# COLLABORATION TRENDS AND TECHNOLOGY
## A SURVEY OF KNOWLEDGE WORKERS

August 2015

dimensional research

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## Introduction

Today's most productive knowledge workers — business professionals who are contributing, sharing insight and experiences, participating in decision making, and influencing change — are a company's true competitive advantage. They are paid to think and collaborate with distributed team members, contractors, partners, suppliers, and vendors across an increasingly global workplace to help grow an enterprise's bottom line. As digital ways of working change how knowledge workers exchange information, companies must ensure that effective workplace collaboration keeps pace. Employees need enterprise collaboration solutions that work equally well both inside and outside the organization. Content must be able to flow easily between the different parties involved in the process while allowing for secure collaboration with external consultants, partners, and vendors.

The following report, sponsored by Alfresco, is based on a survey of 753 business professionals. All survey participants were knowledge workers who spent more than 25% of their workday online. Questions were asked on a variety of topics related to collaboration. The goal of the survey was to quantify experiences, challenges, and trends in work collaboration habits and technology.

## Key Findings

**Collaboration is essential to knowledge workers**

- 98% of connected employees collaborate
- 94% say collaboration is important
- Morning (48%) and early afternoon (24%) are the best times to collaborate

**Technology is necessary for effective collaboration**

- 83% depend on technology to collaborate
- 82% would be impacted by the loss of collaboration technology
- Only 49% use mobile devices for collaboration, but most (92%) say it is important

**Today's collaboration tools do not deliver — especially among millennials**

- 59% experience challenges with their collaboration tools
- 71% of millennials face challenges with their tools compared to 45% of baby boomers
- Millennials say chat or text is their preferred way to collaborate
- Baby boomers say it is the least effective way to collaborate

**Employees find ways to collaborate, even if security is ignored**

- Only 38% always think of data security when collaborating externally
- 51% rely on personal email for work email
- 51% use public document sharing for work collaboration
- 16% say they use public sharing tools not approved for use

### Definitions Used

**Collaboration:** Working together with co-workers or external stakeholders on documents, project plans, reports, or other types of content in order to create a revised or final version of that content or enable project execution.

**Millennials:** Adults born after 1980 who currently range in age from 22 to 35 years old.

**Gen X:** Adults born from 1965 to 1979 who currently range in age from 36 to 50 years old.

**Baby Boomers:** Adults born from 1946 to 1964 who currently are more than 50 years old.

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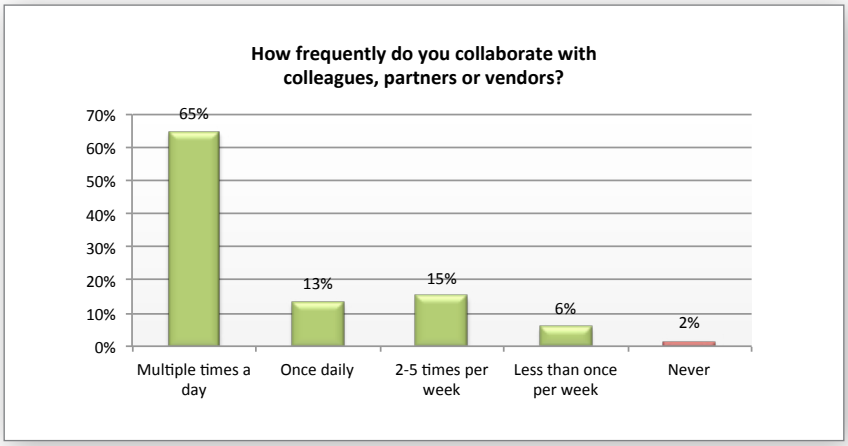
# Detailed Findings

## Collaboration is essential to knowledge workers

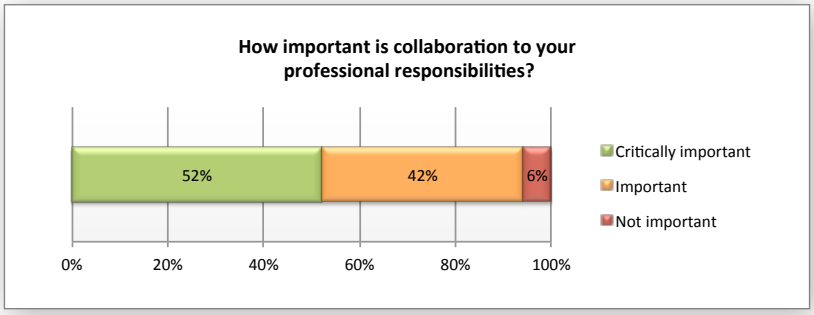
Without a doubt, there is unleashing power in workplace collaboration. By working together, employees can help develop better products and services, connect strategy with execution, make more effective business decisions, and increase revenue.

For the purposes of this survey, collaboration refers to working together with co-workers or external stakeholders on documents, project plans, reports, or other types of content in order to create a revised or final version of that content or enable project execution. All participants read and agreed to this definition of collaboration.

When asked about the frequency of their collaboration with colleagues, partners, or vendors, almost all connected employees (98%) collaborate at some level. Nearly two thirds (65%) collaborate multiple times a day while only 2% stated that they never collaborate with others.




Expectedly, 94% of knowledge workers recognize the importance of collaboration to their professional responsibilities. In this survey, 52% said collaboration was critically important, 42% said it was important, and only 6% reported it was not important.




It is interesting to also note that when we looked across company roles and age groups, we see collaboration is critically important to executives (69%) and millennials (57%).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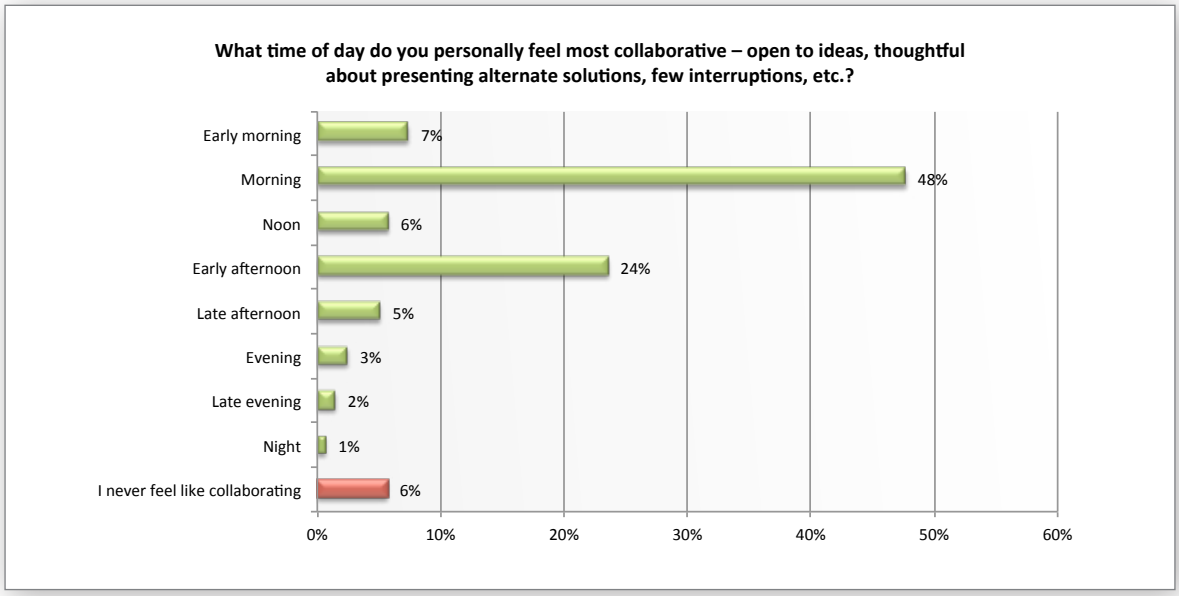
## Morning and early afternoon are the best times to collaborate

Employees are often more productive when they perform the most demanding work tasks, such as collaborating, during their time of greatest energy and fewer distractions. Among knowledge workers, the times of day they personally felt most collaborative are morning (48%) and early afternoon (24%). Not surprisingly, the least preferred time for professional collaboration is at night (1%).




## Technology is necessary for effective professional collaboration

Workplace collaboration is not new. But the way business professionals go about collaborating is fundamentally changing with the latest innovative technology. Today companies are using modern technology to better connect employees and external business partners, as well as make it easier for information to flow between all parties. Among our survey participants, 83% depend on technology to collaborate while 17% don't use tools to collaborate.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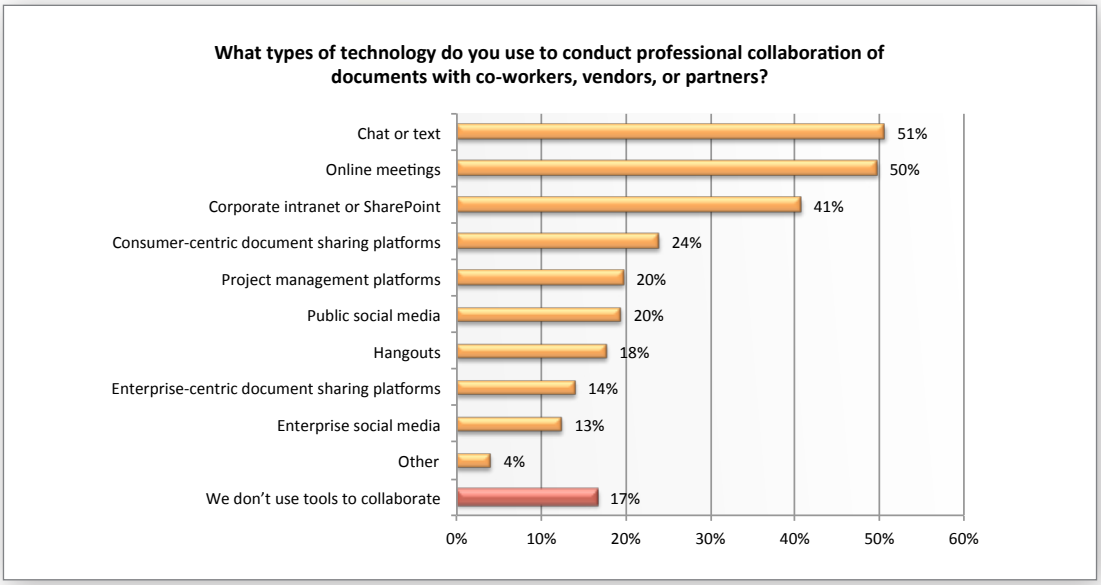
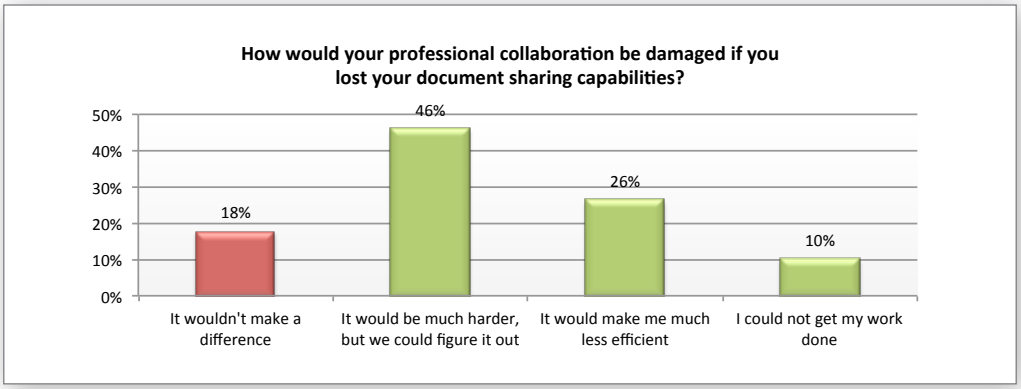
When asked about the types of technologies used for conducting professional collaboration, knowledge workers most repeatedly mentioned chat or text (51%), online meetings (50%), and corporate intranets or SharePoint (41%).




## Loss of collaboration capabilities would impact work productivity

Employees are becoming more increasingly reliant on this technology to perform collaborative tasks such as sharing documents with co-workers and external business partners. An overwhelming majority, 82%, would be impacted by the loss of collaboration capabilities. Furthermore, 10% reported that they could not get their work done if they lost collaborative capabilities. Conversely, it would not make a difference to 18% of knowledge workers.



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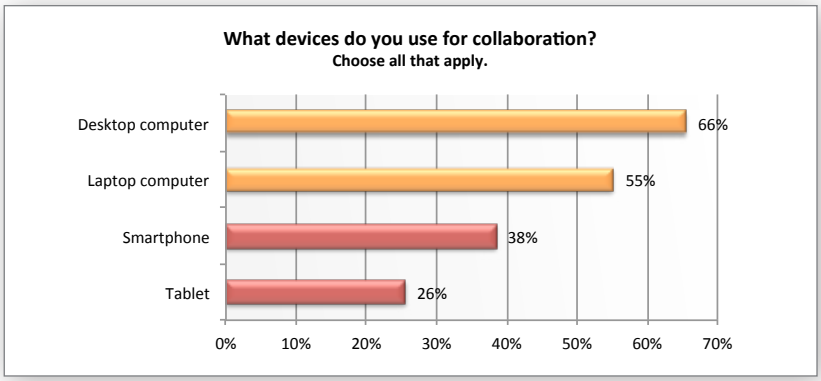
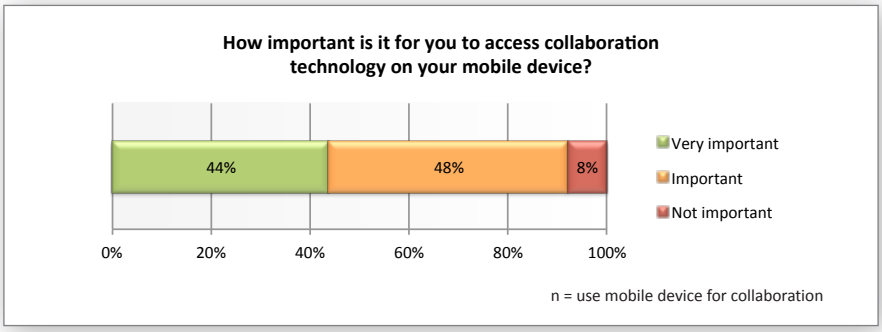
## Knowledge workers rely on mobile devices for collaboration

Because modern professionals live a connected lifestyle and want to be productive anytime, anywhere, from any device, mobile is playing a vital role in professional collaboration. While only half (49%) use mobile devices for collaboration, such as smartphones or tablets, most business professionals (92%) say it is important.




Once employees learn to collaborate using their mobile devices, it becomes increasingly important to have this capability. Of those respondents who do collaborate on their mobile devices, 44% consider access to collaboration technology on their mobile devices to be very important. Only a small minority (8%) believes it is not important.





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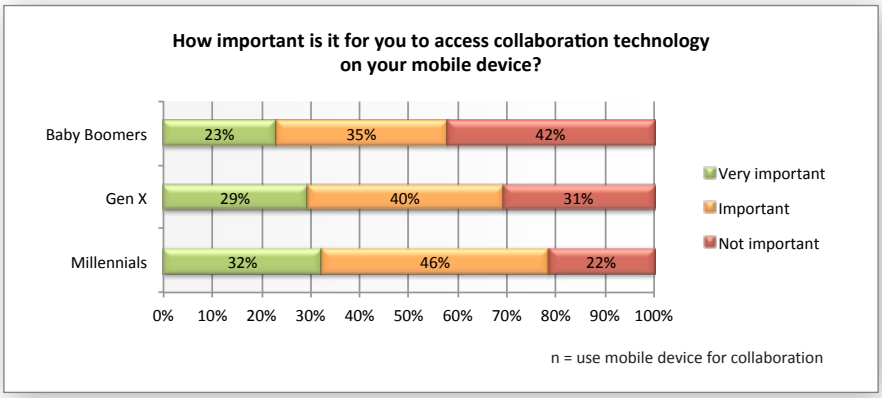
Furthermore, the degree of importance of mobile collaboration is higher among younger knowledge workers. In our survey, 32% of millennials said collaborating on their mobile devices is very important compared to 29% of Gen Xers and 23% of baby boomers




## Collaboration tools do not deliver — especially among millennials

Managing digital content and the workflow associated with an extended enterprise require some careful thought. As new enterprise collaboration tools flood the market, companies must be scrupulous in vetting the appropriate collaborative solutions for their organizations.

Overall, our survey revealed that 59% of knowledge workers face challenges with the current tools their companies provide for collaboration.

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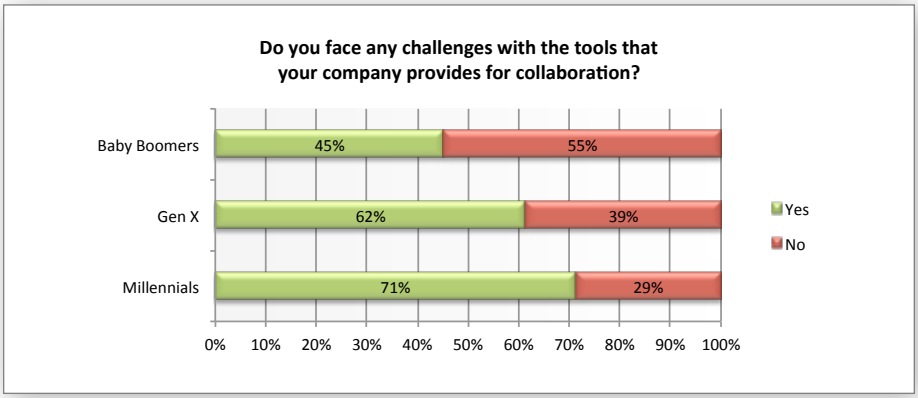
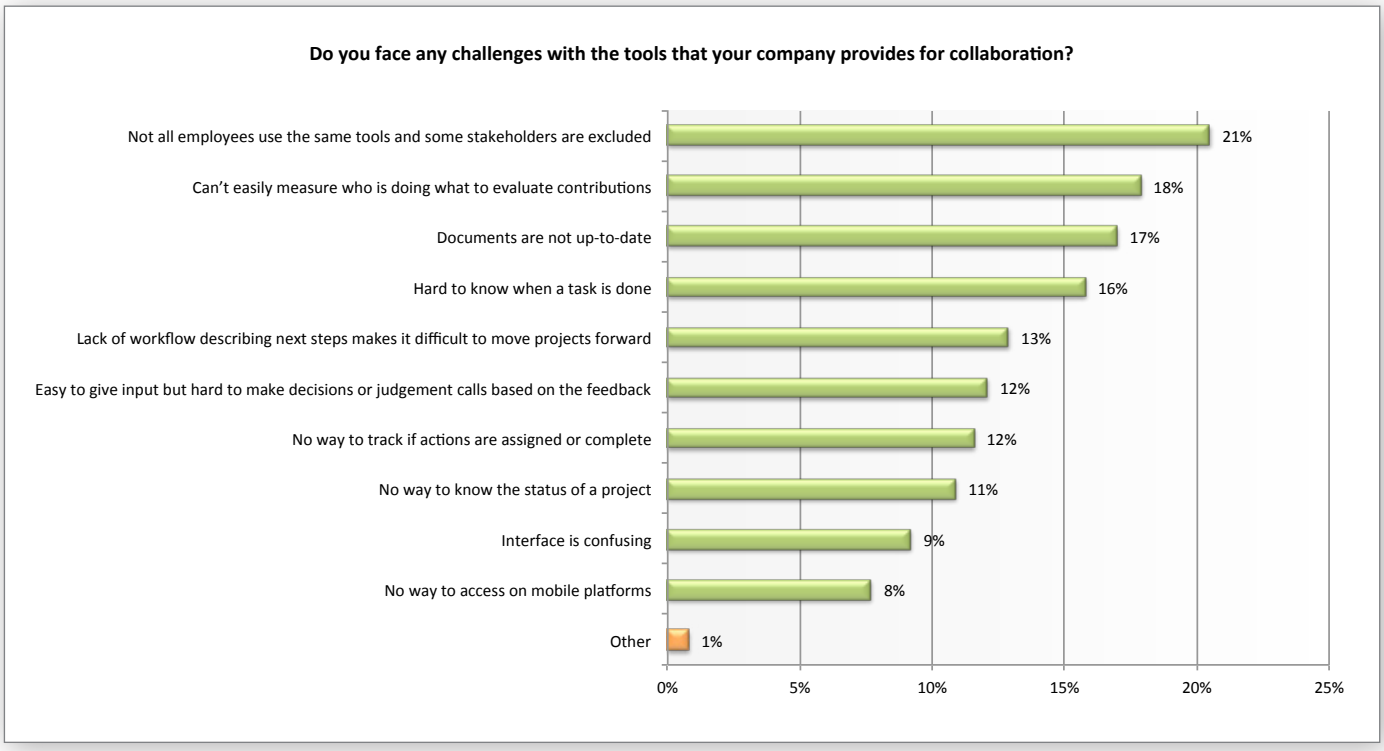
This dissatisfaction with workplace collaboration tools is especially prevalent among millennials who typically are more comfortable using technology than previous generations. Millennials want tools that help them work through a problem the fastest. When we looked at the participant responses by age groups, a large number of millennials (71%) said they face challenges with their professional collaboration tools compared to Generation Xers (62%) and baby boomers (45%).




While challenges with enterprise collaboration tools are broad ranging, the most common issues communicated by knowledge workers are not all employees use the same tools and stakeholders are excluded (21%), the inability to easily measure who is doing what to evaluate worker contribution (18%), documents are not up to date (17%), and it's hard to know when a task is done (16%).



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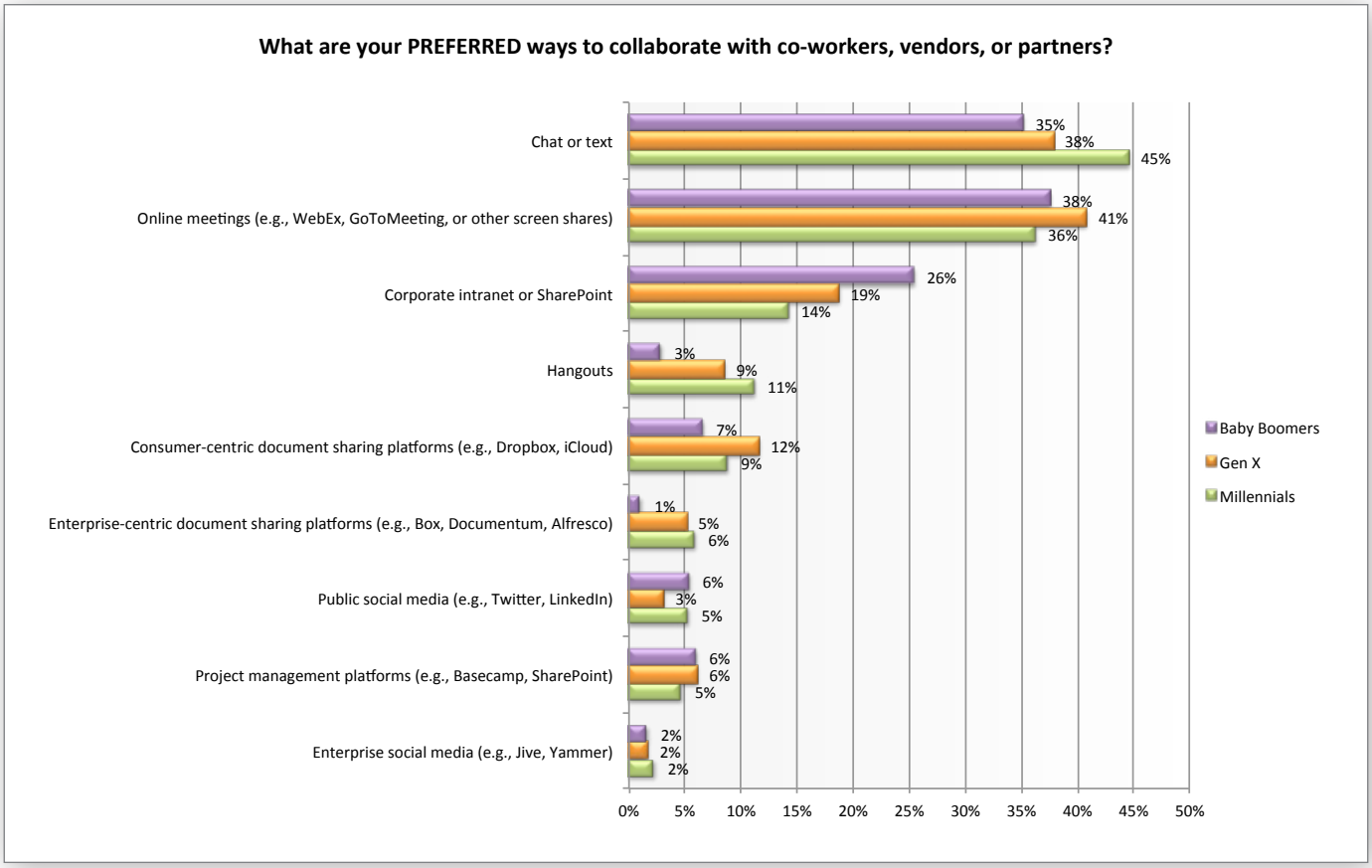
### Age influences professional collaboration preferences

Millennials are the first generation to grow up in a connected world. And most do not remember a time without the Internet. They opt for quick, casual, and efficient collaboration and choose tools that meet these needs. Nearly half of millennials (45%) said chatting or texting is their preferred way to collaborate with co-workers, vendors, or partners. Similarly, 47% of millennials also favored online meetings to in-person if they were given the choice.







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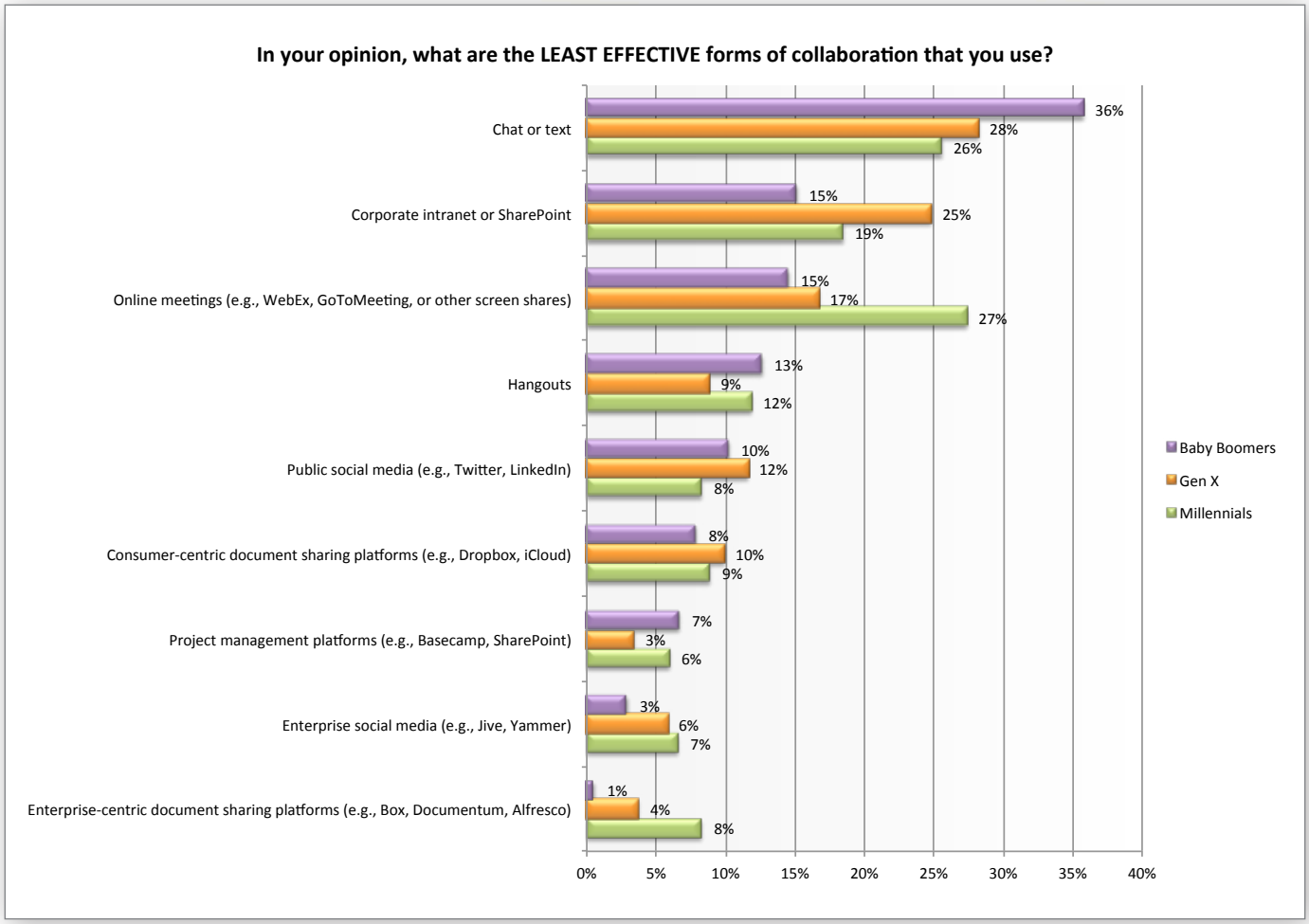
On the opposite side, 36% of baby boomers said chat or text is the least effective form of collaboration that they use. And when given the choice, only 26% would prefer online to in-person meetings.




## Employees find ways to collaborate, even if security is ignored

Savvy knowledge workers seek the most efficient ways to collaborate professionally. If their company collaboration tools do not meet their needs, they will find options elsewhere. Yet there can be severe consequences when employees rely on solutions not designed with the enterprise in mind.

Often security and privacy are overlooked when business professionals employ alternative collaboration tools at work. Among all survey respondents, only 38% said that they always think about data security or privacy when sharing work content with clients, vendors, and other external stakeholders. Furthermore, 11% revealed that they never consider data security when collaborating externally.



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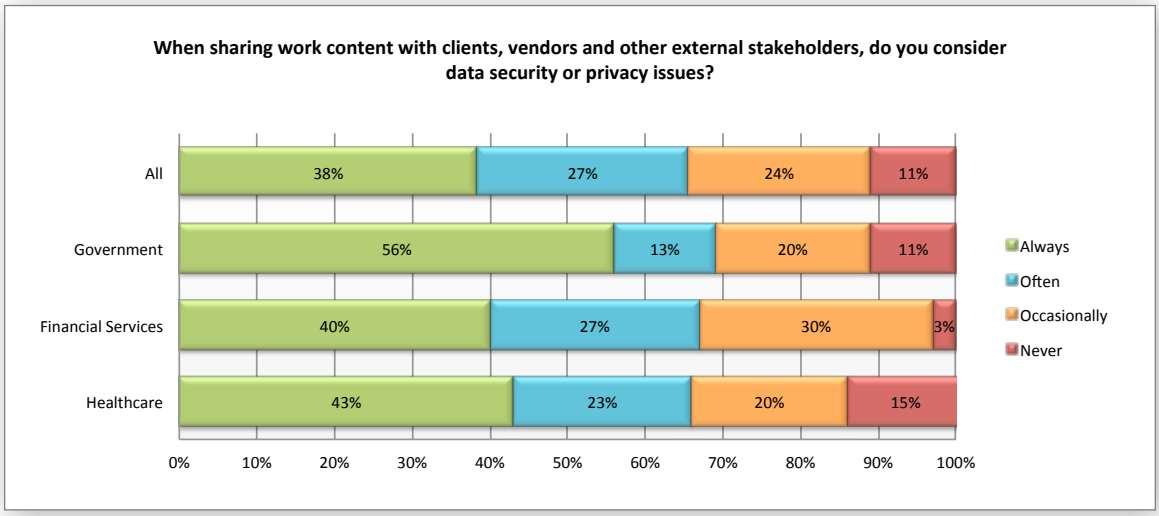
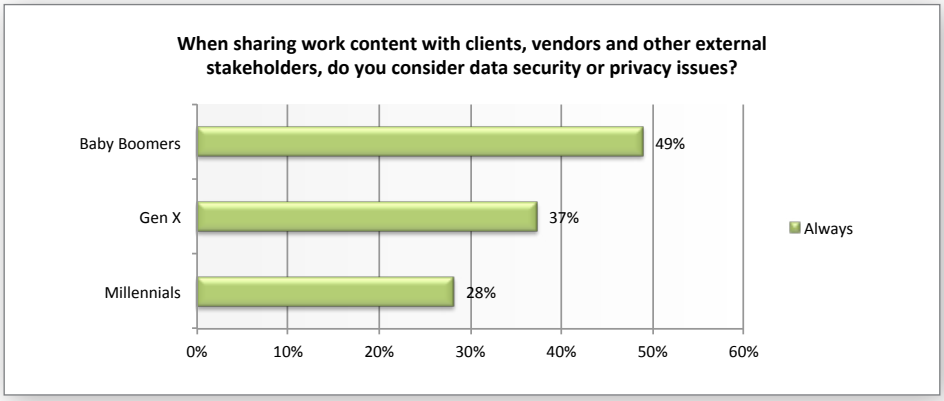
When we looked at participant responses across key industries that are at a greater risk of harm after a security or privacy breach, we found more than half (56%) of government knowledge workers always think about security in their collaboration. This percentage contrasts appreciably with those knowledge workers in healthcare (43%) and financial services (40%) who always consider security or privacy issues.




One of the more interesting insights of our survey is that older employees tend to hold a higher regard for data security or privacy issues than younger employees. More specifically, 49% of baby boomers always consider data security or privacy issues compared to 37% of Gen Xers and 28% of millennials.





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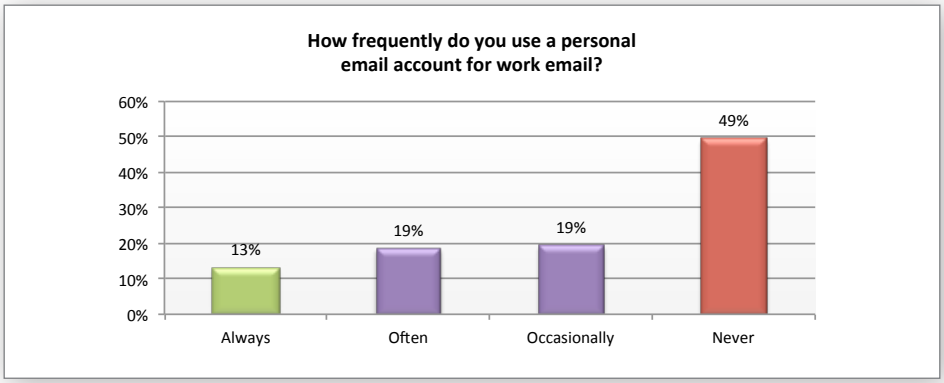
## Personal email is frequently used for work email

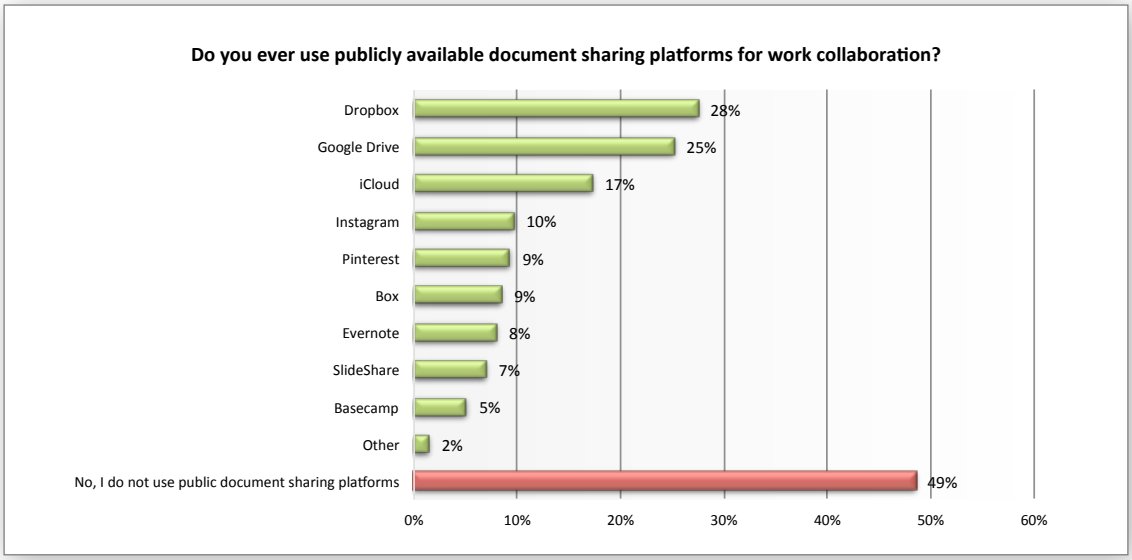
Enterprise security can be put at risk is when employees use personal email for work purposes. Whether it is due to fewer file size restrictions, preference for using their own devices, no access to corporate networks at home, or something else, employees often prefer using their personal email. In fact, more than half of knowledge workers, 51%, stated that they used personal email accounts for work email. And of this group, 13% said they always used it; 19% said they used it often.




## Public document sharing tools are often used for work collaboration

As consumer file-sharing apps become even more intuitive and readily available at zero or low cost, employees regularly turn to these convenient platforms when their enterprise collaboration tools don't measure up. We found that 51% of knowledge workers use public document sharing for work collaboration.

The most used document sharing platforms among survey participants include Dropbox (28%), Google Drive (25%), iCloud (17%), and Instagram (10%).



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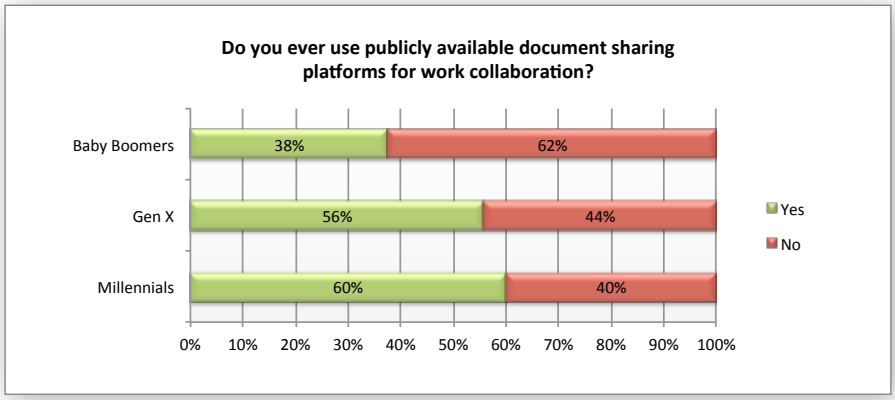
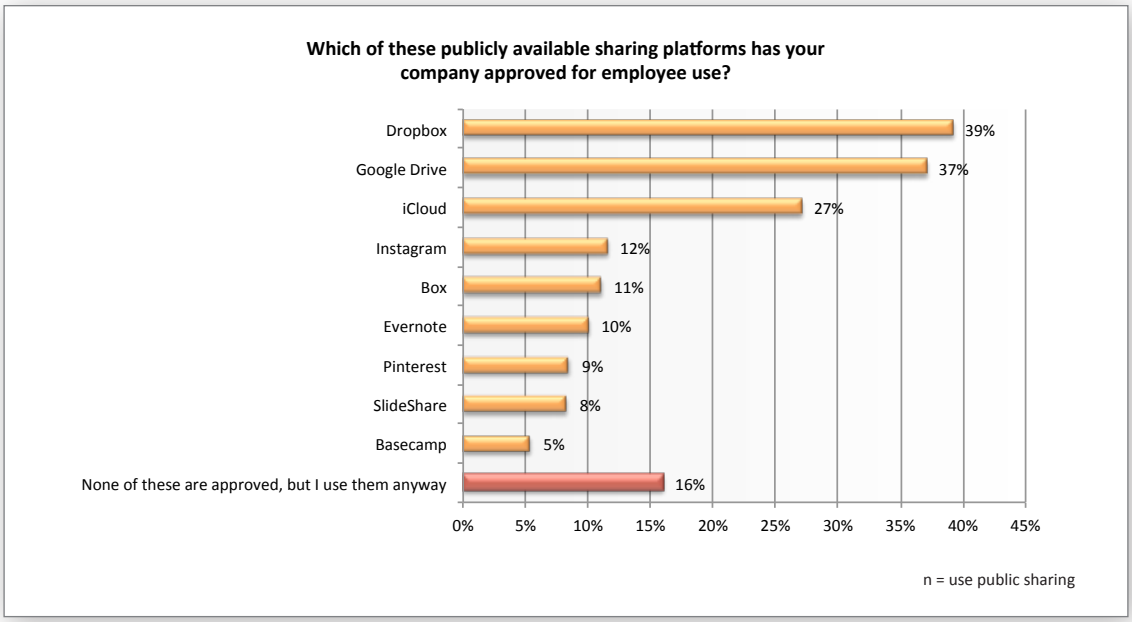
When we looked at participant responses by their age groups, more than half of millennials (60%) and Gen Xers (56%) use publicly available document sharing platforms for work collaboration. In contrast, only 38% of baby boomers use these same platforms.




## Workers use sharing tools even though they haven't been approved

One unexpected finding of this survey is that 16% of knowledge workers use public document sharing tools even though these tools haven't been approved.

The conclusion from this unauthorized use admission is that today's enterprise collaboration solutions are not flexible enough to adapt to the ebb and flow of the extended enterprise. Now more than ever, companies need a workplace collaboration platform that can work effortlessly on the most popular computing systems and devices, including mobile, provide user-friendly capabilities for wide adoption, and, most important, safeguard critical content.



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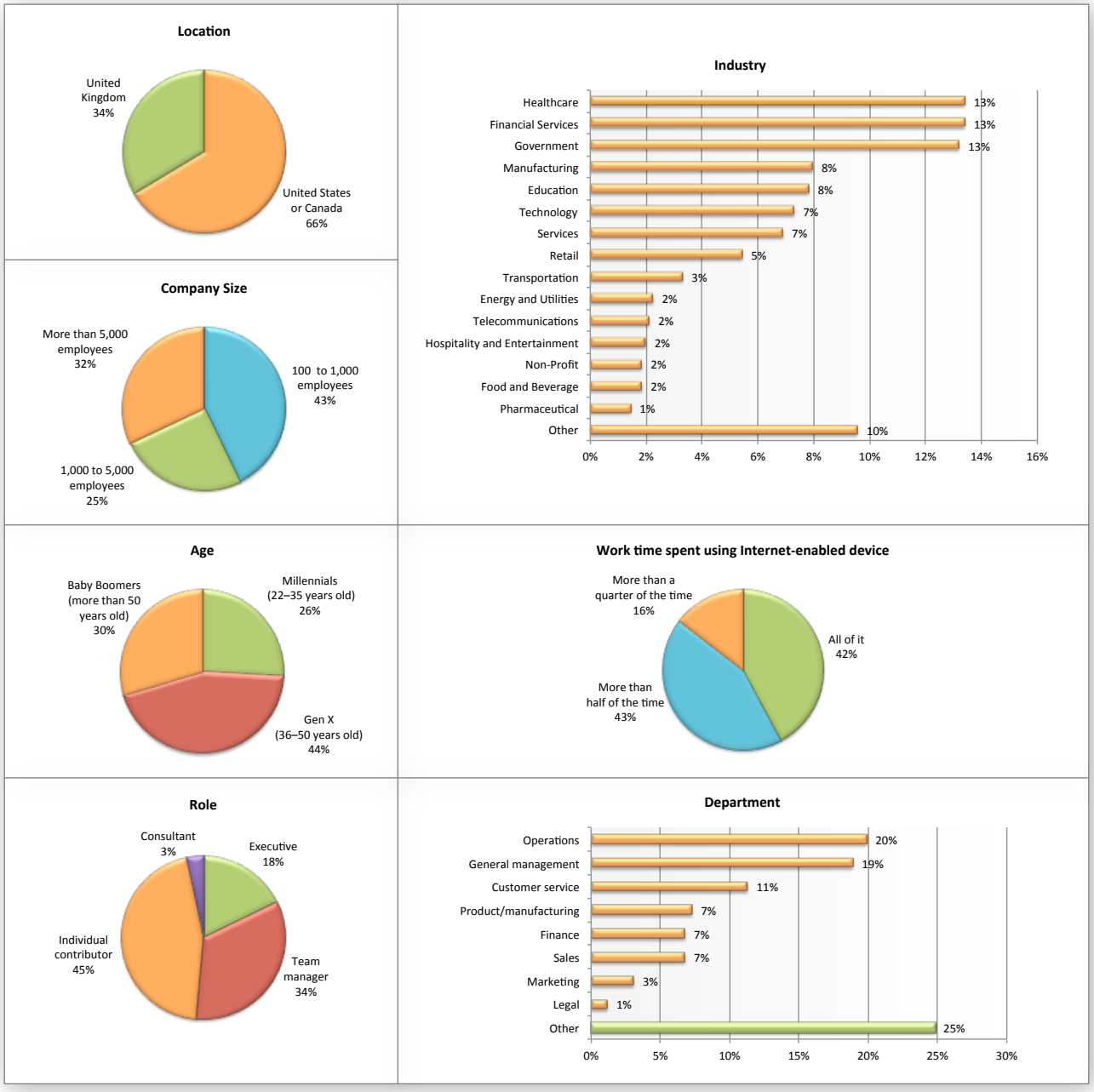
## Survey Methodology and Participant Demographics

In June 2015, knowledge workers from the United States, Canada, and United Kingdom were invited to participate in an online survey about collaboration trends and technology. Participants were asked a series of questions to quantify experiences, challenges, and habits in work collaboration.

A total of 753 individuals completed the survey. All spent more than 25% of their workday online. Participants represented a wide range of industries, company sizes, departments, roles, and age groups.



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## About Alfresco

Alfresco provides modern enterprise content management (ECM) software built on open standards that enables organizations to unlock the power of their business-critical content. With the controls that IT demands and the simplicity that end users love, Alfresco's open source technology enables global organizations to collaborate more effectively across cloud, mobile, hybrid and on-premise environments. Innovating at the intersection of content, collaboration, and business process, Alfresco manages over seven billion documents, powering the daily tasks of more than 11 million users worldwide. Please visit us at www.alfresco.com.



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