/internal communications departments know that you use messaging apps to communicate with fellow colleagues, managers and the head office about work-related matters?

- Yes **63 %**
- No **16 %**
- Don't know **21 %**

Chart 6

Do you use social media sites to communicate with fellow colleagues, managers and the head office about work-related matters?

- Yes **47 %**
- No **53 %**

Chart 7

On average, how often do you use social media sites to communicate with colleagues, managers and the head office about work-related manners?

Once a day	13%
At least 2-3 times a day	15%
At least 4-6 times a day	10%
More than 6 times a day	6%
Every 2-3 days	4%
Every 3-5 days	3%
Once a week	5%
2-3 times a week	1%
4-6 times a week	0.4%
Once every 2 weeks	1%
Once every 3 weeks	0.5%
Monthly	1%
Rarely	14%
Never	27%

Note: Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Chart 8

Do your HR/internal communications departments know that you use social media sites to communicate with fellow colleagues, managers and the head office about work-related matters?

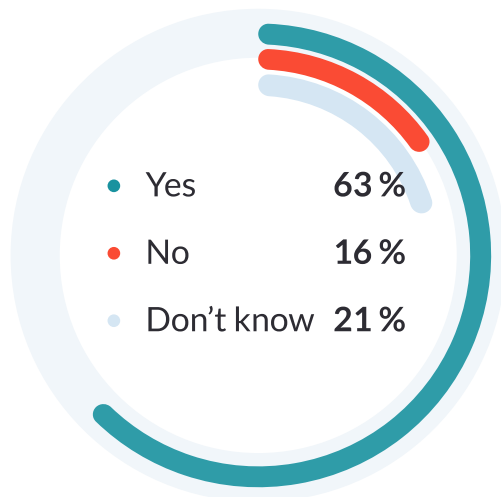- Yes   **52 %**
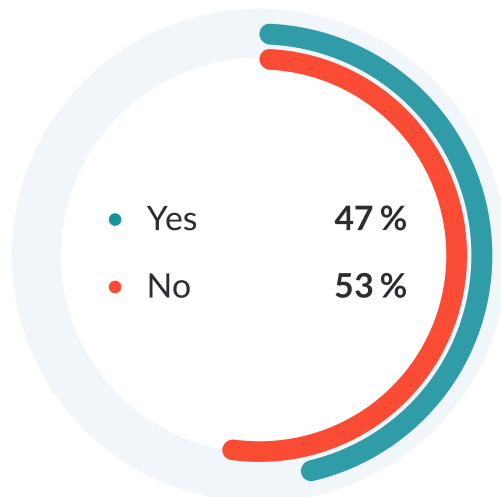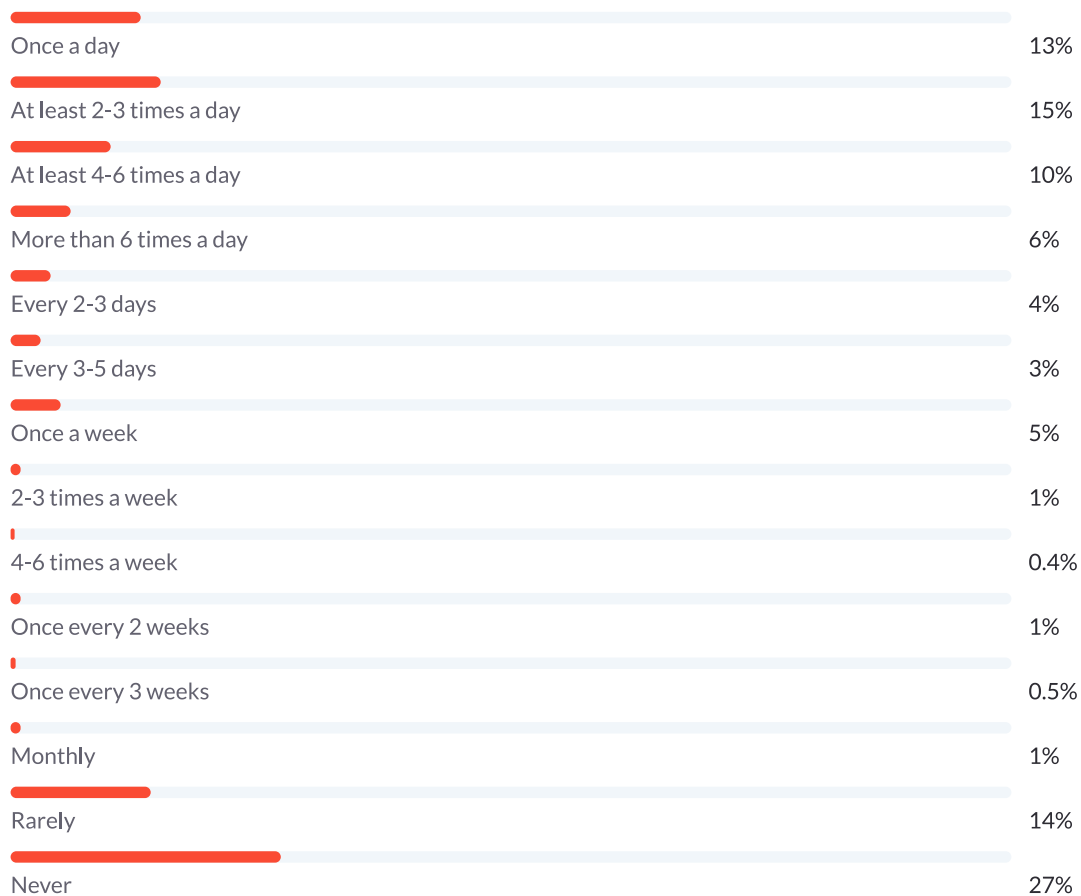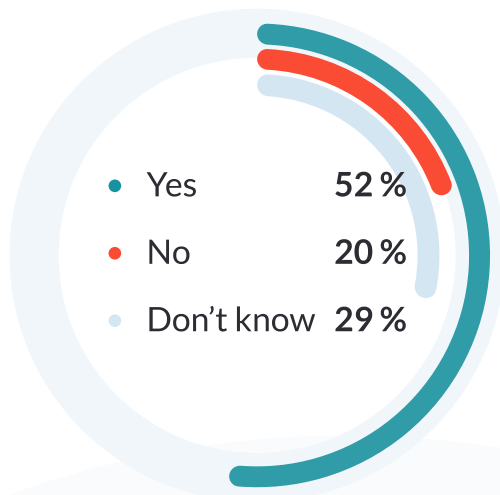- No   **20 %**
- Don't know   **29 %**

Note: Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Although WhatsApp & Facebook Messenger Get the Popular Votes, They Fall Short on Relevance & Risk Mitigation

Now that we've established that a significant portion of frontline employees are using messaging apps for work-related matters, let's dive a little deeper into this. According to Mashable research conducted by Statista, the average WhatsApp user sends over 1,000 messages per month with over 2,000 messages being received. On average, users upload 40 photos, send 13 voice messages and 7 video messages.

This coincides with our own data, which found that WhatsApp is the most popular of the messaging apps used by non-desk workers (weighted score of 5.61) to communicate with fellow colleagues, managers and the head office, followed by Facebook Messenger (weighted score of 5.37) and Skype (weighted score of 4.29).

But just because something is popular or preferred doesn't mean it's the right choice. There's a serious problem with using WhatsApp for employee communications within an organization – data security. In August 2018, cybersecurity firm Check Point Technologies said that it had discovered a flaw in WhatsApp that allows scammers to alter the content or change the identity of the sender of a previously delivered message. More specifically, scammers can change a quote – a feature that allows people within a chat to display a past message and reply to it – to give the impression that someone sent a message they didn't actually send. To make matters worse, WhatsApp admitted that it was possible to manipulate the quote feature.

In a New York Times article, Oded Vanunu, head of vulnerability research at Check Point Technologies, called out this flaw and said it made it too easy for hackers to spread misinformation from what appeared to be a trusted source. He pointed out that this could be further exacerbated by the high volume of users who can be included in group chats (up to 256 people). So it can be tough to keep track of all of the messages and ensure the messages haven't been manipulated with misinformation. To quote Vanunu, "The public relies on the integrity of the message. WhatsApp needs to adjust to prevent this simple manipulation." We agree wholeheartedly.

Just imagine how serious of a problem this could be if a hacker manipulates an important message that was sent by the head office for a global beauty brand or fashion retailer – and that message was part of a group chat with over 250 people included. And just imagine what could happen if the altered quote gave the wrong information about a new product that was launching, or the price of that product. The store managers or retail associates could end up selling the product to loyal customers at the wrong (higher) price and if/when that error is discovered, it could result in customer frustration, less loyalty and lost sales (due to lack of trust). That is not the end result any brand wants.

It's not just WhatsApp at fault. In December 2018, Facebook confirmed that the social network had

exposed the private photos of millions of users without their permission. The breach includes photos that users had started to upload but never actually posted, as well as images posted to Facebook Stories. This isn't the first time the social media network has faced challenges with data privacy.

Earlier in 2018, a data scientist working for Cambridge Analytica revealed that the company harvested raw data from up to 87 million Facebook profiles. It's no wonder the firm announced recently that it is shutting down.

Beyond the problems of such data breaches, Facebook has recently submitted several patent applications, including a patent for technology that uses location data to predict where users are going and when they will be offline. In our minds, that feels quite intrusive and when you think about it in the context of internal communications, it wouldn't just violate employees' privacy rights, but it would also instill feelings of mistrust and misalignment

with a company's vision and values. No employer wants their employees to feel that way – in such cases, it will likely result in less productivity, poor job performance and, eventually, high turnover.

Which of the following messaging apps do you use most often on a daily basis to communicate with fellow colleagues, managers and the head office for work-related purposes? Rank in order of frequency (highest to lowest).

WhatsApp	5.61
Facebook Messenger	5.37
Skype	4.29
Viber	4.04
Telegram	3.18
Lync	2.57
Other	2.93

Ease of Use, Speedy Responses & Wide Reach Drive Heavy Reliance on Messaging Apps

When we asked respondents to specify the main reason for their heavy reliance on messaging apps for work-related matters, almost half (49 percent) of the respondents cited ease of use and efficiency. Meanwhile, 20 percent cited fast response times and 14 percent said wide reach to large groups was their reason.

While respondents in our research study described "wide reach to large groups" as a benefit of messaging apps, we would argue that it's actually a disadvantage. Here's why. One of the most frustrating things as an employee is getting too much information or having your newsfeed congested with information that's irrelevant to your actual role, responsibilities and interests.

Take, for example, an employee who works in the customer support department of a specific store

in Manchester, UK for a global beauty retailer. This employee doesn't need to receive messages or have their newsfeed cluttered with updates related to the company's multiple stores in greater London. The more this employee's newsfeed – or messages – become cluttered by irrelevant posts and updates that have nothing to do with their role or the team/location they work in, the more frustrated the employee will become and the less likely they will be to open messages, respond to messages or check the newsfeed for key company news, updates and information. That means they could eventually miss out on receiving important communications about new products being launched or changes to promotional offers/sales. And the less they know, the worse the customer experience and the less sales they could eventually deliver.

Relevance must be the way forward. The messages that your brand delivers to your non-desk workforce cannot afford to be spammy, irrelevant or insensitive to employees' needs and preferences. Otherwise, you won't simply turn them off; you'll make them less efficient, less connected to your brand's purpose and vision and more likely to leave your company (for a new role).

Ultimately, the cost of high turnover can be tremendous. Let's look at the supermarket industry as an example. The replacement cost for a supermarket cashier is $3,637. With the average employee turnover rate amongst grocers hovering near 50 percent, this would result in an annual cost of $67,000. While employee turnover can't be eliminated completely, it can be reduced with smart, relevant and engaging communications.

Chart 10

What is the main reason you use messaging apps to communicate with colleagues, managers and the head office about work-related matters?

Easy to use and efficient	49%
Wide reach to large groups	14%
Fast response times	20%
No training required	8%
Already familiar with them	9%

Mental Health, Relationship Building & Problem-Solving Rank High Among Social Media Benefits

One of the most important workplace conversations today is about mental health. According to a July 2018 survey from Peldon Rose, nearly three-quarters of workers say they want their employers to champion mental health and well-being in the workplace.

Mental health is also a top priority for us at Speakap – and was the impetus behind launching the new Do Not Disturb feature on our platform earlier this month. We believe strongly in the need and value of employees switching off during non-work hours in order to cut down on stress, reduce the likelihood of burnout and nurture personal growth and relationships. This is supported

by our research, which found that 21 percent of non-desk workers use social media sites because it allows them an opportunity to take a mental break. In our minds, this percentage is too low and should be much higher. It may have to do with the always-on nature of social media sites, which can actually make it difficult to switch off and focus on other things.

Additionally, 21 percent of the respondents said social media sites help them strengthen and build personal relationships with co-workers. Plus, another 22 percent find social media sites to be useful in asking questions and solving work problems (through the wisdom of the crowd).

Chart 11

What is the main reason you use social media sites to communicate with colleagues, managers and the head office about work-related matters?

Allows an opportunity to take a mental break	21%
Great way to make professional connections	21%
Strengthens and builds personal relationships with coworkers	21%
Enhances information discovery and delivery	8%
Easy to ask questions and solve work problems (wisdom of the crowd)	22%
Boosts productivity	7%
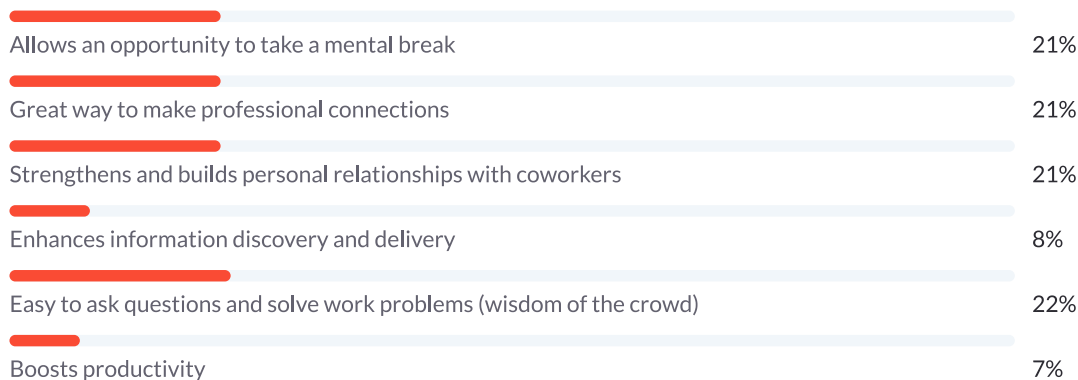
24/7 Nature of Messaging Apps & Social Media Can Trigger Stress, Performance Issues & Privacy Fears

According to our study, 30 percent of the respondents said their number one fear about using messaging apps and social media sites for work-related matters is that it makes it problematic to maintain work/personal life boundaries with 24/7 messaging. This is further evidenced and exacerbated by the fact that another 21 percent of the respondents worry about being contacted during non-work hours. When your frontline workers are bombarded by a barrage of non-stop messages at all hours of the day and night, it can create the regular expectation that they should be available during non-work hours and able to respond quickly, regardless of what they may be doing. That regular expectation can lead to heightened levels of anxiety, stress and even fractured personal relationships.

The data supports this. According to a study from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), two-fifths of workers check emails outside of working hours at least five times a day. That's a lot. This inability to switch off, coupled with the always-on functionality of mobile devices, can lead to high levels of stress, burnout and even fractured personal relationships. It's one of the reasons we built the Do Not Disturb feature into our platform in January 2019.

Our own co-founder, Patrick Van Der Mijl, has a clear perspective on this matter. "As one of the founders of a technology company, I won't profess that technology has no place or value in employees' lives. It certainly does. But the true power and value of technology as a whole and our 'Do Not Disturb' feature, in particular, comes from relinquishing some of that power so employees can choose to disconnect when they aren't working. If they want to switch off once their shift has ended, they have every right to do so and should feel supported and empowered to do so by their employer – be it to spend quality time with their loved ones or simply decompress for their emotional well-being. We know the companies we already work with share the same belief."

Now let's also consider the importance of protecting sensitive data. According to our study's findings, 12 percent of the respondents are concerned that sensitive data could be left exposed and susceptible to data breaches. This makes sense when you consider how frequently data breaches occur.

In October 2018, Facebook confirmed that hackers were able to access personal information for over 30 million accounts. The personal information included name relationship status, religion,

birth date, workplaces, search activity and recent location check-ins.

With the EU General Data Protection Regulation (EU GDPR) going into effect as of May 25, 2018, the regulations around protecting sensitive data have become even stricter. In fact, it was noted earlier this year that certain businesses are now banning the use of messaging apps like WhatsApp and Snapchat in order to comply with EU GDPR. For example, it was reported in 2017 that German car parts supplier, Continental, has banned its 240,000 employees from using WhatsApp and Snapchat on company-issued mobile phones. Both of these apps save users' contact data, stored in their phones' address books, and transfer the information to their own servers.

Continental isn't the only European company to enforce such bans. Deutsche Bank, for example, has also joined its ranks by banning the use of SMS, WhatsApp and other messenger services as of January 2017. The reason it gave for this ban was the stringent documentation obligations that fall on banks for regulatory compliance. Meanwhile, car manufacturers are taking similar approaches, with Volkswagen restricting its employees from 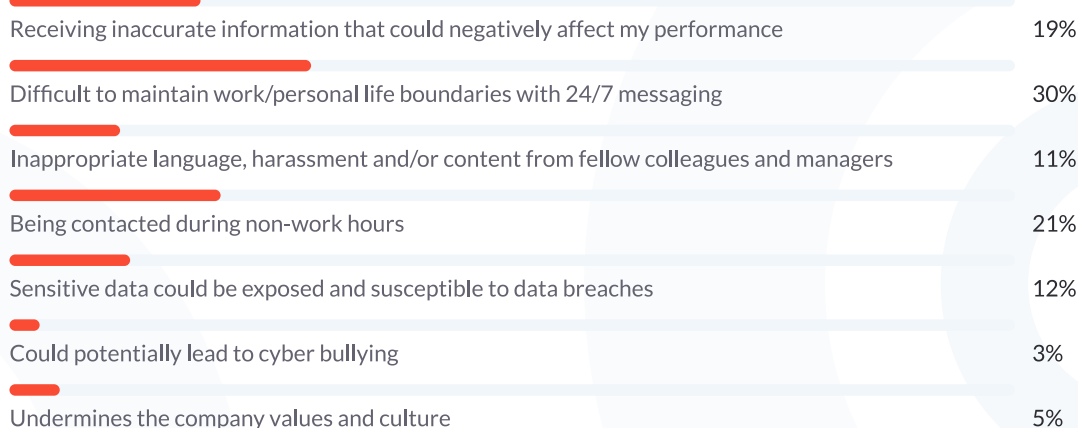using chat apps for business at all and BMW only permitting authorized apps on company phones (of which, WhatsApp and Snapchat don't make the approved list).

Data privacy cannot and should not be an after-thought. This is especially true when you consider the various types of personal information, messages, documents and content (personnel files, HR documents, photos, videos) that can reside on a communications platform or app. As an employer, it's critical to ensure all data is collected, stored and maintained in compliance with data privacy regulations, such as EU GDPR and ISO 27001. For the employees (end users of such communications platforms and apps), it's equally critical that sensitive data isn't left exposed and vulnerable to data breaches, identity theft and even fraud.

What's also interesting is that 19 percent of the respondents fear they'll receive inaccurate information that could negatively impact their job performance. Fear of failure is a powerful and real feeling. If that fear seeps into your frontline staff's minds – and stays there for the long term – it can create anxiety and hamper their actual job performance. That, in turn, could cause them to feel less connected and aligned with the company's purpose, which could then result in higher turnover.

Chart 12

What is your biggest fear about using messaging apps and social media sites to communicate with colleagues, managers and the head office for work-related matters?

Receiving inaccurate information that could negatively affect my performance	19%
Difficult to maintain work/personal life boundaries with 24/7 messaging	30%
Inappropriate language, harassment and/or content from fellow colleagues and managers	11%
Being contacted during non-work hours	21%
Sensitive data could be exposed and susceptible to data breaches	12%
Could potentially lead to cyber bullying	3%
Undermines the company values and culture	5%

Note: Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Internal Communications Platforms Plug Relevance & Privacy Holes Left by Messaging Apps & Social Media Sites

As our study found, 68 percent of the respondents said they would stop using messaging apps and social media sites if their companies provided an internal communications platform/app. Despite the purported benefits of such tools, non-desk workers would gladly ditch them if they could use an alternative that improves the two-way communication between themselves, their colleagues, managers and the head office in a way that's smart, relevant, fun and safe.

That's powerful. It signals two things: disillusionment with the current processes/tools for internal communications (as we outlined earlier with WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, etc.) and a willingness to embrace and use a smarter alternative.

- Yes   **68 %**
- No   **32 %**
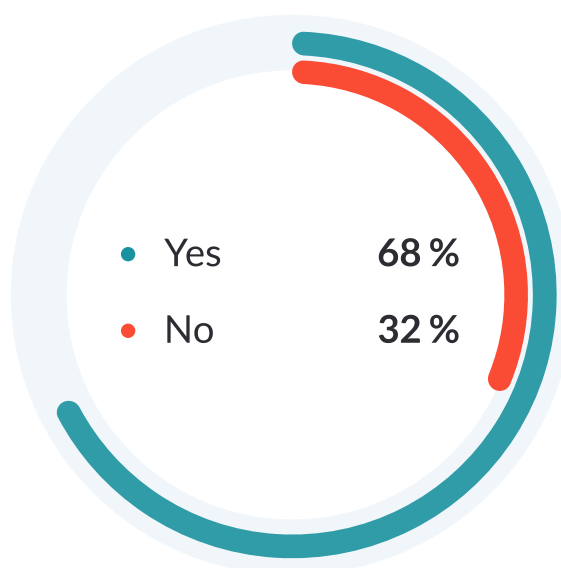
Targeted Messaging, Access to Learning & Development Content and Regular Feedback Are Keys to Converting Unengaged Employees into Brand Advocates

When we asked respondents about their level of understanding and alignment with the company's purpose and values, the responses were both interesting and disheartening. Only 27 percent admitted to being one of their company's strongest brand champions and advocates. On top of that, 51 percent said they know their company's purpose and vision to some degree but could use some additional training. Worse yet, 12 percent lack sufficient knowledge and 9 percent don't have any knowledge and don't really care to learn it.

These stats are troublesome. If frontline employees don't know what your company stands for, what goals your company is trying to achieve and how their roles contribute to the company's overall purpose and vision, how can you expect them to act as your brand champions and advocates? You can't.

Chart 14

How well do you know your company's mission and values?

I am one of the company's strongest brand champions and advocates	27%
I know it to some degree, but could use some additional training	51%
I lack sufficient knowledge	12%
I don't have any knowledge and don't really care to learn it	9%
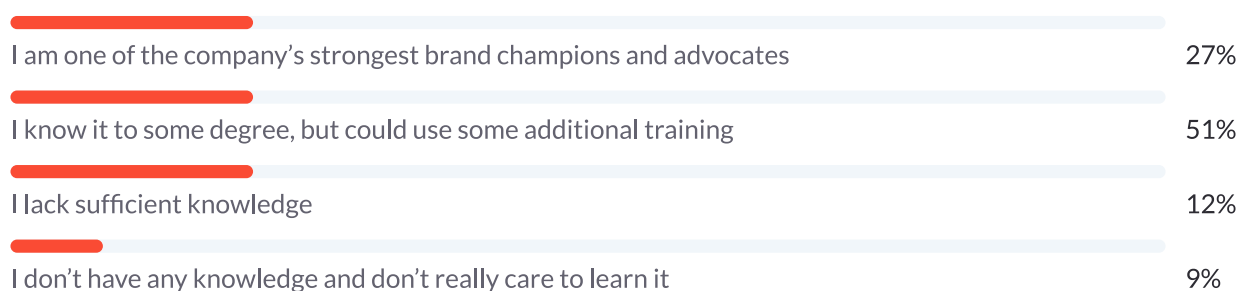
Note: Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

But all hope isn't lost. When asked how an internal communications platform/app would help frontline employees become more knowledgeable about their company's mission and values, relevance resounded as the number one answer. In particular, 27 percent of the respondents said an internal communications platform/app would allow them to chat with targeted, relevant groups (rather than send or receive mass emails to all staff).

Also, the fact that more than half of the respondents (51 percent) need additional training to beef up their knowledge of the company's purpose and values says a lot. It indicates that training could be key to converting less engaged workers into b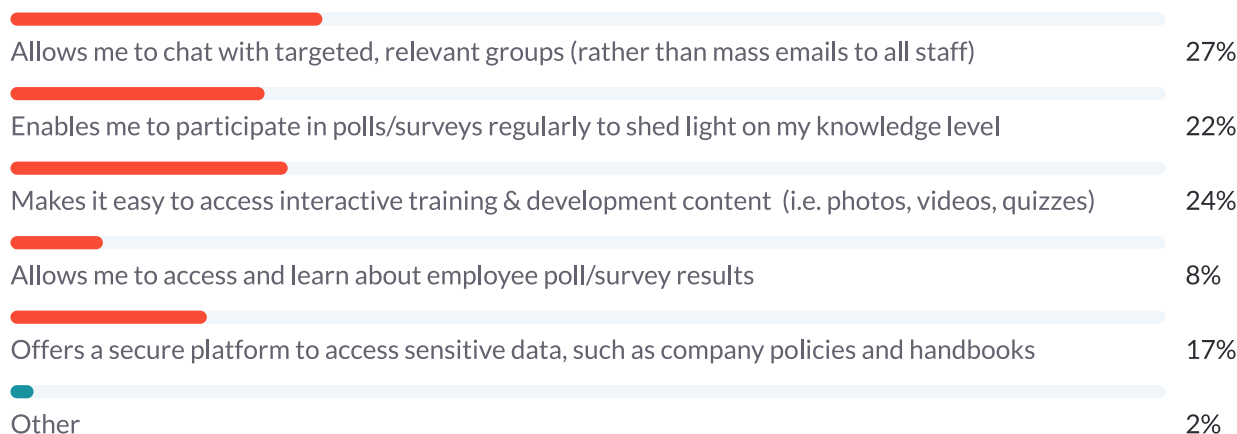rand champions and advocates. But how that training is delivered can be just as important. Remember: these employees aren't sitting in front of a desk or computer on a daily basis; they need to be able to access L&D content in a way that's fast, hassle-free, easily digestible, relevant and interactive so they actually learn what they need to and can apply those learnings to their roles and daily tasks.

This coincides with our study's findings, with 24 percent of the respondents saying an enterprise social network (ESN) would make it easy to access interactive training and development content (i.e. photos, videos, quizzes) to increase their awareness and knowledge. Plus, 22 percent said an ESN would enable them to participate in polls/surveys regularly to shed light on their knowledge level.

How would an internal communications platform/app help you become more knowledgeable about your company's mission and values?

Allows me to chat with targeted, relevant groups (rather than mass emails to all staff)	27%
Enables me to participate in polls/surveys regularly to shed light on my knowledge level	22%
Makes it easy to access interactive training & development content (i.e. photos, videos, quizzes)	24%
Allows me to access and learn about employee poll/survey results	8%
Offers a secure platform to access sensitive data, such as company policies and handbooks	17%
Other	2%

Maintaining Personal & Work Life Balance Impacts Employee Satisfaction

We asked respondents to clarify the most important aspect of how their company connects with them. The answers were powerful and enlightening, in that 24 percent said finding a good balance between their personal and work lives was most important.

Conversely, we asked respondents about their biggest complaint with how their companies connect with them and the highest response (17 percent) was related to it being difficult to shut off when not working, resulting in stress and burnout. Clearly, disconnecting during non-work hours is a critical component for employee engagement and job satisfaction.
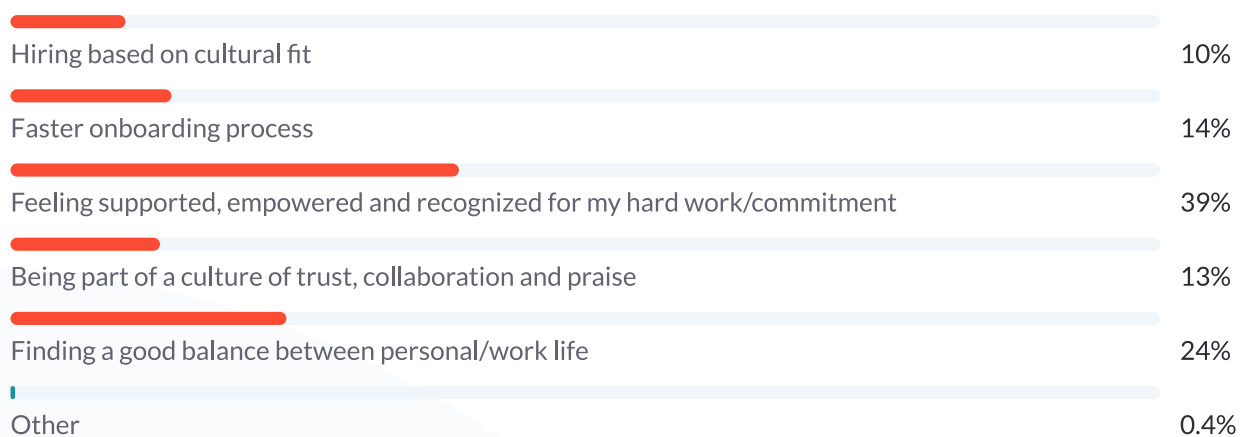
This ties back to our impetus behind building and launching the Do Not Disturb feature into the Speakap platform. Just because technology makes our lives more convenient, productive and enjoyable doesn't mean that employees have to always be on, 24/7, and available to respond to work emails at all hours of the day and night. Taking time to switch off is important – and every employee has the right to do so.

There was an article in The Guardian in November 2018, which featured insights from a retail worker who worked at an Amazon fulfillment center in Kansas City, Missouri. The retail employee said that he was already working 60 hours a week to meet the demands of the holiday shopping season (November 1 – December 31). Now consider this: Amazon announced earlier last year that it planned to hire 100,000 temporary employees for the 2018 holiday season. When you listen to these types of employee accounts, it's clear just how necessary a feature like Do Not Disturb is in today's digitally connected, always-on workplace.

Imagine you're a non-desk employee (i.e. retail associate) and having a group conversation with all of the members of your department discussing what's happening on the shop floor. If you're not scheduled to work on a given day and your mobile device starts getting flooded by push notifications to alert you to updates, private messages to various groups/teams, HR news and more, that could be overwhelming and make the employee feel added pressure to respond to all of the messages, comments to their posts and updates (when they're not working). But here's where having a feature like Do Not Disturb on an employee communications platform like Speakap works to employees' advantage. It lets employees mute all of those notifications – and even schedule start and end times for that silent period – so they can take back some of the control and decide for themselves when they want to find out about company-related updates during non-work hours.

What is most important to you in how your company connects with you?

Hiring based on cultural fit	10%
Faster onboarding process	14%
Feeling supported, empowered and recognized for my hard work/commitment	39%
Being part of a culture of trust, collaboration and praise	13%
Finding a good balance between personal/work life	24%
Other	0.4%

Note: Figures may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Chart 17

What is your biggest complaint when it comes to how your company connects with you?

Slow and complicated onboarding process | 10%

Being uninformed and unaware of the company's vision and how my contribution plays a role | 16%

Don't feel emotionally connected to the company's purpose, values and culture | 17%

Lack of collaboration and trust between fellow colleagues, teams, managers and the head office | 16%

Don't feel like my voice is heard due to infrequent and ineffective methods of collecting feedback | 13%

Feel isolated, disconnected and lack a sense of belonging | 5%

There's a disconnect between culture that CEO thinks employees want and that employees want | 6%

Difficult to shut off when not working (resulting in stress, burnout) | 17%

Increased Product/Promotion Knowledge and Better Job Performance Are Where the Value Lies

When we asked respondents about the most important criterion for how they want to receive internal communications from their company, the top answer was to learn about new products, promotions and offers (weighted score of 9.31). For non-desk workers who work in the retail, hospitality and entertainment/leisure industries, this is especially important. It's something we have heard time and time again from our own customers.

Take, for example, global retailer Hudson's Bay. The retailer launched in the Netherlands with very little brand awareness and had a lot of work to do to hit the goals it had set for itself and its stores – opening 10 stores with over 110,000 square meters of selling area in six weeks. Lofty ambitions, you might say. But they found a way to achieve these goals by integrating the Hudson's Bay mobile shopping app with its Bay Talk employee app (which is Hudson's Bay branded version of Speakap) to provide a personalized and optimal shopping experience for its customers, while also supporting, engaging and empowering its own non-desk workers.

Geert Crooijmans, head of customer relationship management (CRM) for international department store chain, Hudson's Bay, described how they made this happen. "The customer books via their Hudson's Bay app then the sales employee gets a notification, via Speakap, that their customer has arrived in store and they can go and meet the customer. But our sales assistant also gets a push notification via Speakap if one of their favorite customers arrives in store, just as a customer will be told that their favorite sales assistant is in store and that a meeting is possible."

Penny Grivea, UK managing director for global beauty retailer Rituals, had a similar perspective in a recent blog post. She explained, "We look at the Speakap app/platform as a necessary channel to motivate and spark healthy competition between our managers, which leads to better team performance and higher sales per store."

Geert Croojimans from Hudson's Bay has a similar approach. "One thing we've learnt is that we have to educate our employees in how to use Speakap on their mobile phones. If they're stood in store,

staring at their screens, it could annoy customers who don't realize the sales assistant is looking for information about a product. We're now training people to explain to a customer that they're using Bay Talk to do something for them, not browsing their own personal social media."

But it isn't just about increasing sales. Internal communications platforms are vital in keeping managers updated quickly and effectively when technical difficulties arise. Rituals' UK managing director, Penny Grivea, shared a real-life example during her speaking session at Smile London in November 2018. "A few weeks ago, our cash registers (tills) stopped working for a few hours and we used Speakap to inform the managers at the affected stores instantly about the problem. Not only did our store managers get the information easily and instantly, but they were also able to use that knowledge to inform the store associates so they could better manage our customers' expectations. That's the key."

Another important criterion, as revealed in our study's findings, is the desire to cut down on email clutter (weighted score of 9.07). Email clutter is a real problem in today's digitally driven environment. But don't just take our word for it; a study from Radicati Group in February 2017 revealed that a staggering 269 billion emails are sent each day. So it makes sense that employees would want to cut down on email clutter – their inboxes and their mental health will improve as a result.

Chart 18

What is the most important criterion for how you want to receive internal communications from your company?

Criterion	Score
Learn about new products/promotions/offers	9.31
Cut down on email clutter	9.07
Get access to necessary training & content	9.04
Share knowledge across teams/locations	8.54
Become more productive and efficient in my job	8.30
Create more trust and collaboration with my managers/head office	7.12
Get more personalized, relevant information that relates to my role/function/interests	6.45
Celebrate individual/team achievements and successes	5.36
Motivate and foster healthy competition between colleagues	4.50
Improve communication frequency and relationship with management	4.19
Improve my customer satisfaction scores	3.40
Increase my sales	2.73

Lack of Collaboration & Information Sharing Can Hamper Two-Way Communications

Delivering two-way communications to employees, especially to those who work in non-desk roles, can be extremely challenging. It's not something that can be achieved in a single day or as the result of a single tactic or tool. Every employee has different types of communications, interactions and experiences that matter to them. For that reason, employees can often become frustrated by the process and quality of the communications they receive.

In July 2018, WhatsApp announced a new feature, which gives group chat admins the power to make themselves the only member who can send messages. While in some cases, this might seem like a good idea to control the delivery of messages related to company events or milestones, it creates a limited, one-way flow of communications, which can instill a lack of trust, less feedback and less collaboration from employees in the long-run. That's not a good scenario for any business that wants to build a culture of trust, collaboration and efficiency among its workforce.

This is evidenced by our study's findings, with 27 percent of the respondents saying their biggest frustration with how their company delivers two-way communications is the lack of collaboration and sharing of relevant company/product information and learnings with their fellow colleagues,
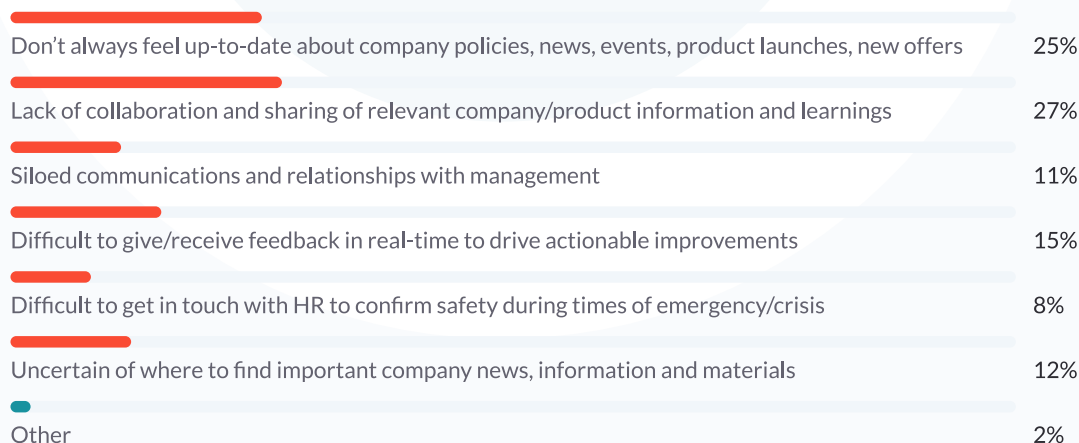
teams, office staff and management. Another 15 percent said their frustration stems from how difficult it is to give/receive feedback in real-time to drive actionable improvements.

One of the findings, in particular, reveals that 8 percent of the respondents are frustrated by how difficult it is to get in touch with HR to confirm their safety during times of emergency/crisis. Why is this important? Let's consider the recent wildfires that spread throughout Southern California. In this type of emergency, many families were forced to evacuate their homes when the fires came too close to their neighborhoods/homes. In such cases, these people (many of whom likely work in non-desk roles) could have used an internal communications platform/app to quickly and easily inform their managers and even the head office of their location, their safety and their needs related to working remotely (or taking time off to handle finding new temporary housing or helping family members).

Whatever the emergency or crisis is, it's critical that your employees can contact you quickly and easily. If your HR team is relying on manual, time-consuming processes, it could be difficult to support your employees in such times of need.

Chart 19

What is your biggest frustration with how your company delivers two-way communications with you?

Don't always feel up-to-date about company policies, news, events, product launches, new offers	25%
Lack of collaboration and sharing of relevant company/product information and learnings	27%
Siloed communications and relationships with management	11%
Difficult to give/receive feedback in real-time to drive actionable improvements	15%
Difficult to get in touch with HR to confirm safety during times of emergency/crisis	8%
Uncertain of where to find important company news, information and materials	12%
Other	2%

Move Over AI & Voice Recognition: Clear Timeline, Organizational Groups and Document Management Are Most Beloved ESN Features

We asked the respondents to identify which features they believe to be the most important when using an internal communications platform/ app and the responses were somewhat surprising. The top four features that non-desk workers care about are, in order of importance: clear timeline (weighted score of 14.92), news (weighted score of 14.63), organizational groups (weighted score of 13.38) and document management/access (weighted score of 13.13). This matches the discussions we have with retail, hospitality and entertainment brands on a daily basis.

But what we found more surprising is that the types of features most often categorized as innovative, such as artificial intelligence (weighted score of 2.60), voice recognition (weighted score of 3.22) and video (weighted score of 4.05) ranked lowest on the list of desired features. This could be a signal that for non-desk workers, the greatest value doesn't come from adding shiny, cool things, but instead from improving the quality and style of communications in simple, achievable ways.

Chart 20

Which of the following features are most important to you when using an internal communications platform/app to communicate with fellow colleagues, managers and the head office?

Feature	Score
Clear timeline (targeted, relevant)	14.92
News	14.63
Organizational groups	13.38
Document management/access	13.13
Private messages	12.68
Events	11.34
Personal profiles	10.48
Alternative registration (without email)	9.68
Polls/surveys	8.71
Do Not Disturb option (shut off during non-work hours)	8.70
Project management/collaboration	7.85
Integration with Microsoft Office 365	6.60
Integration with payroll, HR, CRM systems/tools	5.95
Usage stats/insights	5.07
Video	4.05
Voice recognition	3.22
Artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities	2.60

Internal Communications Platforms Are Gaining in Popularity, But Still Not Fast Enough

Interestingly, over half (59 percent) of the respondents said their company currently provides an internal communications platform/app to communicate with fellow colleagues, managers and the head office. On one hand, this is good news. It indicates that more companies are recognizing the problems and frustrations that can arise from traditional email and communications methods.

But we can't help but focus on the other statistic: 41 percent still don't have access to an internal communications platform/app. This could lead to serious issues in the quality of communications and employee engagement. Why? For example, failure to communicate the launch (or discontinuing) of products, changes in pricing and seasonal promotions/offers could mean frontline workers don't have the right information to do their jobs properly.

Worse yet, it could lead to serious miscommunications with customers. Imagine if your frontline staff tell customers a higher price for a product than the actual price. That could irritate your customers and lead them to not purchase the product in that moment and ditch their loyalty with your brand in the long term. That means a drop in customer loyalty and sales.

To us, this should be a wake-up call for businesses with non-desk employees. Things must change or you could suffer in more ways than employee satisfaction and engagement. Your bottom line could feel the pain too.

Chart 21

Does your company currently provide an internal communications platform/app to communicate with colleagues, managers and the head office?

- Yes   **59 %**
- No   **41 %**
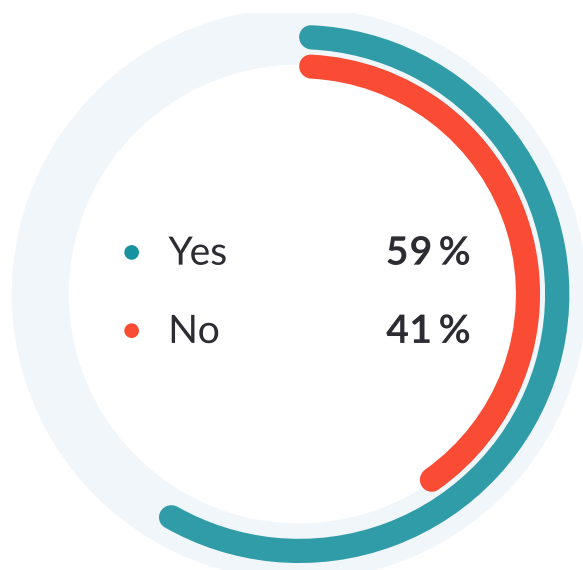
CONCLUSION

Delivering smart, engaging and relevant communications to non-desk workers is no easy feat and a one-size-fits-all approach will always be problematic. But technology, with all its benefits of added convenience, productivity and entertainment, can help improve the ways in which companies in the retail, hospitality and entertainment sectors reach, engage and empower their non-desk workforces.

It's just a matter of finding the right enterprise social network (ESN) solution – one that can integrate with various HR, CRM, payroll and workforce management tools and one that is actually easy to use, intuitive, fun and cuts out the clutter and noise of traditional communication models. Beyond that, it's also important to find ways to encourage frontline employees to continue using the internal communications platform on a daily basis. Why? Because by using it, they will do a better job, increase their own efficiencies, create more trust and collaboration among colleagues, improve relationships with management, increase their knowledge of products/promotions and deliver excellent customer experiences. That's a win-win for everyone.

ABOUT SPEAKAP

Founded in 2011 by co-founders Patrick Van Der Mijl and Erwin Van Der Vlist, Speakap is a secure, private enterprise social network that enables organizations in the retail, hospitality & restaurants, entertainment, travel, auto, manufacturing and logistics industries to reach, support and engage their non-desk employees. By doing so, both frontline employees and businesses are able to reap a multitude of benefits, including higher productivity levels, increased job satisfaction, stronger knowledge of products and promotions/offers, better job performance, reduced absenteeism, higher employee retention rates and more sales.

On the shop floor, in the kitchen or on the production line, Speakap is available 24/7 and enables communication and collaboration from any internet-connected device. The company currently has over 350 customers in 27 countries around the world, including iconic and trusted brands such as McDonald's, IKEA, Hudson's Bay and Rituals. The company is headquartered in New York, with additional offices in Amsterdam, London, Barcelona, Sao Paolo, Koln and Diegem.

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