

# From Workplace Chaos to Zen

How App Overload Is Reshaping  
the Digital Workplace



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# Executive Summary

## App Overload Is Creating Workplace Chaos

Disparate workplace apps intended to streamline workflow have sparked an app overload that's undermining productivity in businesses around the world.

- **Seventy percent of workers say their communications volume is a challenge** to getting their work done.
- More than **two-thirds of workers say they waste up to 60 minutes at work navigating between apps**, and 68 percent of workers toggle between apps up to 10 times an hour. Many workers get so frustrated they'd **rather do household chores (53 percent) and pay bills (52 percent) than navigate between apps**.

## Workers Seek One Platform to Rule Them All

To end the workplace chaos, 66 percent of workers want a single platform that integrates all of their communications.

- They believe a **unified platform would help them achieve a better workflow (67 percent)**, be more productive (65 percent) and help work feel less chaotic (62 percent).
- Team messaging is growing quickly in popularity as the preferred “home base” for a single communications platform.
- **Workers 45+ years old still prefer email** (51 percent), but 25 percent say they find that emails disrupt their workday—the third most disruptive work activity after unscheduled meetings and phone calls. **Workers 18–44 years old prefer team messaging** (43 percent), and find it the least disruptive work activity.

## The C-suite Is Holding Back Collaboration

Despite the growing popularity of team messaging among younger workers, the C-suite has been slow to embrace the platform.

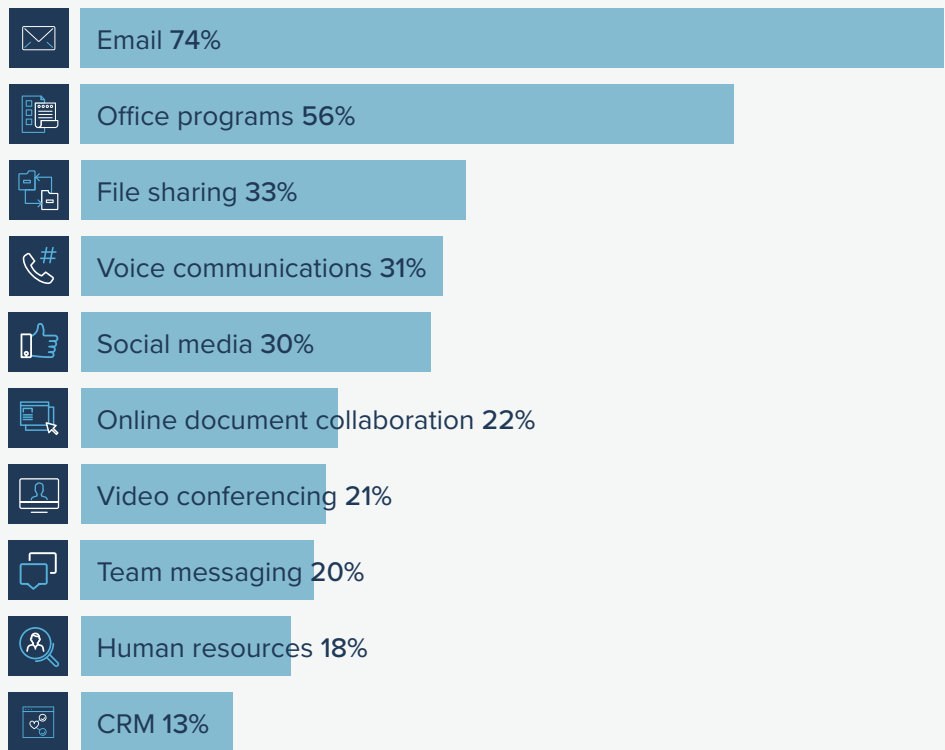
- While **80 percent of C-level executives are more likely to find their communications volume very or somewhat challenging**, 27 percent of the C-suite find team messaging disruptive—the most of any group. They are more likely to be content with their current suite of tools (44 percent), revealing a disconnect with the cultural shift to newer communications and collaboration solutions.

# Today's Chaotic Workplace: An Anatomy of App Overload

In the past decade, the amount of information in the world rose from 30 exabytes to over 300 exabytes—an increase of 900 percent.<sup>1</sup> According to whatsabyte.com, five exabytes is equal to all of the words ever spoken by mankind. Coupled with the technological advances of the 21st century, people today face more information on a daily basis than our ancestors could have ever imagined.

Information is coming from everywhere, with unlimited ways for it to be delivered. Notifications flood cellphones; ads inundate web browsers; news and social media jostle for attention. Want to cuddle with puppies? There's an app for that, and virtually everything else. Amidst a surplus of technology, we face a glaring deficit of order. Alvin Toffler first introduced the concept of information overload in 1970; today that disconcerting feeling has spilled into the workplace and is hampering how work gets done.

## What apps do workers use?



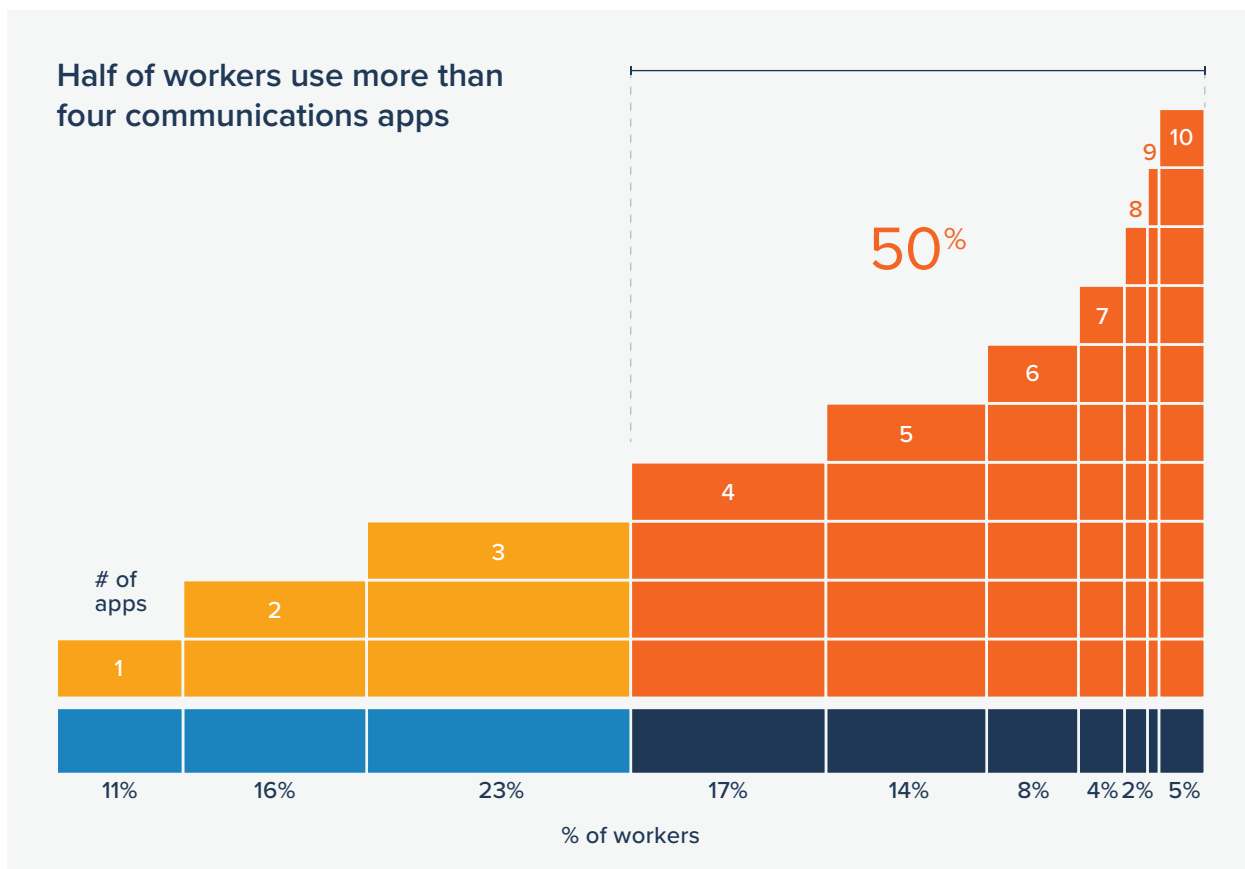
1. Levitin, Daniel J.. *The Organized Mind: Thinking Straight in the Age of Information Overload*. New York: Dutton, 2014.

## App Overload Is the Office Overlord

We know today's workplace requires a toolbelt of apps and programs to complete tasks efficiently and effectively, but have workers reached an app overload tipping point that is undermining the business goal of improved productivity? **RingCentral and CITE Research explored this question via an online survey of 2,000 global knowledge workers**—people in a profession that require them to “think for a living.” Our research sought to understand the type of apps knowledge workers are using, how they are using them, and their impact on the workplace.

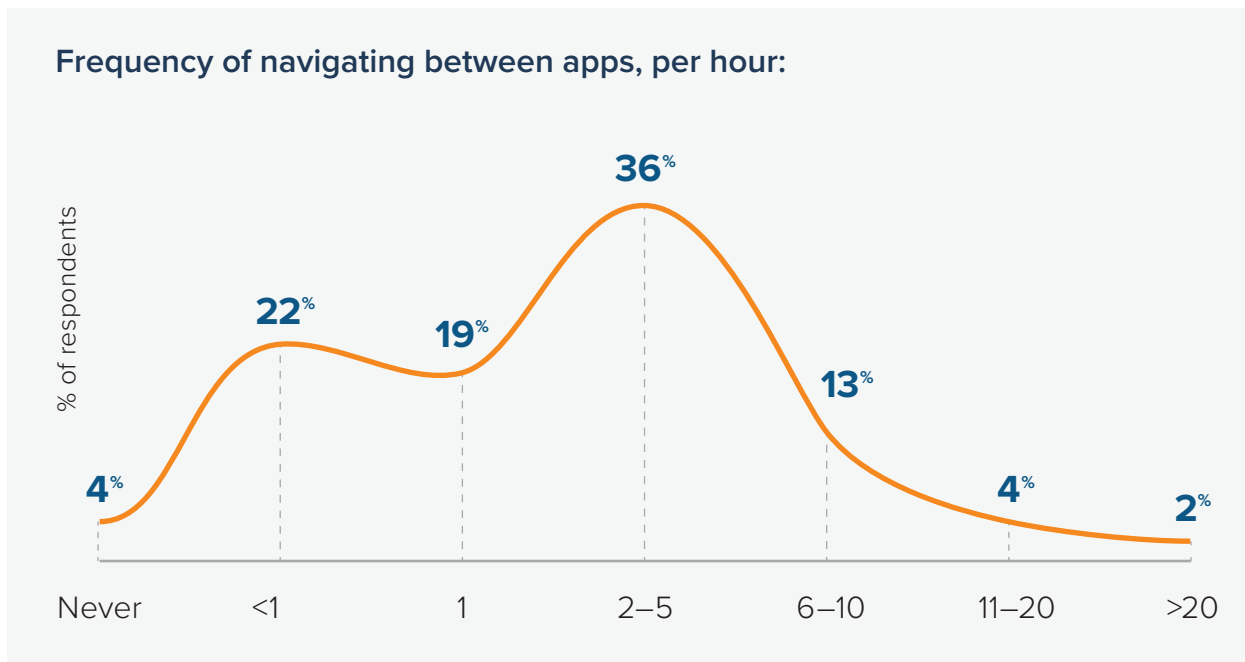
The findings provide a fresh look at today's workplace reality. Most notably, **app overload is very real and very damaging**. While apps provide some efficiency through increased connectivity, they also add chaos to workflows and upend productivity. These challenges can directly undermine a business's bottom line—and are often overlooked by the C-suite.

**Communications apps include phone calls, text, web meetings, video conferencing, team messaging and more.** Let's explore the impact of app overload—and the road to turn workplace chaos into a state of productive zen.



## Today's Disjointed Workplace Costs Time + Money

As Benjamin Franklin once quipped, time is money. Consider the time lost simply toggling between communications apps, which for most workers is up to 10 times an hour. More than **two-thirds of workers say they waste up to 60 minutes at work navigating between apps**, while 17 percent waste even more. That means workers lose up to **32 days a year navigating** between the very apps meant for workplace productivity, costing hundreds of billions of dollars for businesses annually.



69% of workers **waste up to 60 minutes** a day navigating between apps.

That's up to **32 days** a year.

68% toggle between apps up to **10 times** an hour.

## Workplace Disruption Is the New Normal

App overload doesn't just manifest itself in the time it takes to switch between apps. It also disrupts workplace zen or flow—the state of mind one achieves when fully immersed in a task.<sup>2</sup> That entails being completely focused on the task at hand, tuning out everything else, feeling happy and in control, and being creative and productive.

Breaking that flow has a major impact on concentration and rhythm, and ultimately productivity. Flat hierarchies, open desk spaces in offices, and the influx of technology intended to enhance access and collaboration have created workplaces teeming with ways to get off track. **Fifty-six percent find searching for information in different applications disruptive**, and **31 percent of workers said it caused them to lose their train of thought**.



56%

find searching for information in different apps **disruptive**



31%

have **lost their train of thought** while navigating between apps

**Want less workplace disruption?  
Look to team messaging.**

The most disruptive activities to getting work done

#1 Unscheduled meetings (42%)

#2 Phone calls (33%)

#3 Email (25%)

#4 Searching for information in apps/programs (24%)

#5 Talking to coworkers in person (24%)

#6 Social media (20%)

#7 Personal devices (19%)

#8 Texting (19%)

#9 Navigating between apps or programs (19%)

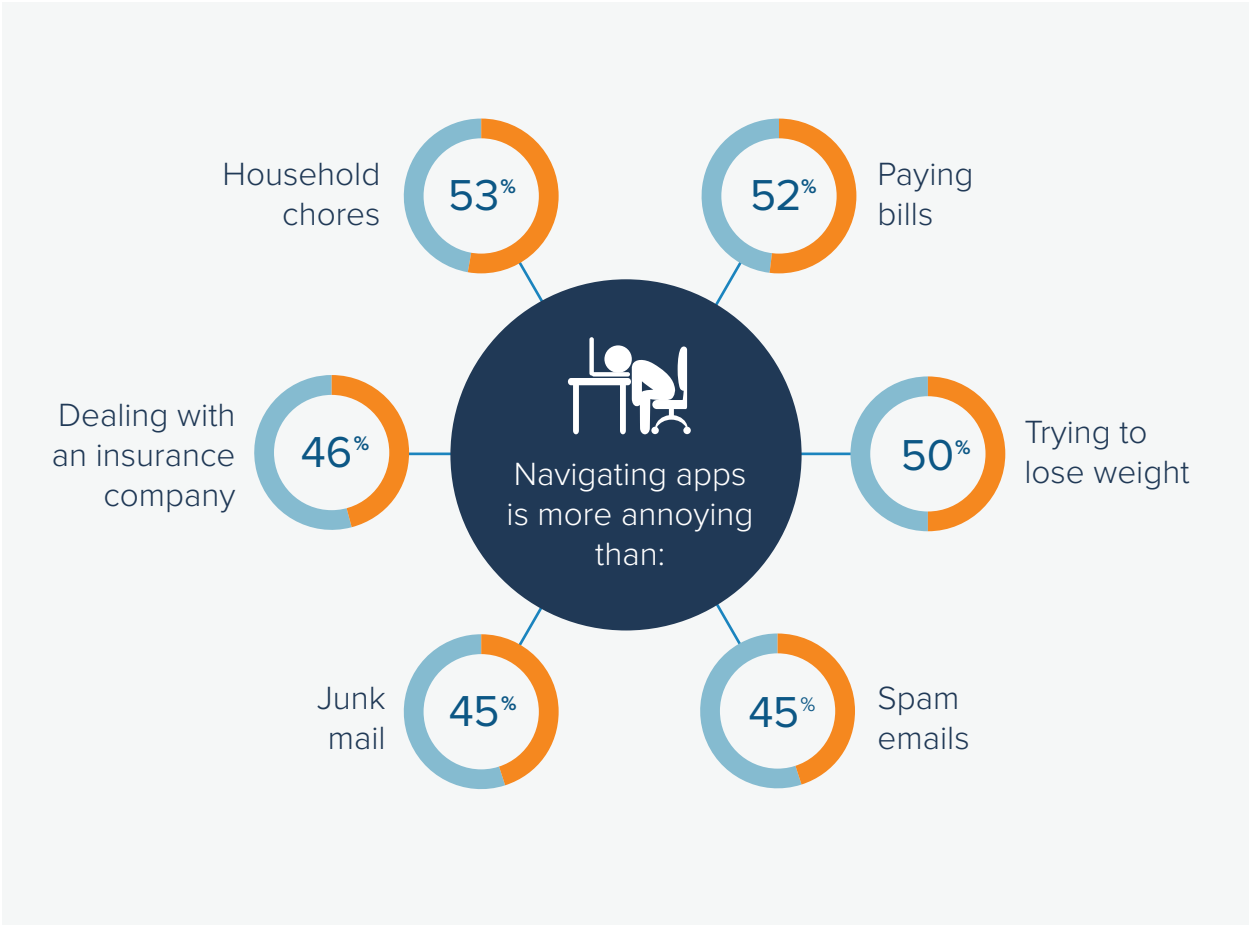
#10 Team messaging (17%)

2. Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008.

# A Global Feeling of Frustration

Workplace apps are meant to make work easier and keep teams more connected and productive through greater collaboration. And yet, workers around the world are becoming more frustrated. British workers are more likely to have difficulty keeping up with their jobs, missed a meeting, or lost sleep due to navigating apps. And many workers get so frustrated they'd **rather do household chores (53 percent) or pay bills (52 percent) than navigate between apps.**

The frustration with apps meant to streamline and simplify work is getting so bad, that today's workers are evenly divided on what is more of a nuisance: navigating these apps, or losing weight. Hand them a cheeseburger, but hold the side of app overload, please.

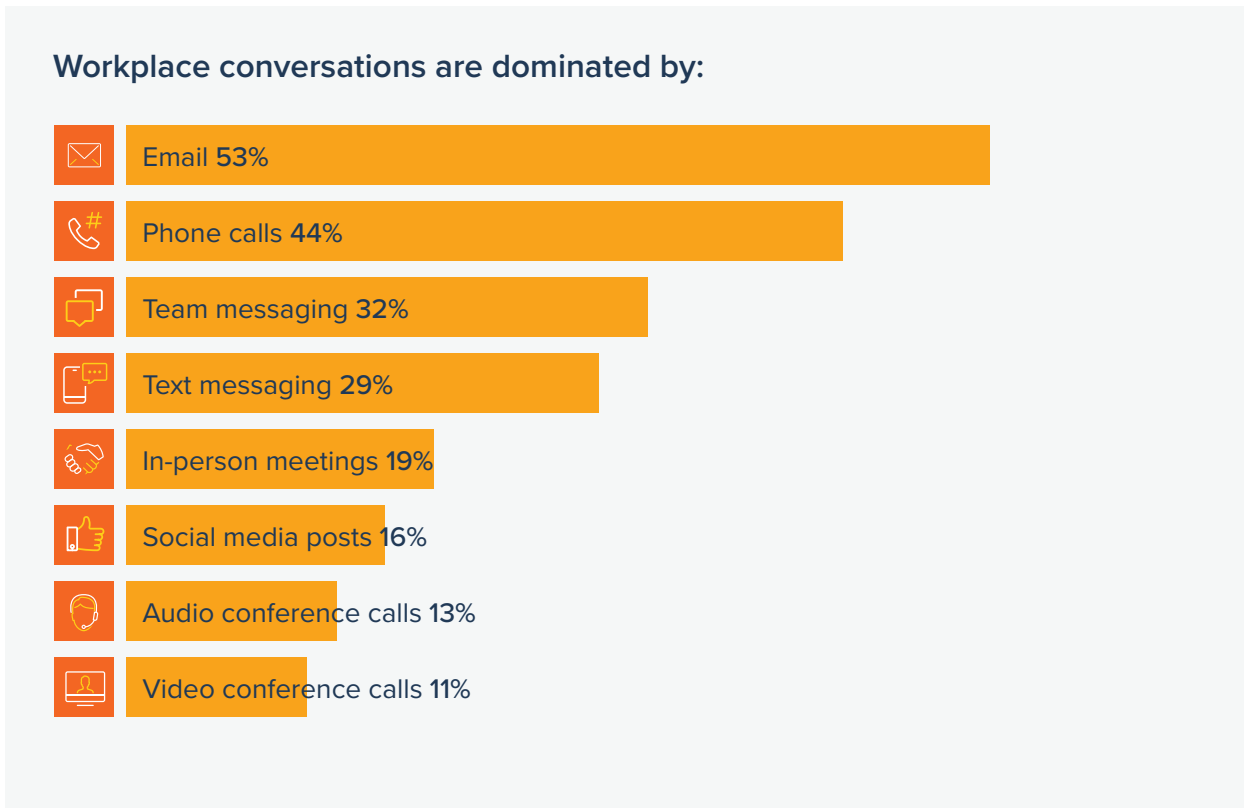
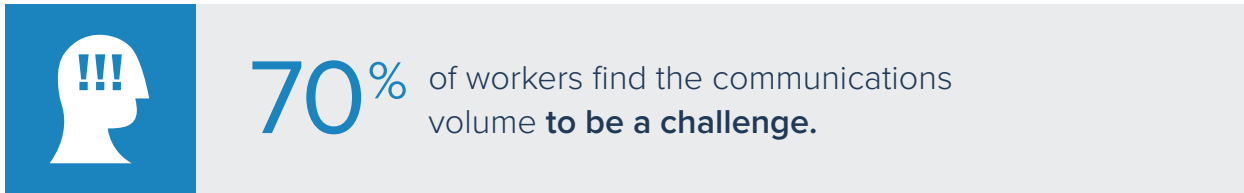




## Drinking from the Communications Fire Hose

There's a root cause to the ruckus: the sheer volume of communications. Workers aren't just overloaded with apps; they're inundated with an ocean of messages that can range from mission critical to a total waste of time. **Seventy percent of workers find the communications volume to be a challenge**—and that's no surprise when workers must manage eight different ways of communicating. Workers reported that the main communications channels they use at work are emails (53 percent), phone calls (44 percent), and team messaging apps (32 percent).

The **communications fire hose hits even harder for the C-level, where 80 percent find communications volume to be a challenge.** Workers need, and demand, a better solution.



# Workers Daydream of a Better Solution

Having four apps for work communications is like trying to constantly juggle four bowling pins. That's too much for even the best multitasker or brightest brain to comprehend. But a broken system breeds change—and is giving rise to demand for a truly unified communications experience.

## One Platform to Rule Them All

There's no reason to have three apps for file sharing, seven for office programs, and four for communicating. **Sixty-six percent want a single platform for all of their communications**—and the perceived payoffs are significant. Workers believe a unified platform would help them achieve a better workflow (67 percent), be more productive at work (65 percent) and help work feel less chaotic (62 percent).



**66%** of workers want a **single platform** for all their communications.

Workers believe a unified platform will help them:

**67%**

Achieve a better workflow

**65%**

Be more productive

**64%**

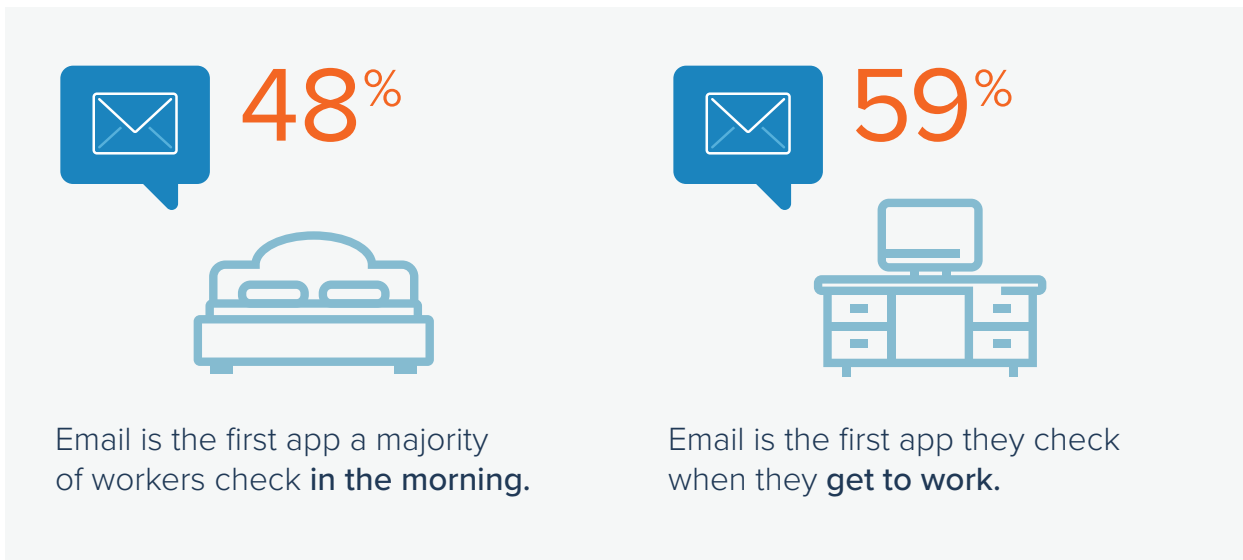
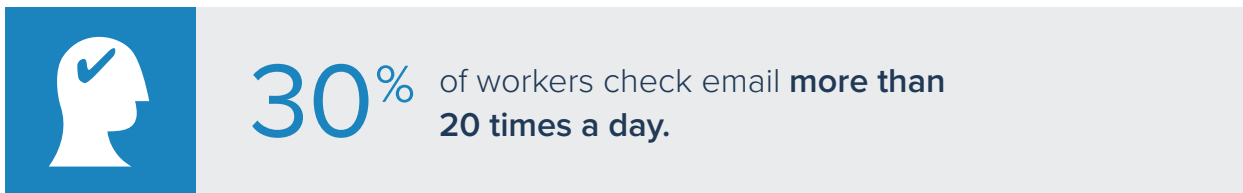
Help work feel less chaotic



## Email Holding on as De Facto Platform

While the culture is changing around communications, organizations and workers still consider email their go-to platform. It's the first app a majority of workers check in the morning (48 percent), and the first app they check when they get to work (59 percent). Workers are so obsessed with email that 30 percent check it more than 20 times a day in the U.S. Because emails can also be sent to anyone from anywhere without downloading a specific app, it's holding on as the preferred home base for all-app integration (45 percent).

But is email the de facto destination only because of its decade-long workplace reign? **Twenty-five percent of workers say they find that emails disrupt their workday**, the third most disruptive work activity after unscheduled meetings and phone calls. That's sparking companies to experiment with new communications channels, causing an insurgence of new communications and collaboration solutions, such as team messaging, to emerge as the next workplace home base.



## The Workplace's Rising Star: Team Messaging

Team messaging is a rising star that's disrupting the proverbial office pop charts.

One thing it's not disrupting? Workers. **They found team messaging—centric platforms to be the least disruptive form of communications at work.** Unfortunately, there's a divide in communication preferences between today's multi-generational workforce and the C-suite. Workers 45+ years old are the main email ambassadors (51 percent), while millennials (and Gen Xers) are manic team messengers. Workers 18–44 years old (43 percent) are most likely to use team messaging—and more likely to use it 46 to 60 minutes a day.

Across all generations, **those who use team messaging are more likely to strongly prefer a single platform that does it all (38 percent).** Email may be hanging on as the preferred workplace home base for now, but the intuitive experience of team messaging is as catchy as a Top 40 hit—and racing to the top spot on the office app countdown.



43%

Workers 18– 44 years old are most likely to use team messaging and are more likely to **use it 46 to 60 minutes a day.**

38%

Those who use team messaging are more likely to strongly prefer a **single platform that does it all.**

## The C-suite Is Holding Back Collaboration

More concerning is that the company shot callers (**C-suite**) are **out of step with cultural shifts going on in the trenches**—and this C-suite blind spot is holding back a more collaborative and productive workplace.

The **C-suite is more likely to find team messaging disruptive (27 percent)** and are less likely to expect team messaging benefits like productivity (26 percent), faster completion of work (29 percent), and ease of working remotely (25 percent).

So why is the C-suite being neo-luddites when it comes to team messaging? Consider that C-suite executives are already overloaded with messages flooding their devices in a day: **80 percent of executives find their communications volume very or somewhat challenging**, a full 10 percent more than workers in general. And the C-suite is most likely to have considered quitting (9 percent) or lashed out at family (11 percent) no thanks to their flood of communications.

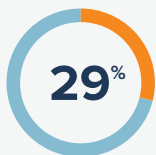
The C-suite is the poster child of app overload. And it's no surprise they're not chomping at the bit to add more to the mix.



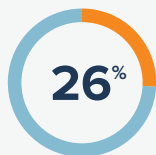
**80%** of executives are more likely to find their communications volume **very or somewhat challenging**.

**44%** of the C-suite is likely to be **satisfied with their current set of tools**.

**Team messaging provides many benefits, but only a fraction of C-suite sees them:**



Faster completion of work



Productivity



Ease of working

# The Future of Workplace Collaboration

The cultural change taking place in the workplace is in full swing—a **movement towards collaboration and unified experiences** that overcomes app overload and leads to a state of workplace zen where focus, productivity and working “in the flow” reign supreme. Workers believe an integrated and unified approach will lead to time savings (54 percent), increased organization (52 percent), better communication with colleagues (51 percent), increased productivity (51 percent) and a feeling of control over work (32 percent). Don’t you want to keep your workers happy?

While email is still the go-to choice for workers, new options are emerging that workers don’t even know they prefer yet because they haven’t been implemented broadly at their organization. For example, those without team messaging–centric platforms are more likely to check email as the first program when they get to work (61 percent vs. 52 percent), simply because it’s all they know.

## Top five benefits of an integrated approach:



**54%**

Time savings



**52%**

Increased organization



**51%**

Better communication with colleagues



**51%**

Increased productivity



**31%**

A feeling of control over work

**Artificial Intelligence (AI)** is also entering the fray of collaborative communications, and while it still won't make awkward small talk with coworkers easier, it can help in other ways. Workers have mixed feelings about the future of AI and job security, but today many believe AI can help eliminate some of the worst work drudgery.

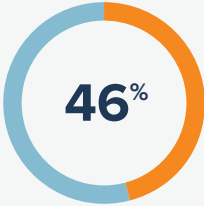
The wants and needs of workers may vary by gender, demographic and region, but they all agree on a **critical way to turn workplace chaos into productive zen—a unified platform.**



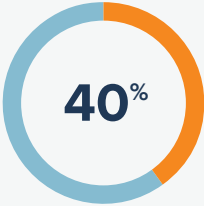
**54%** believe **AI will replace workers** in the future.

**22%** believe it's happening **right now.**

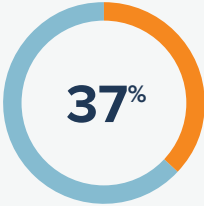
**Workers feel the most important uses of AI are for:**



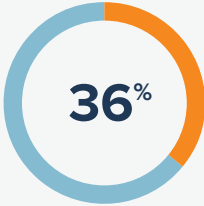
Organizing data



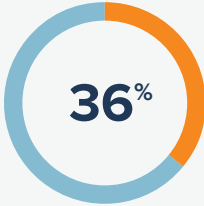
Securing data



Making work easier



Saving companies money



Streamlining work processes

# Who's Better at Managing App Overload?

Workplace study reveals how different genders, geographic locations, and age groups deal with communications chaos at work



RingCentral's 2018 global study of 2,000 knowledge workers uncovered that **today's workforce is under siege by a flood of workplace apps**, specifically for business communications. With half of workers using four or more communications apps (e.g., phone calls, texts, web meetings, video conferencing, team messaging), **workplace chaos abounds**—and it's contributing to significant lost productivity.

Just how bad is it? An astounding **69 percent of workers waste up to 60 minutes a day** navigating between these apps, which equates to 32 days lost per worker every year.

Yet, some people thrive in chaos. So who is holding their head above water while the rest struggle to stay afloat? A deeper analysis of this study found that **women, West Coast workers, and baby boomers** are holding their own in the age of app overload. Let's see what we can learn from these groups that are making headway dealing with communications chaos at work. Check out the key findings.

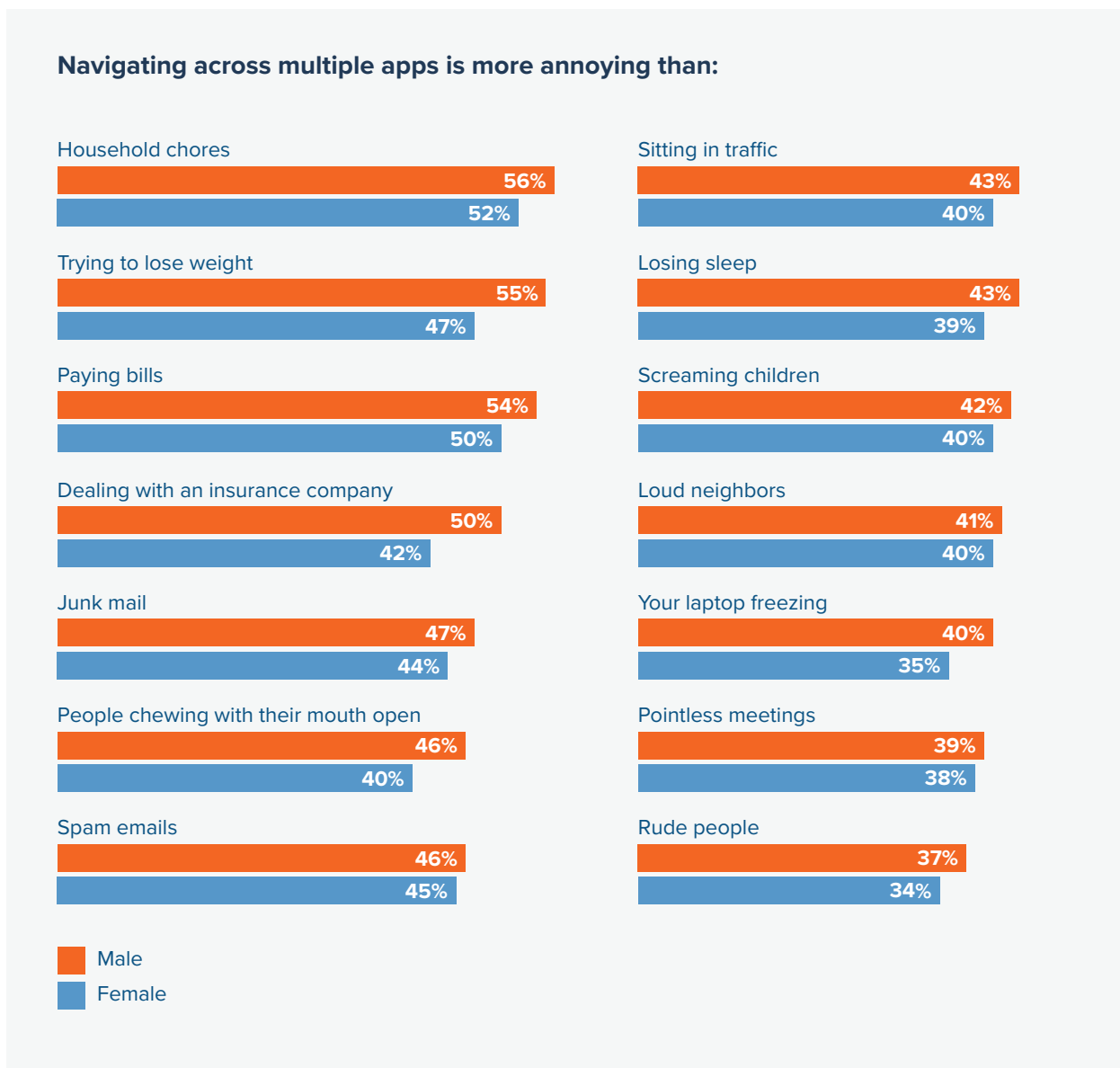


# Key findings

## Women trump men in overcoming app fragmentation

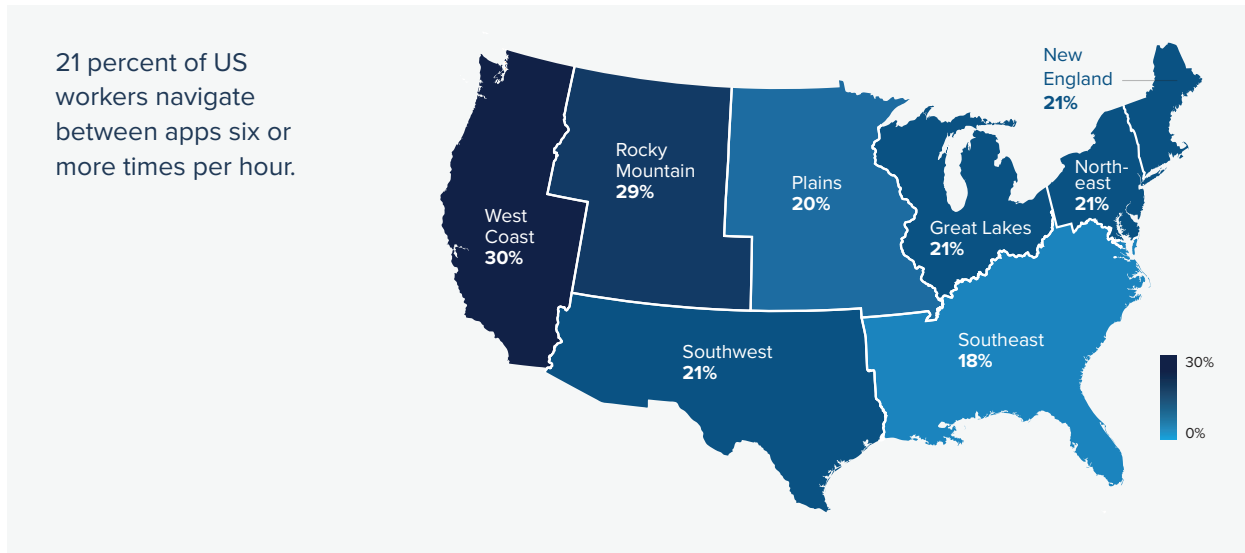
Existing research shows that, in general, [women find it easier than men to switch between tasks](#).

RingCentral's survey polled respondents on 14 less-than-ideal scenarios and found that regardless of the scenario, women consistently feel less annoyance from navigating multiple apps than their male counterparts. A superior ability to manage a fragmented communications landscape gives women a significant advantage in the workplace.



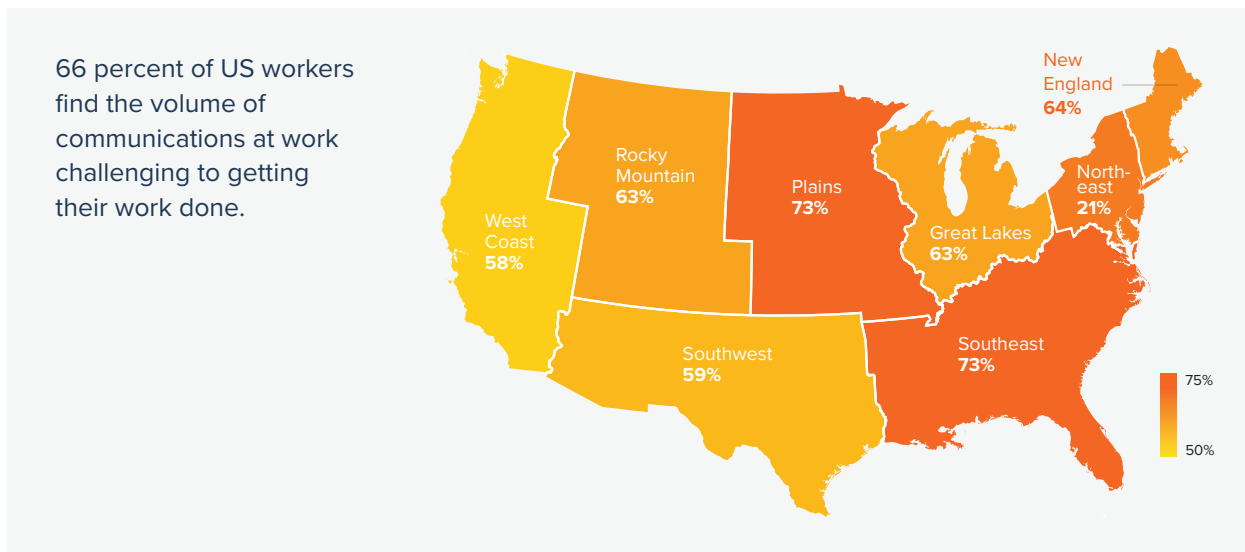
## West Coast workers excel in the age of app overload

On average, 21 percent of US workers navigate between apps six or more times per hour. West Coast workers (i.e., workers in California, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington) are the hardest hit by app overload, with 30 percent indicating they toggle between **at least six apps every hour**.



Surprisingly, despite bearing the biggest app burden, West Coast workers are the **least challenged** by their communications workload; they are the closest to workplace zen.

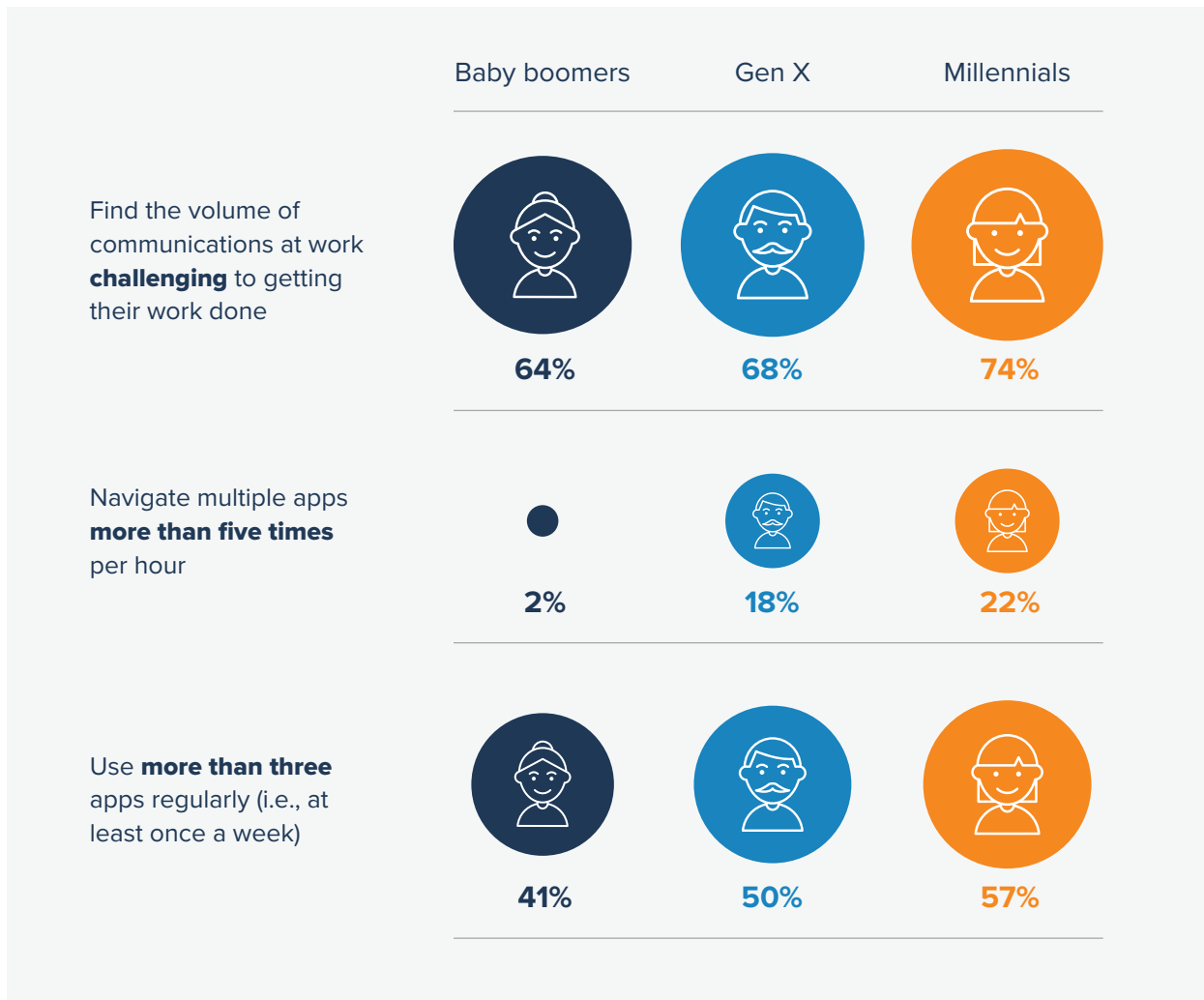
How is this possible? A large concentration of these workers reside in Silicon Valley, San Francisco, and Seattle—[three of the top six high-tech metro areas in the US](#)—making them **intrinsically more tech savvy** and able to **excel in the midst of app chaos**.



## Baby boomers are rising above the communications chaos

Workers 55+ are bucking the trends in communication apps. This group uses **significantly fewer apps** than any other group of workers—less than half use more than three apps regularly. They also use communications apps with less frequency—**only 2 percent navigate apps more than five times an hour**.

What happens when a group of workers spends less time navigating various apps? They feel a lot **less overwhelmed** by their communications load. The value of a single communications platform comes to life here.



## Conclusion

There is no denying that **app overload is costing companies billions in lost productivity**. While all workers are negatively impacted by communications chaos, women, West Coast workers, and baby boomers come out ahead of their counterparts.

Businesses need to counter app overload with a solution that enables their workforces to quiet the chaos and achieve workplace zen. For the majority of workers, a **single platform integrating all their communications channels** is at the top of their wish list. This unified experience is key to bringing much-needed simplicity to today's workplace.

## About the research

This research is based on a January 2018 survey of 2,000 knowledge workers across all industries in the US, UK, and Australia, conducted by CITE Research on behalf of RingCentral. Regions are organized by Bureau of Economic Analysis region definitions.

## About RingCentral

RingCentral, Inc. (NYSE:RNG) is a leading provider of global enterprise cloud communications and collaboration solutions. More flexible and cost-effective than legacy on-premises systems, RingCentral empowers today's mobile and distributed workforce to communicate, collaborate, and connect from anywhere, on any device. RingCentral unifies voice, video, team messaging and collaboration, conferencing, online meetings, and integrated contact center solutions. RingCentral's open platform integrates with leading business apps and enables customers to easily customize business workflows. RingCentral is headquartered in Belmont, California, and has offices around the world.

## Methodology

CITE Research (citeresearch.com) on behalf of RingCentral conducted an online survey among 2,000 knowledge workers in the US, UK, and Australia in January 2018.

## Meet RingCentral

RingCentral, Inc. (NYSE:RNG) is a leading provider of global enterprise cloud communications and collaboration solutions. More flexible and cost-effective than legacy on-premises systems, RingCentral empowers today's mobile and distributed workforce to communicate, collaborate, and connect from anywhere, on any device. RingCentral unifies voice, video, team messaging and collaboration, conferencing, online meetings, and integrated contact center solutions. RingCentral's open platform integrates with leading business apps and enables customers to easily customize business workflows. RingCentral is headquartered in Belmont, California, and has offices around the world.

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