

Foreword

This report summarises online surveys, run in September 2019 and 2018, exploring the degree to which internal and external communications are converging inside organisations.

We received nearly 90 responses to our questions. We assess the degree to which companies are communicating with an internal and external audience simultaneously. We examine

levels of joint planning and production, plus we look at how many organisations are actively encouraging their employees to act as external brand advocates.

In an open question, we ask communicators how they feel about the closer union of internal and external communications – what excites them about a closer partnership and what concerns them.

This report recommends some initial steps organisations could take to maximise the relationship between both disciplines. It also includes an excerpt from Katie Macaulay's presentation on the subject from the recent CIPR Inside Conference, held in Birmingham.



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Executive summary

Same content, different audiences

The degree to which organisations produce content to communicate simultaneously with an internal and external audience is highly variable. Around one-third do this only on rare occasions. However, another third are doing this once a week.

A large majority believe content created for employees could be of interest to wider audiences.

Repurposing employee content for other audiences is common. Only 10% say their organisations never do this.

Joint planning is far from universal. It is only happening across half of all organisations surveyed.

A significant minority do not maintain a shared internal and external communications calendar.

Convergence In numbers

80%

believe employee content is of wider interest to other audiences.

43%

do not maintain a shared internal and external communications calendar.

Employees are informed insiders

Almost half of the organisations surveyed are not actively encouraging their employees to act as brand advocates.

A surprising number of communicators do not know how many employees follow their organisation on social media.

The majority of communicators think convergence will continue – but a clear distinction will remain between internal and external.

Communicators express mixed feelings on the issue of convergence. Many are excited by the opportunity to do better work, broaden their career prospects and collaborate with peers across disciplines.

Others have concerns and words of warning. This relates mainly to the discrete and special needs of employees who need to be treated as “informed insiders”.

Convergence In numbers

47%

don't know how many employees follow their organisation on social media.

60%

of communicators think convergence will continue.

Every day employees see under the hood of our organisations. Unlike other audiences, they see the unvarnished truth. This unique perspective means they are almost impossible to fool or beguile.

“For that reason, you cannot market your organisation to your workforce as you might market it to your customers.

“I also believe we hold the organisations that employ us to a higher standard than those we buy from – and rightly so.

“The irony is, despite its importance, internal communication rarely has the budget, air time or influence of the other communication disciplines.

“But we do have a privileged position at the heart of our organisations. Let’s use this to become hunter gathers of the very best stories about what our organisation does and – crucially – **why** it does it.



Katie Macaulay,
Managing Director, AB
CIPR Inside Conference
2019



02

Recommendations

Exploiting the benefits of a closer union between internal and external comms

The 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer told organisations to “activate their employee voices”. To do this effectively, decide the role you would like employees to play as brand advocates.

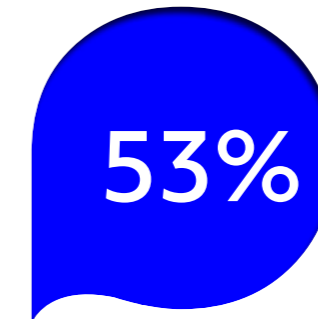
Edelman found more people trust a company expert or a regular employee than a CEO.

As a minimum, identify the number of employees actively engaging with your organisation on external social media platforms. What presence and reach do they have?

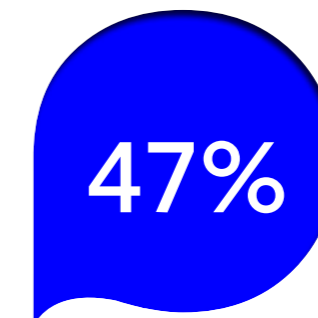
Your employees’ social media posts are likely to perform better than your organisation’s content.

LinkedIn data shows only 2% of employees reshare the content their companies share. But, they are responsible for 20% of the overall engagement (views, likes, comments, and shares) that content receives.

Provide guidance and toolkits for employees, then measure, reward and recognise their impact.



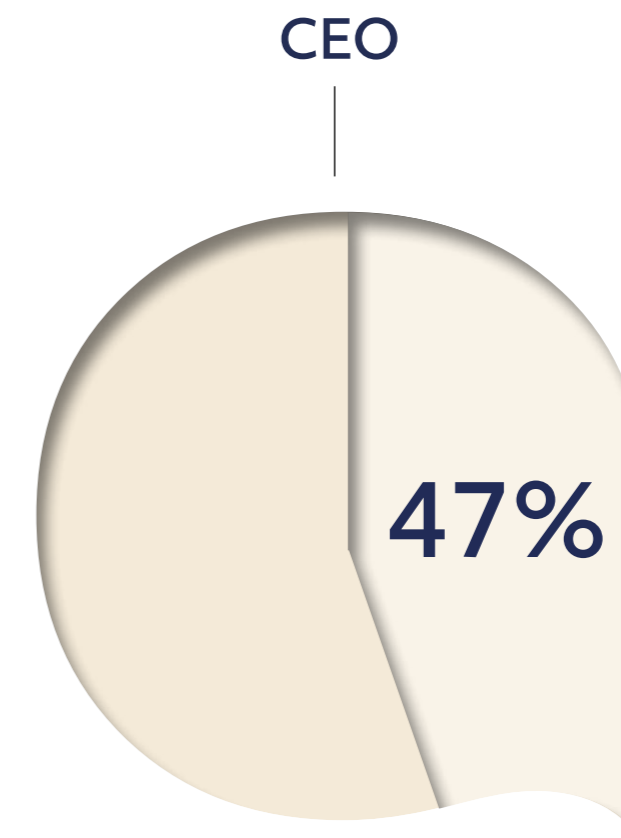
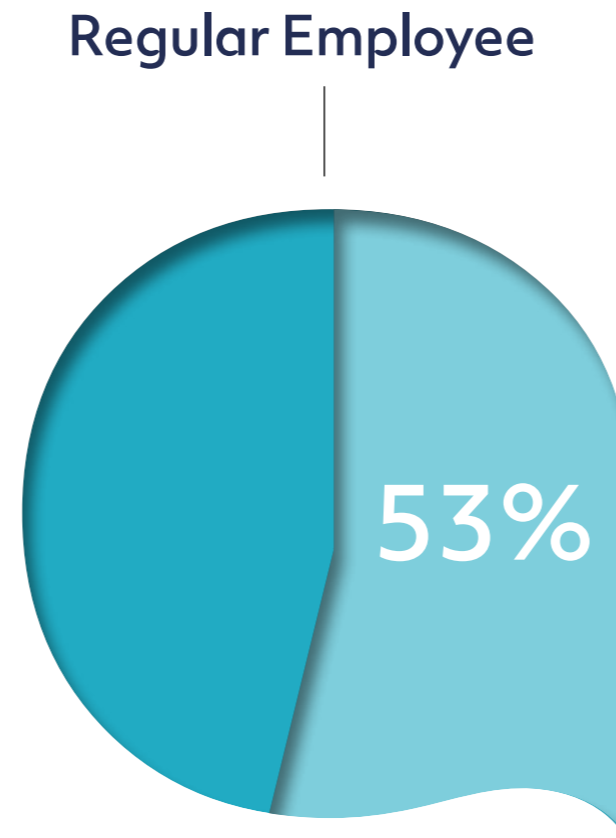
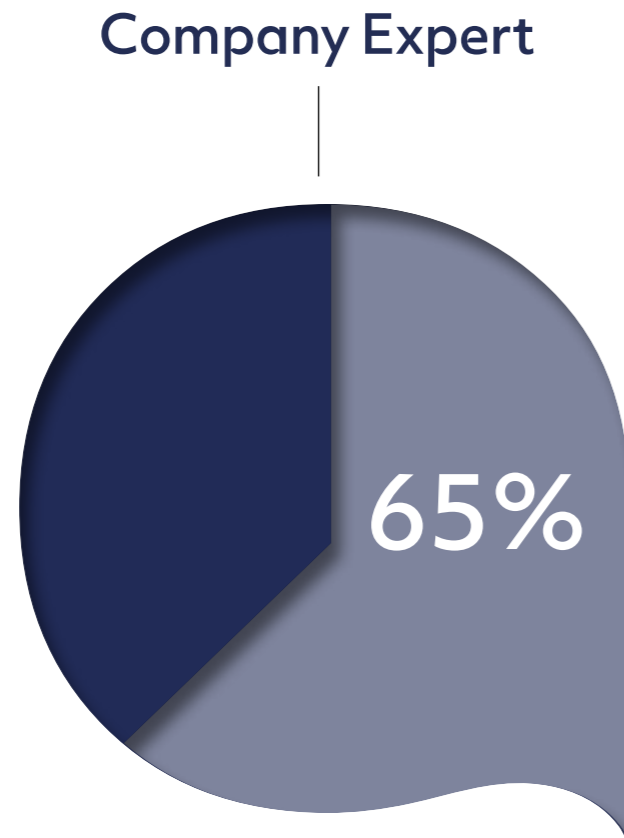
employee



CEO

Edelman found more people trust a regular employee than a CEO.

When forming an opinion of a company, who do we find most credible?



The external value of your internal culture

Purpose-led organisations with truly unique or differentiating values use these to their commercial advantage.

When creating a culture, values or mission statement, ask yourself whether it would pass the 'Patagonia Test'. What impact would it have on the side of a building?



Exploit the benefits of a closer union between internal and external comms

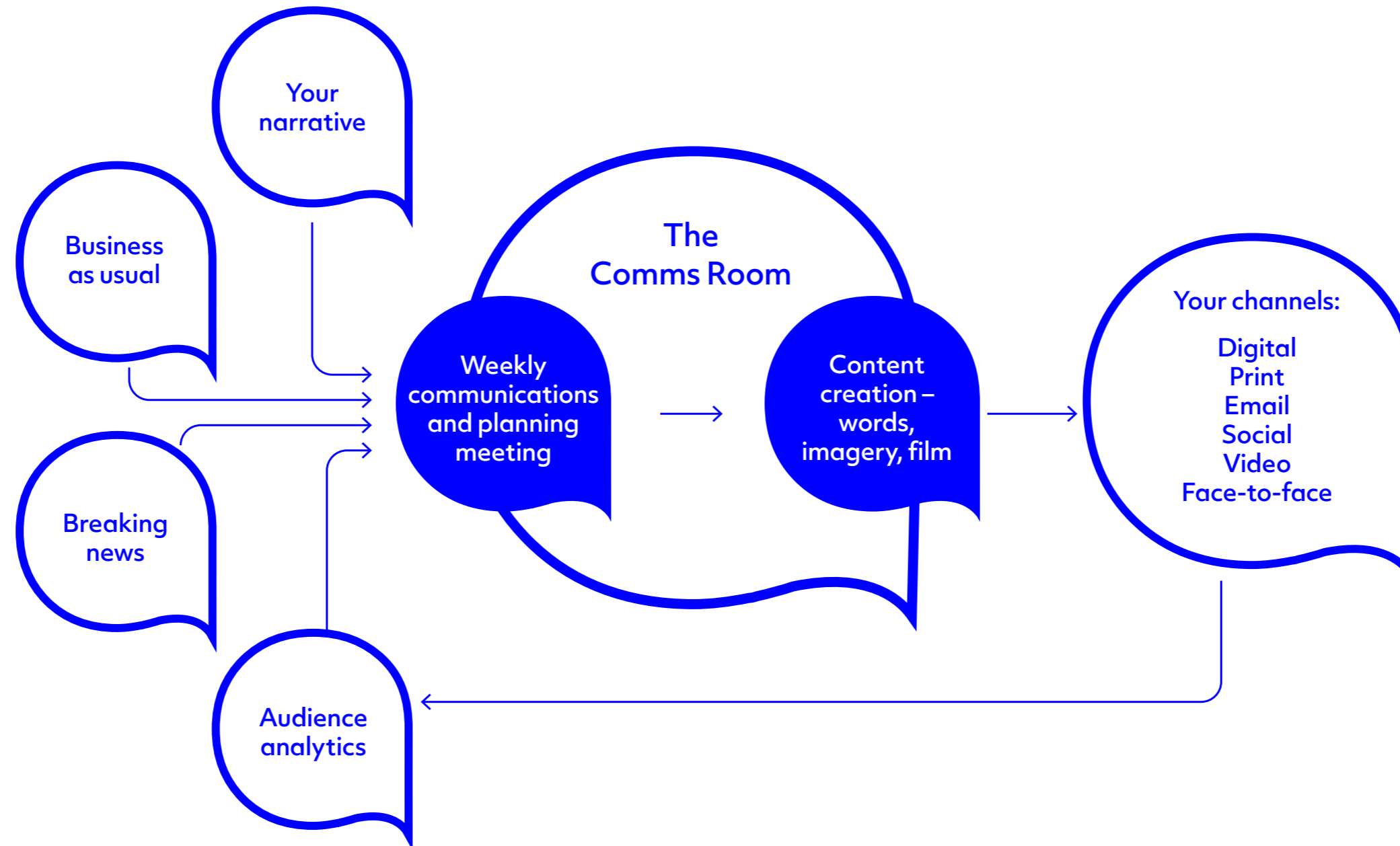
Consider a joint planning meeting, where all communicators – internal communications, media relations, investor relations and marketing – sit together to discuss the organisation’s narrative, breaking news and business as usual content, plus review analytics and sentiment across all audience groups.

Don’t spend your budget creating content for one audience when it might be relevant and engaging to others.

Measure the success of your internal content by how far it has travelled beyond the walls of your organisation.



The new Comms Room brings speed, efficiency and alignment



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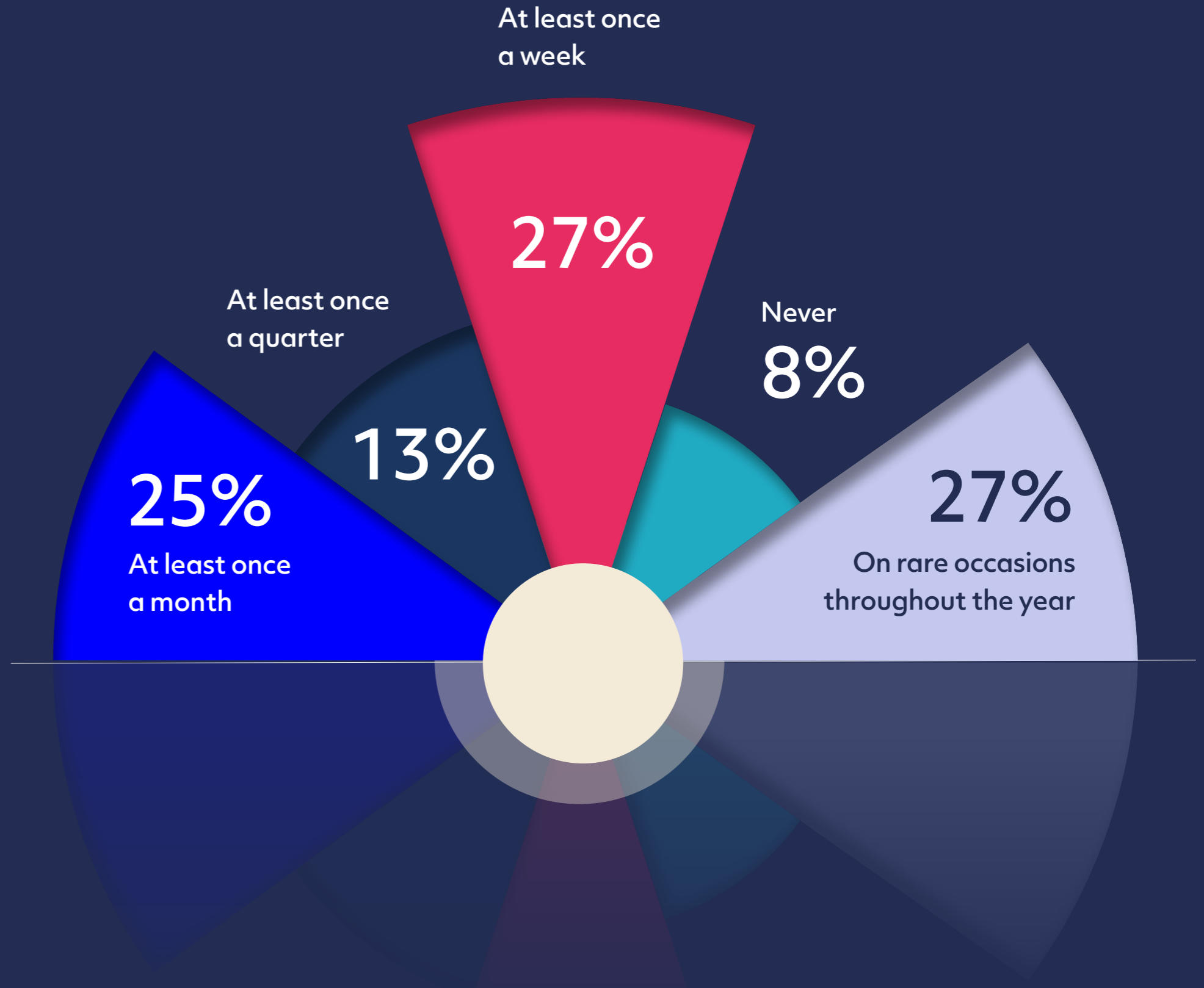
Results



The degree to which organisations choose to communicate with both an internal and external audience is highly variable

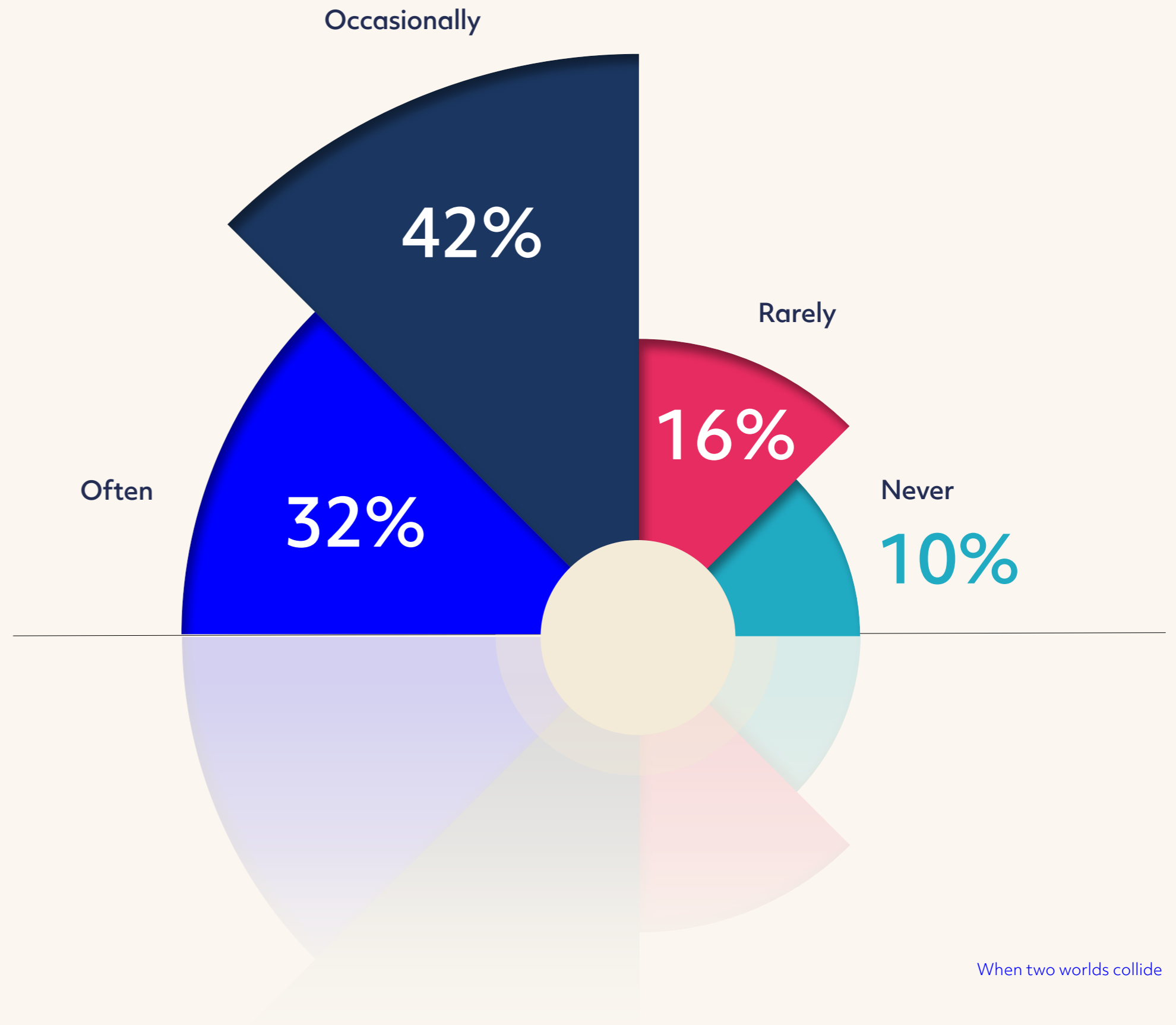
How often does your organisation choose to communicate with both an internal and external audience simultaneously?

This might be a podcast, website for both audiences, a social media campaign or your CEO's blog.



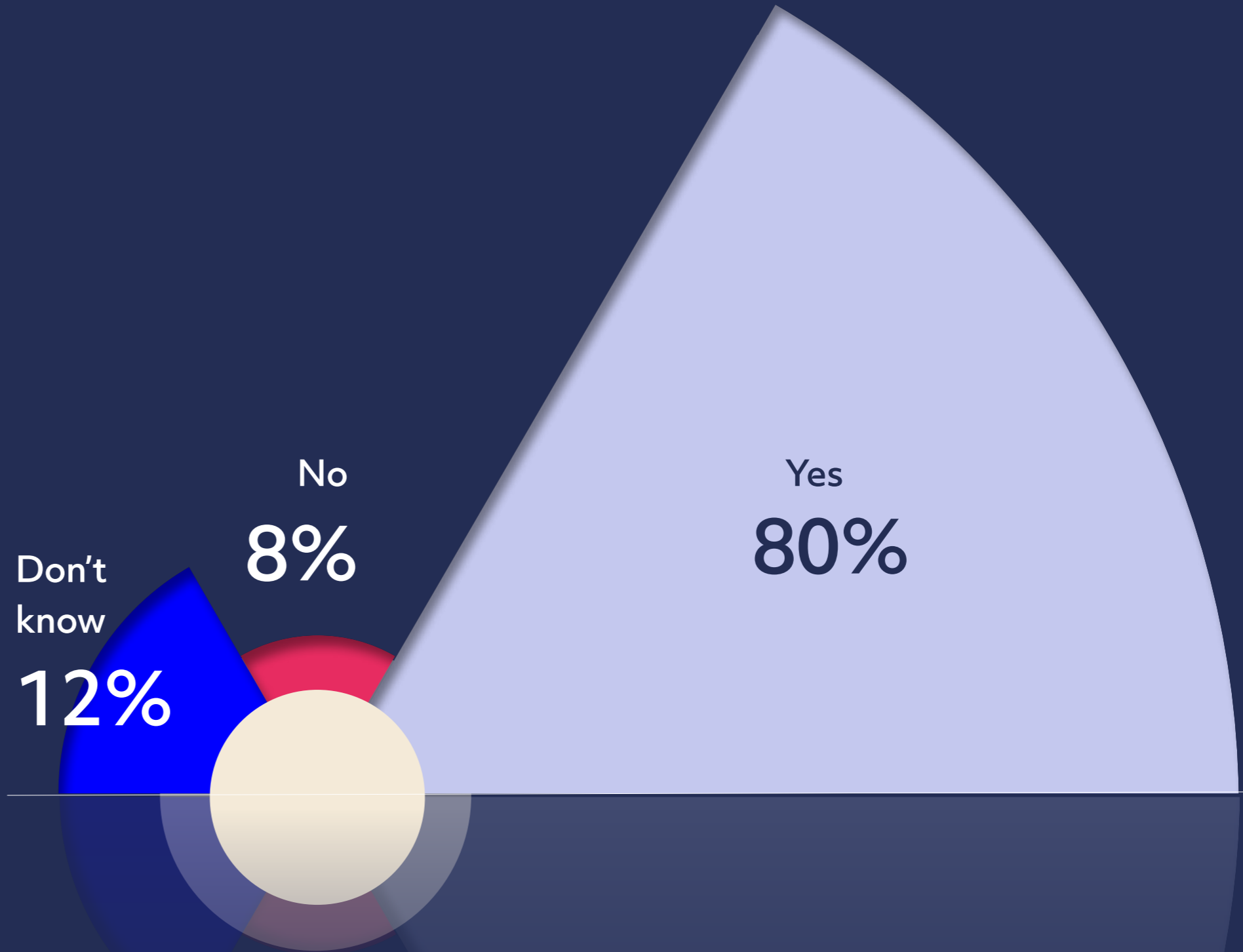
Only 10% never repurpose employee communication for other audiences

How often is content for employees repurposed for external audiences e.g. customers, shareholders, suppliers or the general public?



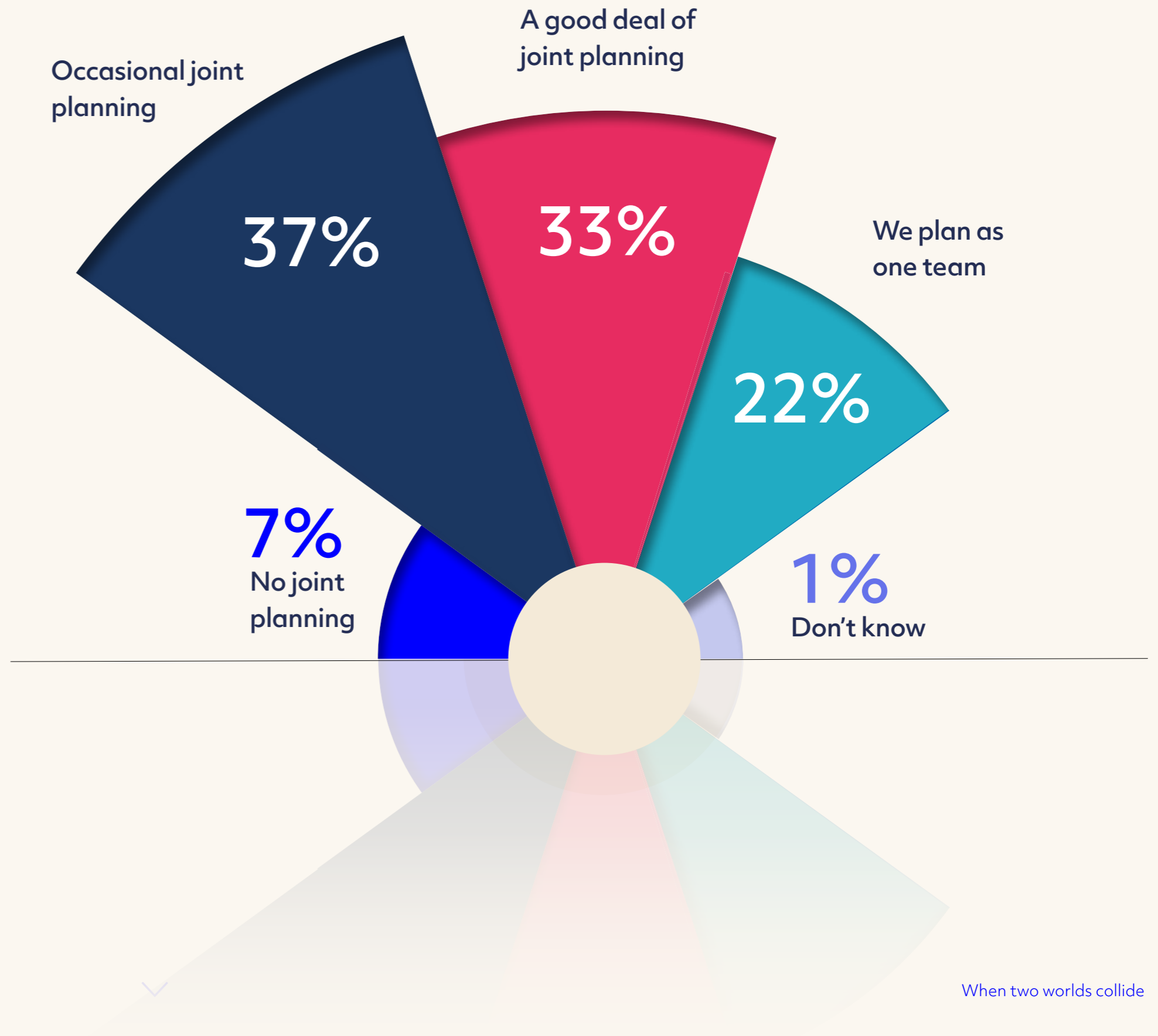
A large majority (80%) believe internal content could be of interest to wider audiences

Do you believe the content you create for employees could be of interest to wider audiences?



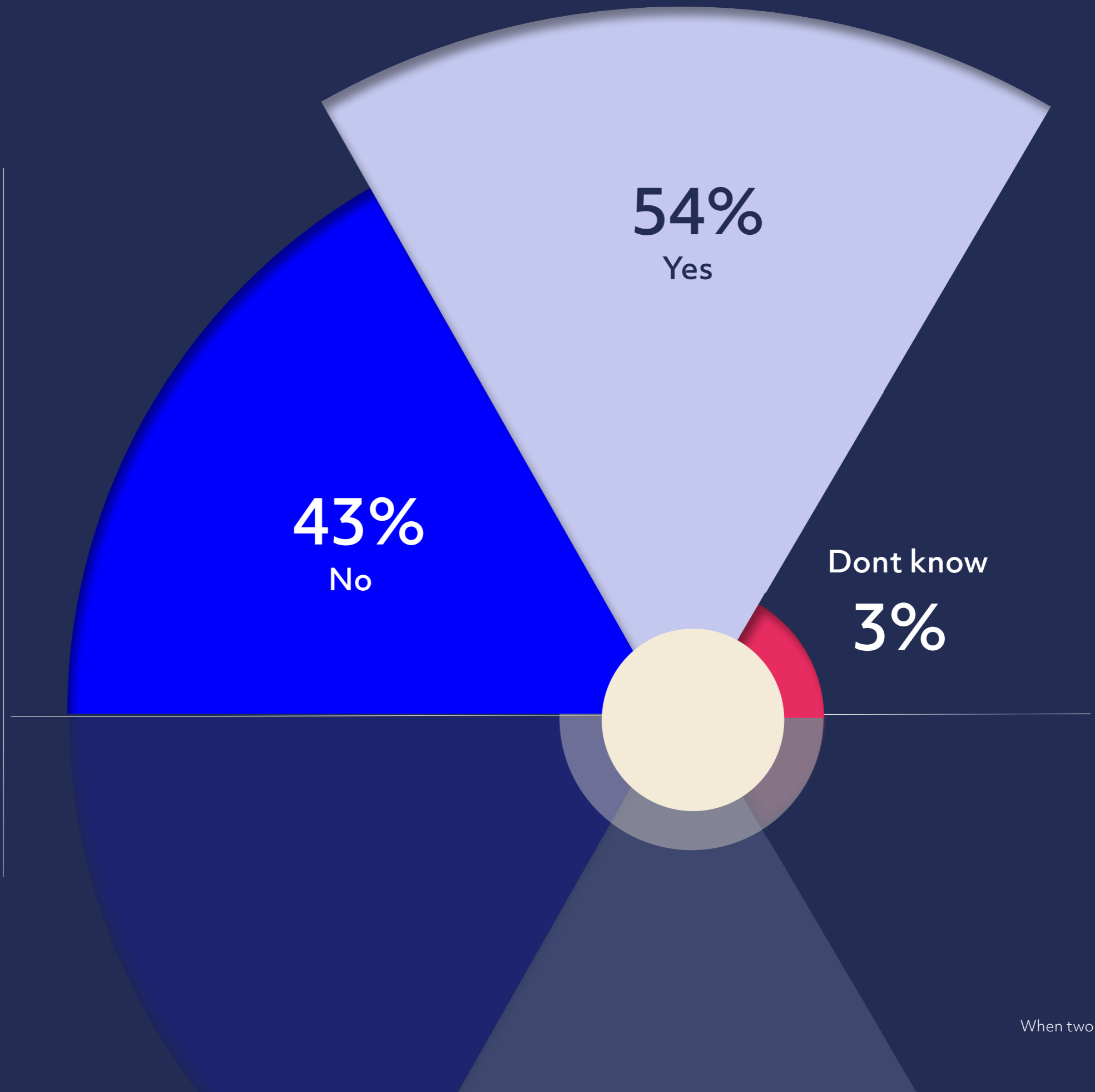
Joint planning is common across 55% of organisations surveyed. Only 7% say there is no joint planning

How closely do teams responsible for internal and external communications plan their activities together?



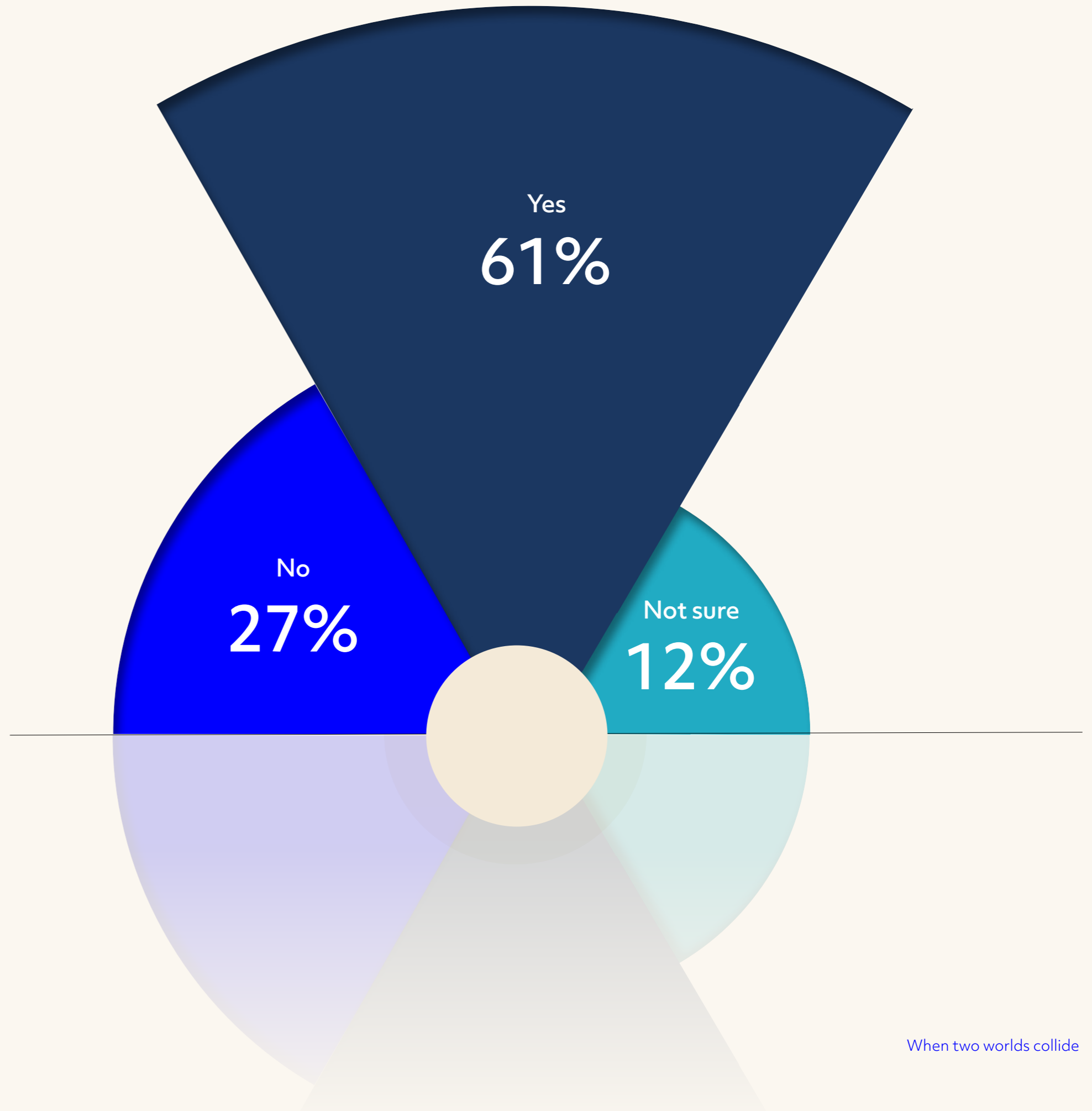
A significant minority (43%) do not maintain a shared internal and external communications calendar

Does the internal communications team maintain and update a shared communications calendar with the external communications team?



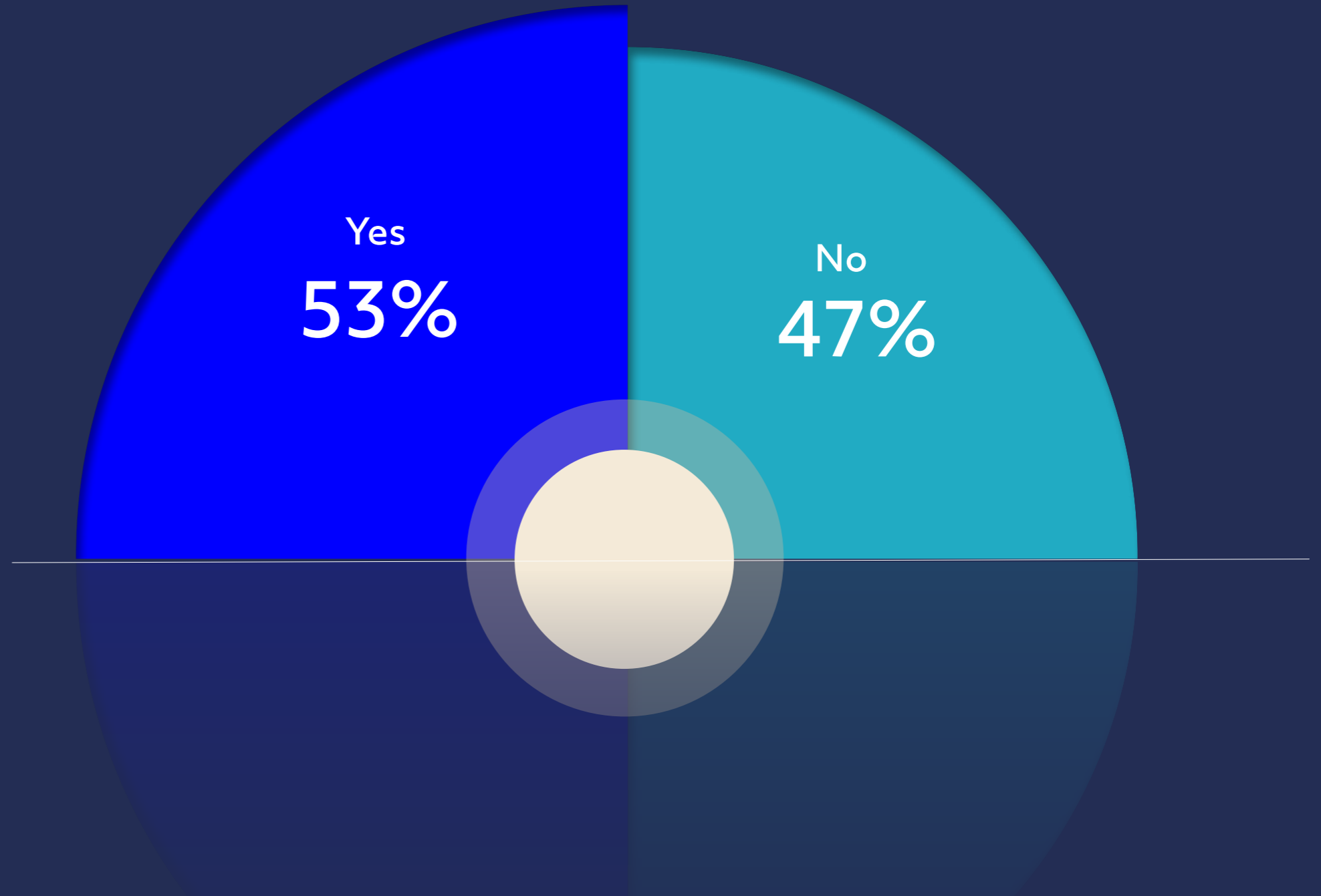
Almost half of organisations are not actively encouraging their employees to act as brand advocates

Do you actively encourage your employees to act as brand advocates for your organisation?



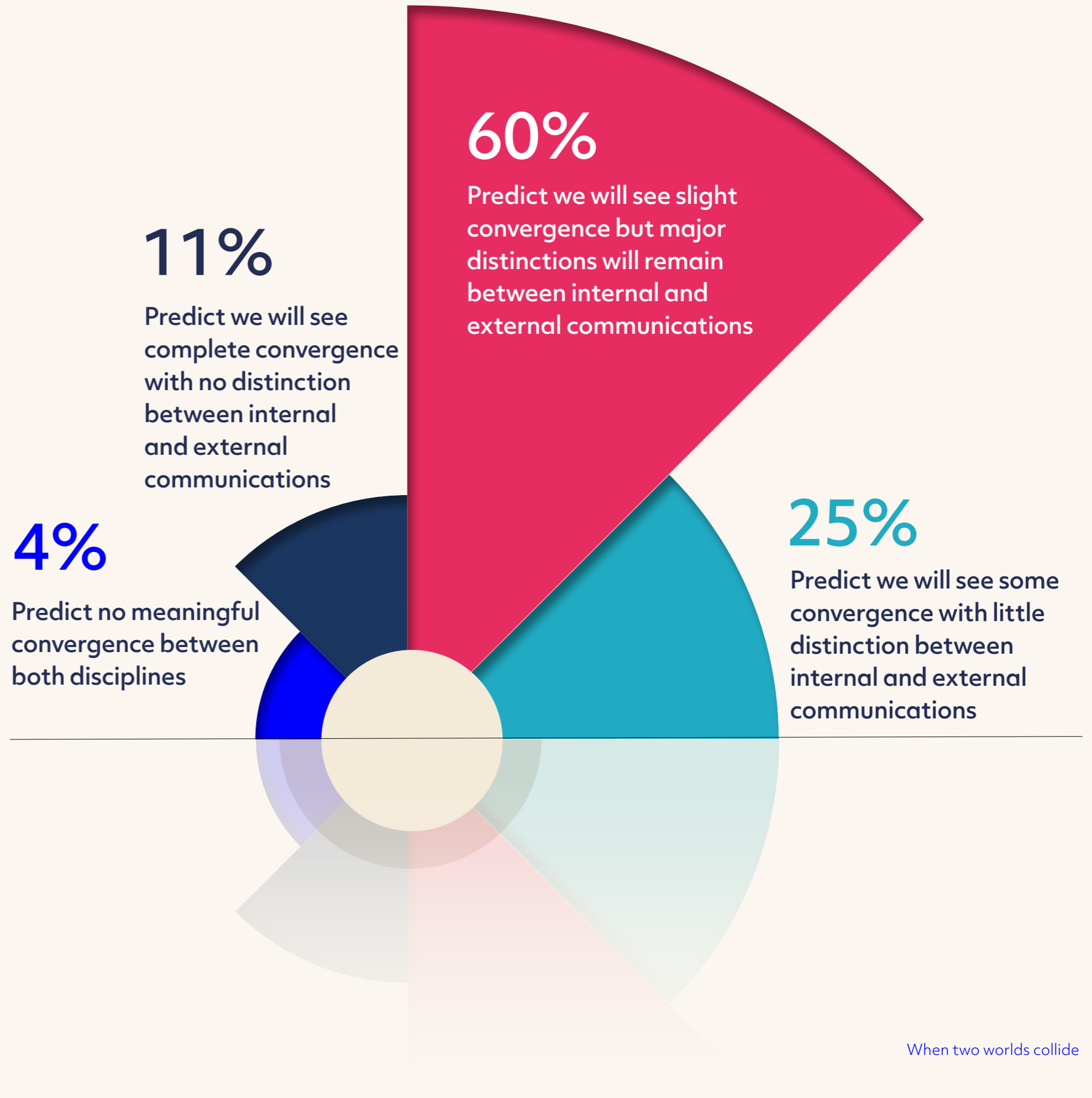
A surprising number of communicators (47%) do not know how many employees follow their organisation on social media

Do you know how many employees follow your organisation's external social media accounts, such as Twitter or LinkedIn?



The majority of communicators think convergence will continue, but a clear distinction will remain between internal and external

In your view, how far will internal and external communication converge inside your own organisation in the future?





04

We asked communicators
how they feel about the
issue of convergence

Many are **excited by the opportunity** this brings:



I think it's a great thing as my team will develop and grow their experience. There is less chance of them becoming pigeonholed into being a purist in only one communication discipline.



There will always be a need for operational internal comms but the excitement lies around the brand work, creating internal brand advocates and really finding employees who are true ambassadors.



I think it's an opportunity to communicate with more immediacy to employees.



I think the exciting thing could be IC becoming more aligned with Corporate Comms rather than HR. I believe a recent trend has been a slight move towards HR. This isn't good for communicators!





We're a new internal comms department in a charity. To date, the focus has been on engaging people externally. A lot of content, especially employee stories, is shared externally but not internally. This leads to our people feeling second-best and disconnected. There is a massive opportunity to bring the outside in and increase engagement. Equally, there is a real opportunity to further clarify and build on our brand positioning by getting insight and stories from internal audiences. This in turn will encourage brand advocacy. At the moment, external comms is reluctant to work in partnership with IC. In my experience, they tend to be confused of its value and benefit.





Working mainly with local authorities, I'm surprised how often councils overlook the fact that their own employees live in the borough (not to mention pay tax and vote in local elections). Often, they're the very people the external campaigns are trying to reach – not to mention their friends, family and neighbours. So if a local authority can get staff genuinely on board with a campaign, that has big potential in spreading the message and winning people over. (We all know you're more likely to listen to a message or recommendation from a friend).



We should be sharing and interpreting what is said externally for internal audiences. This will help our employees understand the market they operate in and how the business they work for is responding to it... and then, if there are changes (cutbacks, expansion into other markets, etc.) they will, or at least should, have a better understanding of the context.



Others have **concerns** and
words of **warning**:



Both are important. But there needs to be mutual respect – IC tends to be looked down on by some who do external comms. It's about time we break down silos between internal and external comms. Ultimately we're dealing with audiences with different needs who are all human beings.



I still see the internal audience as having different content needs. I want to treat our staff as insiders, and give them more in-depth insight than we would an external audience. That said, I think there are opportunities to gain by planning activities together and thinking about where the two audiences overlap.



I see internal and external comms as siblings. There are similarities but the two are not identical. I have no problem with convergence – and professionally, it is good for people to understand both disciplines – but the tone and messages will always be different.



I wish our organisation would do more to converge internal and external communications. Currently, there are too many fiefdoms in external comms that prohibit collaboration. Success requires both parties at the table to be willing to work together.



A few are very **comfortable and familiar** with convergence:



I have never understood
the distinction.



I think it's inevitable and natural.
It's quite common now to admit
that (due to e.g. social media)
anything sent internally can find its
way externally.



It happened here two years ago
– internal and external comms
teams merged to form one
multi-skilled team capable of
doing both. The challenge, as
you'd expect, is balance.



I am neither excited nor concerned;
it's just logical and professional.



Just before you go...

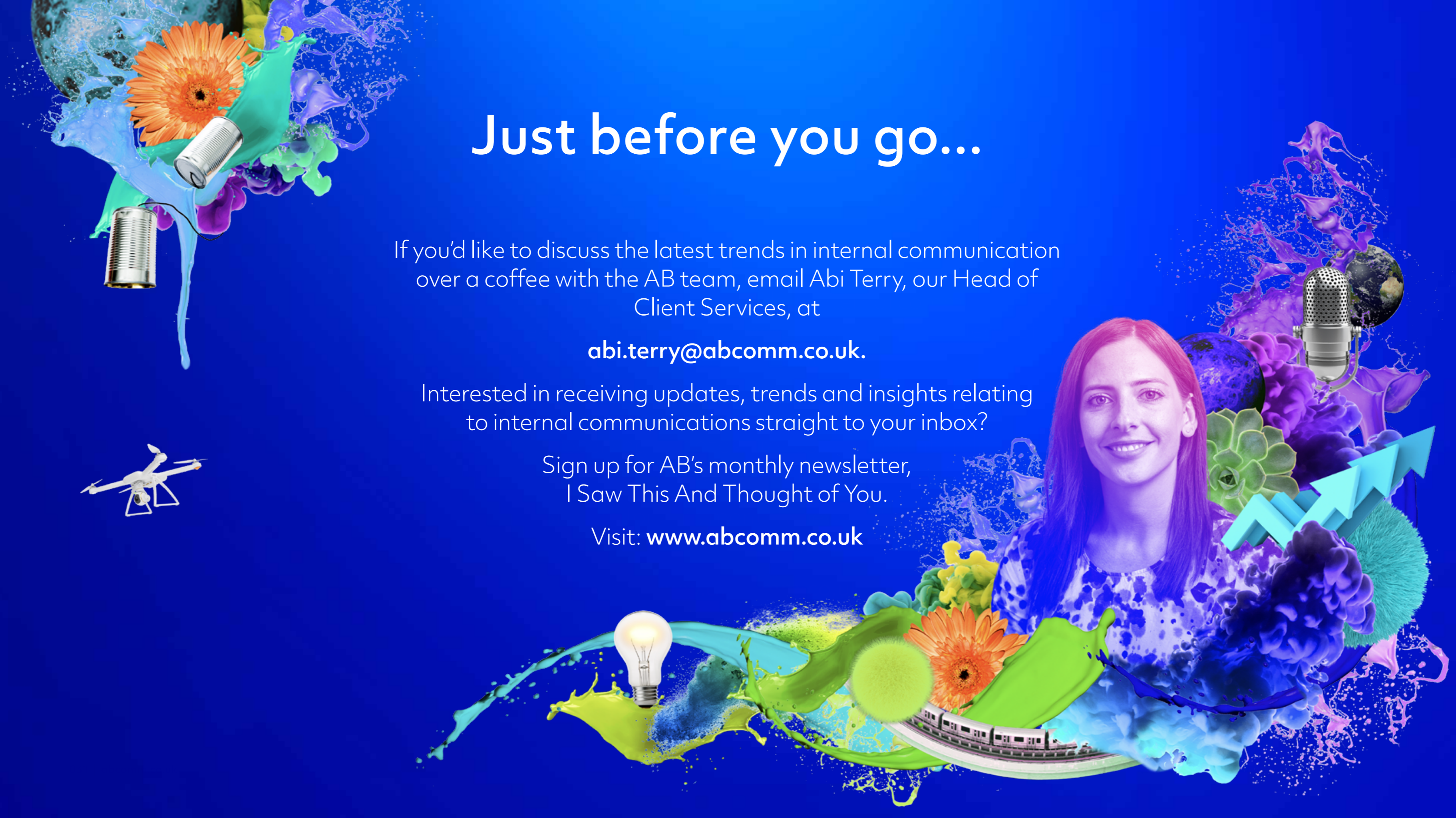
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