The Great AI Divide
in Internal Communications

ruderfinn | Ragan

Contents

The Opportunity

Artificial intelligence is rapidly transforming how organizations communicate and engage with their employees. That said, there has been surprisingly little research examining how communications professionals and organizations are leveraging AI to enhance their internal communications efforts.

Ruder Finn and Ragan have partnered to explore how communications professionals currently harness AI and how they plan to leverage it to advance their internal communications work in the future.

By sharing these insights, we aim to provide internal communications professionals visibility into industry trends around the use of AI for internal communications.
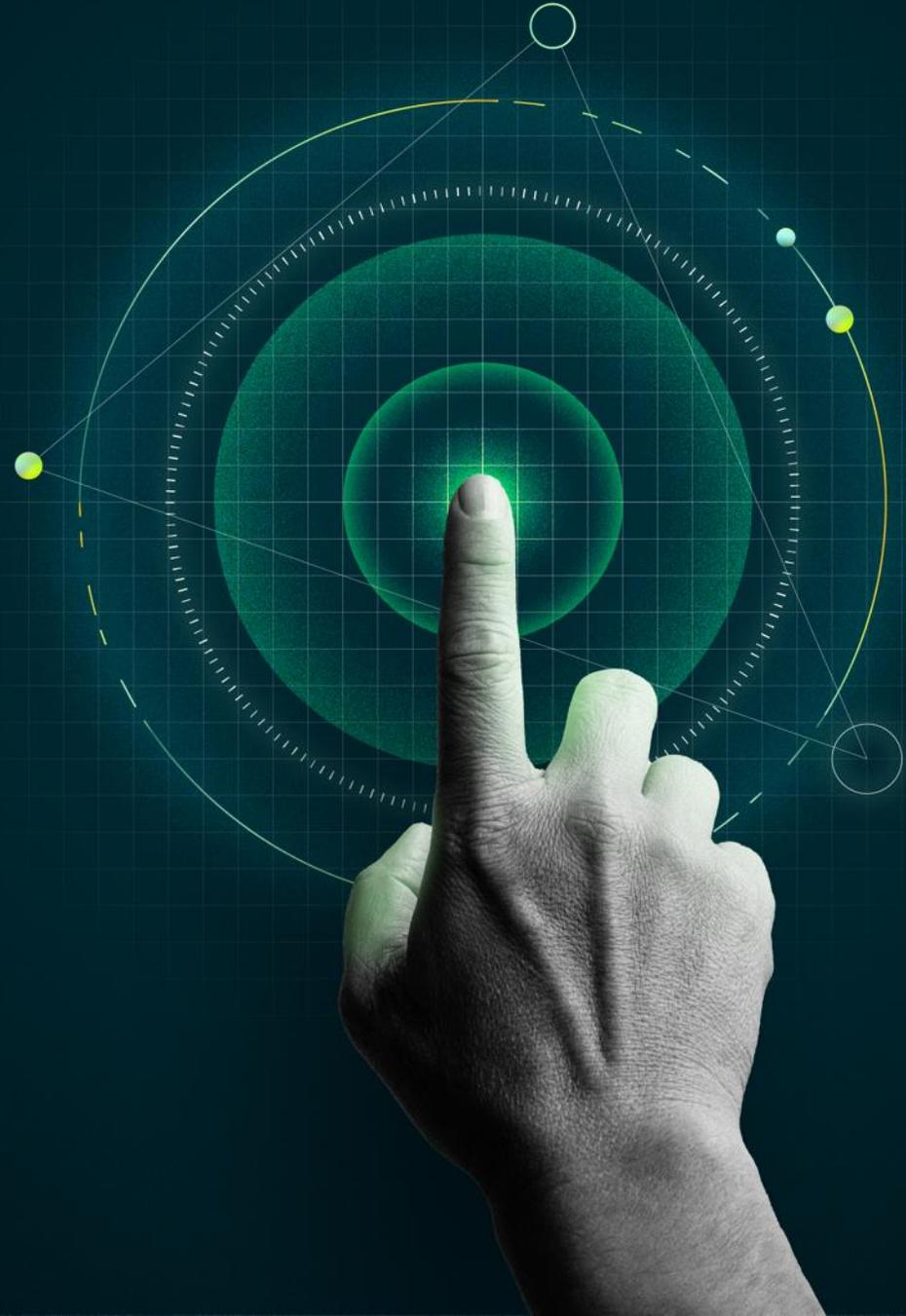
Executive Summary

Our research findings uncover encouraging trends, as well as clear gaps, in how communications professionals perceive and leverage AI to enhance their internal communications efforts across a range of areas.

Most significantly, the results underscore incredible potential for the profession to take a long, strategic look at how we're currently implementing AI to accelerate priority work. They reveal how our roles, industry and company size affect adoption and outlook. We're able to see how risks and concerns can be overcome, and how organizations can and should train communications teams to make use of this transformative tool.

"Change of this magnitude is not straightforward, so it's no surprise that gaps are appearing as organizations come to grips with how these technologies can deliver transformational benefits. The key to success is to remember that any business solution must bring people along, underpinned by communications, and be linked directly to thoughtful integration within existing ways of working."

Kathy Bloomgarden
CEO, Ruder Finn

ruderfinn

"We're thrilled at the chance to partner with Ruder Finn on this joint AI survey. This unprecedented look at how internal communicators adopt AI across multiple demographics and industries will enable comms to remain passionately useful with how they scale their strategy and face the future of the function head on."

Diane Schwartz
CEO, Ragan

Ragan

Our survey uncovered gaps in AI use for internal communications by seniority, age, industry and company size, as well as in priorities compared to AI usage:

01 INDUSTRY
AI adoption varies across sectors

AI adoption varies across sectors with tech-forward industries leading and regulated industries using it the least.

02 COMPANY SIZE
Larger companies are AI-reluctant

The larger the company, the less likely they are to use AI. Those in mid-sized companies are the most optimistic about AI's impact on internal communications and on their roles as communicators.

03 PRIORITIES VS. USAGE
AI drives internal communications priorities

AI is generally being used for internal communications priorities, with room to broaden its uptake, especially in messaging and employee engagement.

04 SENIORITY
Executive leaders are AI-enthusiastic

C-suite communicators are more likely to use and are more optimistic about AI than broader internal communicators, who want more training.

05 AGE
Age creates AI adoption divide

Within the C-suite, executives 43 and younger use AI far more often than executives 44 and older.

06 CONCERNS
Privacy & misinformation are top concerns

While privacy and misinformation are consistently chief among concerns for communicators, the C-suite's biggest concern is stakeholder buy-in.

These gaps and concerns are unmistakable signals that it's time to optimize AI in our internal communications work.

Research Methodology

Ruder Finn's global center of excellence for strategic internal communications, **rf.engage**, and its analytics and emerging technology incubator, **RF Tech Lab**, teamed up with industry organization, **Ragan**, to conduct quantitative survey research in May 2024.

We asked 22 questions of communicators who both oversee and directly work in internal communications. We received a total of 250 responses from communicators, mainly in North America and the U.K. Respondents reported roles that span the full spectrum of seniority:

- C-suite
- Senior leadership
- Mid-level
- Specialists

Survey participants represented a range of industries:

- Consumer goods / food and beverage
- Finance / insurance / banking
- Healthcare / pharma / biotech / life sciences
- Manufacturing / technology
- Arts / entertainment / media
- Aerospace / transportation / logistics
- Government / nonprofit
- Education and hospitality / travel

Key Findings
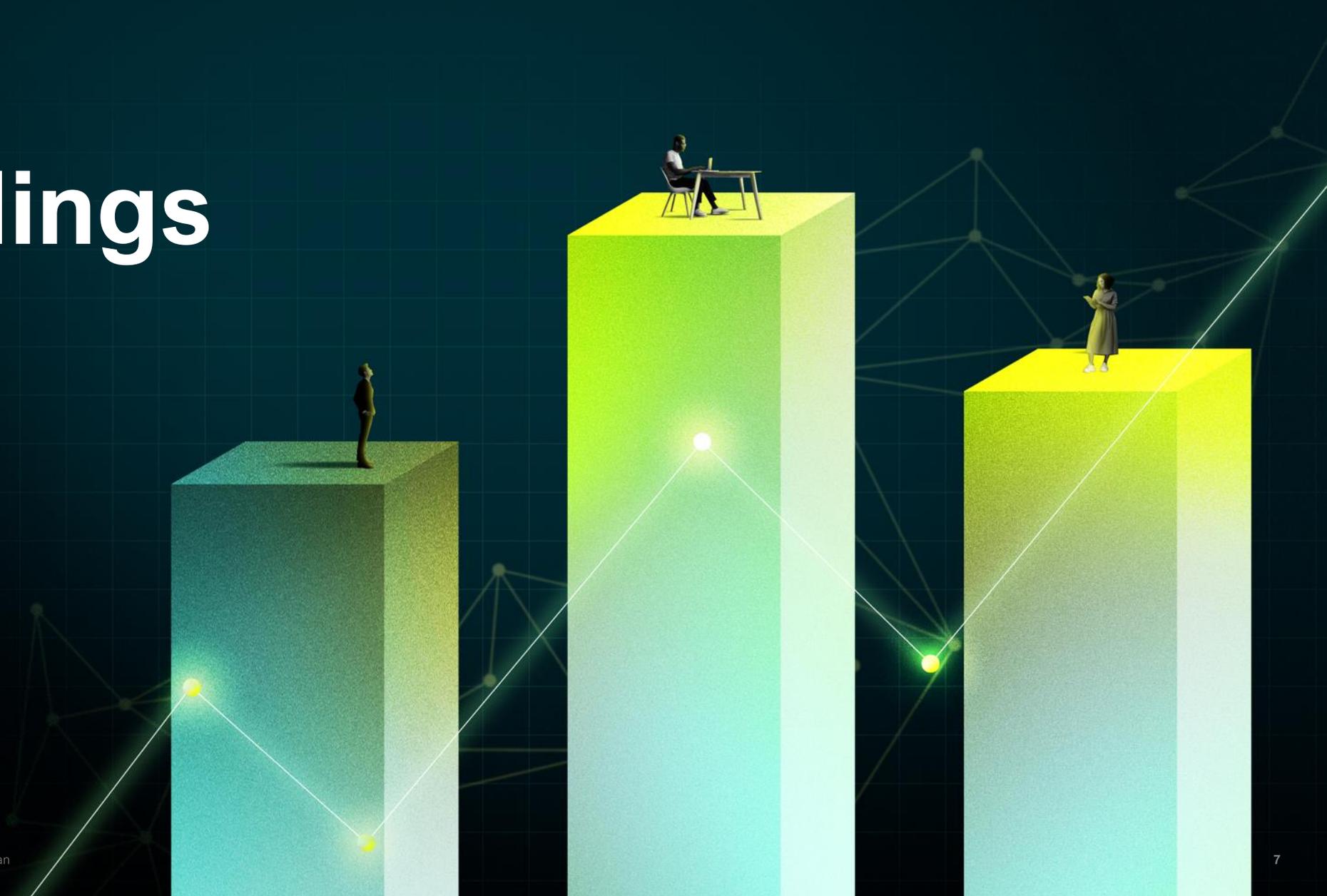
AI adoption varies across sectors

AI adoption varies across sectors with tech-forward industries leading and regulated industries using it the least.

THE INDUSTRY GAP

TECH-FORWARD INDUSTRIES

- AEROSPACE, AVIATION & TRANSPORTATION: 71% Daily AI Use, 68% AI Optimism
- MANUFACTURING & TECHNOLOGY: 49% Daily AI Use, 33% AI Optimism

GOVERNMENT & NONPROFIT

- GOVERNMENT & NONPROFIT: 50% Daily AI Use, 46% AI Optimism
- EDUCATION: 60% Daily AI Use, 25% AI Optimism
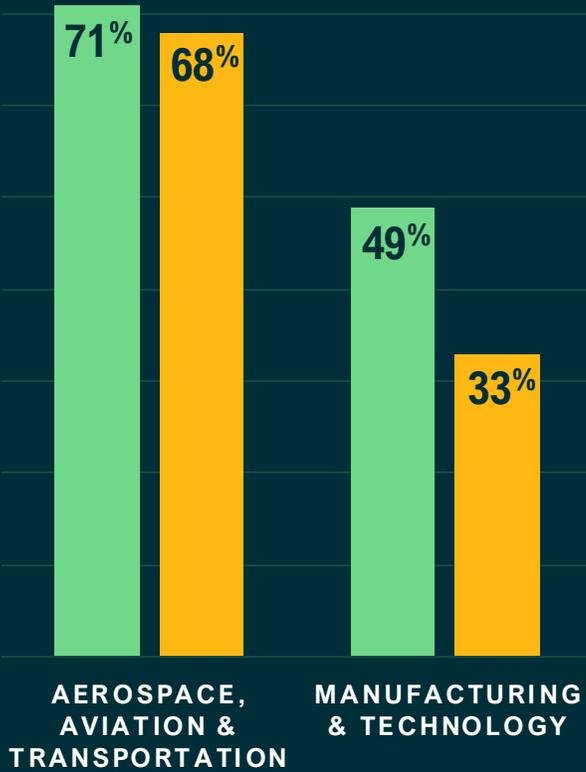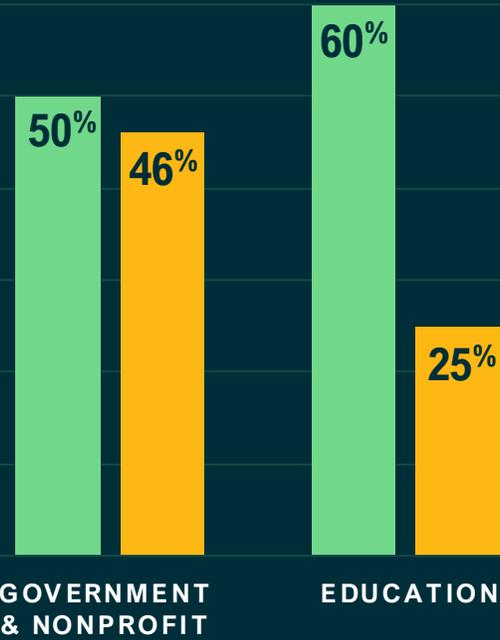
HIGHLY REGULATED INDUSTRIES

- HEALTHCARE, PHARMA & BIOTECH: 34% Daily AI Use, 46% AI Optimism
- FINANCE, BANKING & INSURANCE: 33% Daily AI Use, 33% AI Optimism
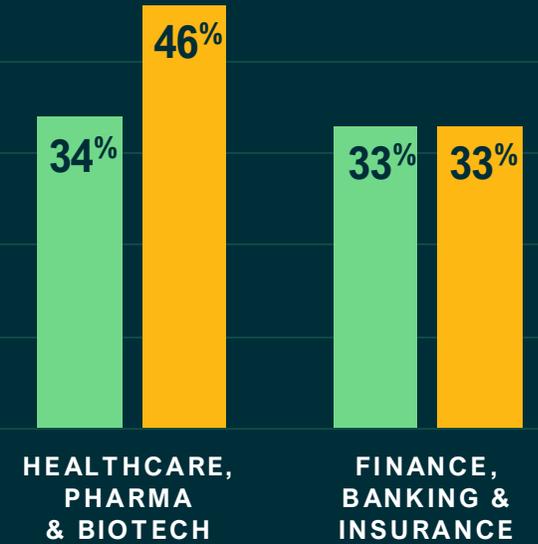
● DAILY AI USE   ● AI OPTIMISM

Larger companies are AI-reluctant

The larger the company, the less likely they are to use AI.
Those in mid-sized companies are the most optimistic about AI's impact on internal communications and their roles as communicators.

The larger the company, the less likely they are to use AI

DAILY USAGE

10,000+ EMPLOYEES	**38**%
1,001 – 10,000 EMPLOYEES	**48**%
<1,000 EMPLOYEES	**50**%
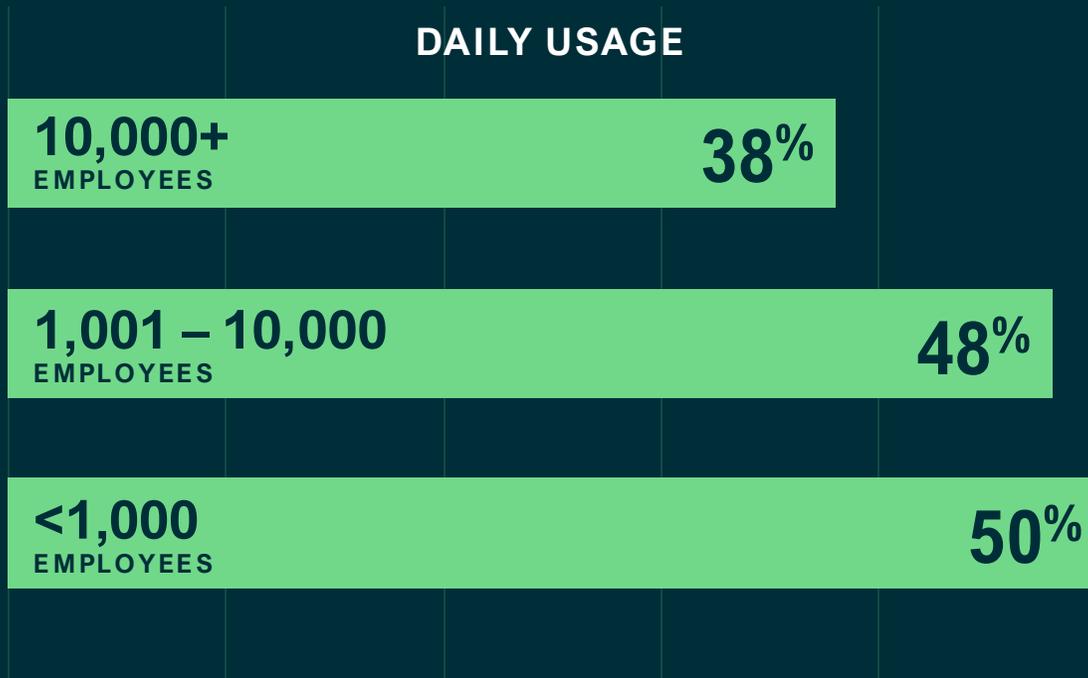
33% of those in companies with 10,000+ employees **don't use AI at all for their internal communications tasks**

55%

of communicators in companies with 1,001 – 10,000 employees are most optimistic about AI's impact on internal communications

AI drives internal communications priorities

AI drives internal communications priorities with room to broaden its uptake. While communicators recognize AI's potential, particularly for employee engagement and executive messaging, actual implementation lags.

THE PRIORITIES VS. USE GAP

57%

34%

23
PERCENTAGE
POINT
DIFFERENCE

56%

39%

17
PERCENTAGE
POINT
DIFFERENCE

EXECUTIVE MESSAGING & POSITIONING

**EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

● IC PRIORITY   ● AI USE CASE
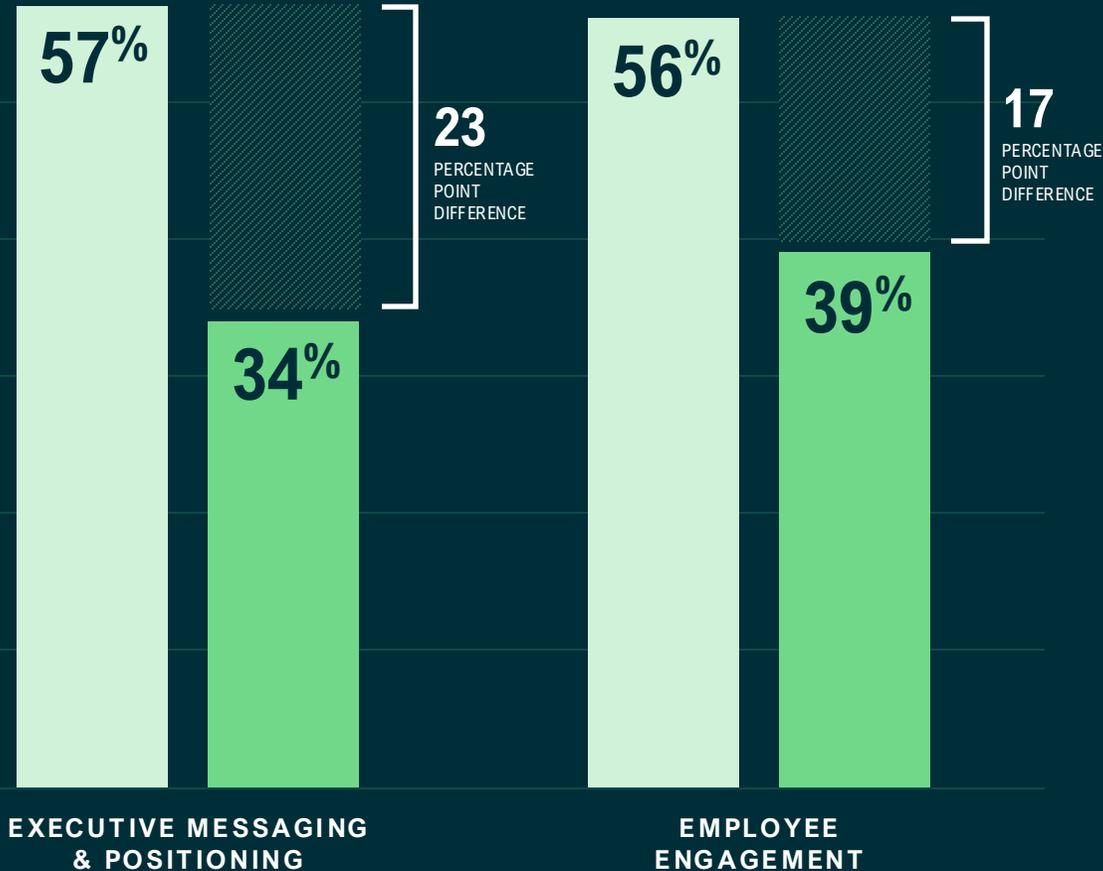
23
percentage point difference between those who identify executive messaging and positioning as a top priority and those who are using AI for that purpose

17
percentage point difference between those who identify employee engagement as a top priority and those who use AI to drive that work

Executive leaders are AI-enthusiastic

C-suite communicators are more likely to use and are more optimistic about AI than broader internal communicators, who want more training.

DAILY USE

83%

41%
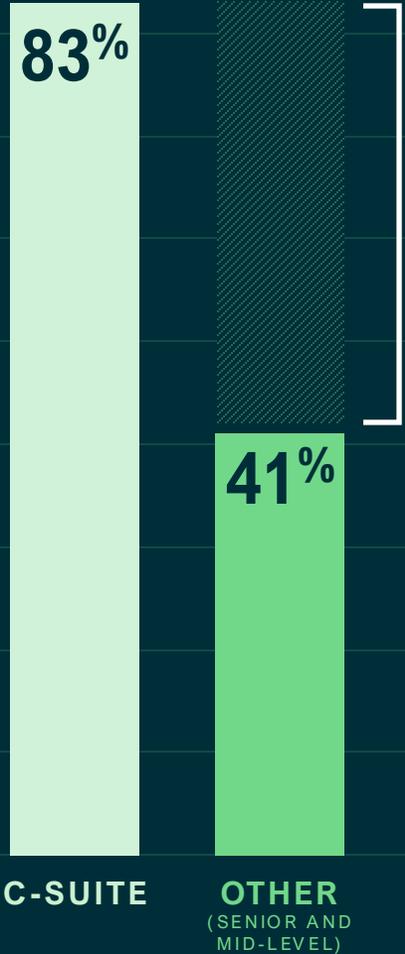
C-suite communicators are
2X
more likely to use AI

C-SUITE

OTHER
(SENIOR AND
MID-LEVEL)

OPTIMISM

25
percentage point difference

C-suite remain more optimistic about AI in internal communications than their less senior counterparts

TRAINING GAP

24%

8%

C-SUITE

OTHER
(SENIOR AND
MID-LEVEL)
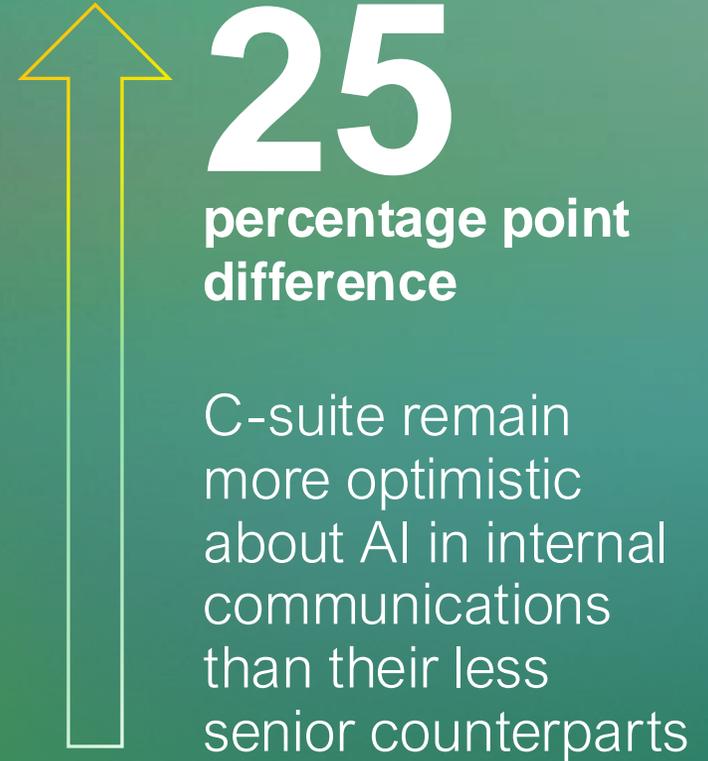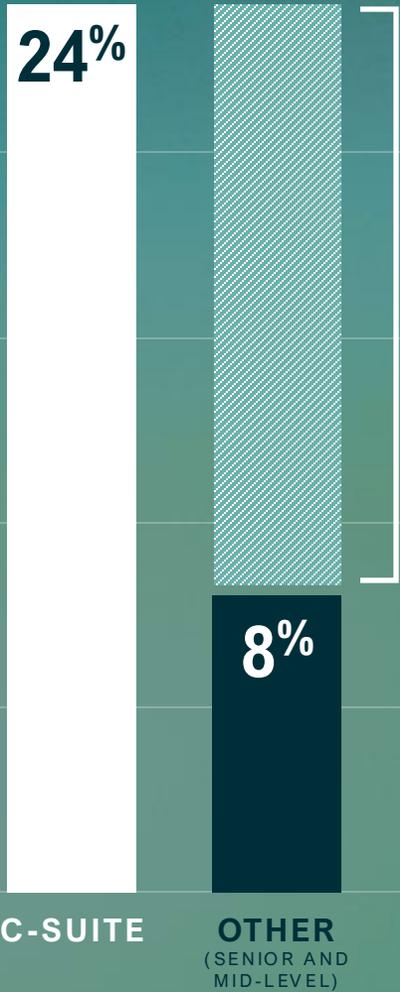
C-suite communicators are

3X

more satisfied with their organization's training

Overall, 64% of communicators want to learn about AI

and its application for internal communications

Age creates AI adoption divide

Within the C-suite, executives 43 and younger use
AI far more often than executives 44 and older.

ADOPTION GAP BY AGE

52%

38%

AGE 43
& UNDER

AGE 44
& OVER
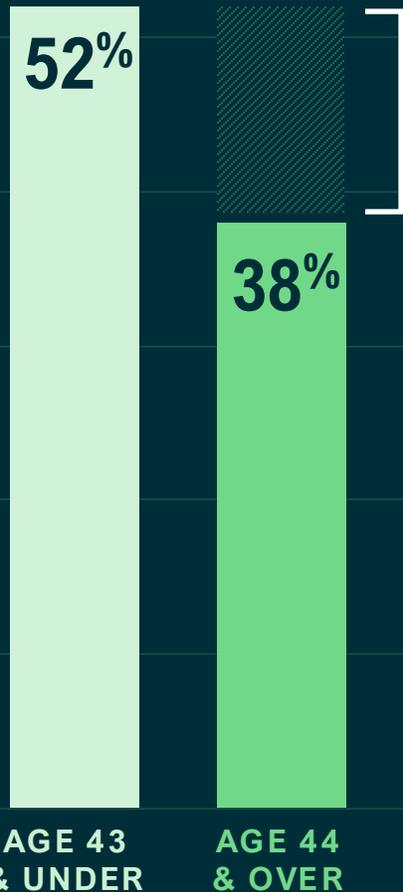
14
percentage point difference

Younger communicators are using AI more frequently than older communicators

Younger communicators have a higher overall AI adoption rate than older communicators

IN THE C-SUITE

100%

of C-suite executives under age 43 report using AI at least once daily, a 42-percentage point difference compared to their peers aged 44 and older

C-suite executives under age 43 report being **more satisfied with their AI training** than their peers aged 44 and older

C-SUITE AGE 44 & OVER

USING AI DAILY — **58**%

SATISFIED WITH AI TRAINING — **42**%

C-SUITE AGE 43 & UNDER

USING AI DAILY — **100**%

SATISFIED WITH AI TRAINING — **53**%

Privacy & misinformation are top concerns

While privacy and misinformation are consistently chief among concerns for communicators, the C-suite's biggest concern is stakeholder buy-in.

TOP CONCERNS

Concern	%
DATA PRIVACY AND PROTECTION	48%
INACCURACIES / MISINFORMATION / BIAS CAUSED BY AI USAGE	46%
COMMUNICATION OVERLOAD RESULTS IN MISINFORMATION	41%
LOSS OF PERSONAL TOUCH / HUMANITY IN COMMUNICATION	37%
LACK OF INTERNAL EXPERTISE AND RESOURCES	35%

48% of C-suite noted **resistance from key stakeholders** as top concern

50% of senior leadership and 51% of mid-levels noted **privacy and fake news** as top concerns

Outlook

As we look to the future of AI in internal communications, it's clear we are all on a path we didn't expect or fully understand how to navigate. Our research has uncovered significant gaps in AI adoption and sentiment across various dimensions, painting a complex picture of the current landscape.

One thing is crystal clear: as internal communicators, we have always been wired to embrace change as it comes, preparing, equipping and empowering those around us through that change. It is our unique responsibility and opportunity to approach AI the same way and lead this transformation, proactively shaping the narrative within our companies and organizations.

Guiding Principles to Help You Lead

AI will shift your role

To be empowered in our careers, we must shift our mindset, embrace AI as the powerful tool it is and approach it with curiosity, ethical understanding and excitement.

You can navigate and thrive in this new AI era

Expand your role beyond adoption by generating ideas and joining other internal stakeholders to develop AI use cases for your organization that solve real problems.

You contribute to your company's AI success

Create AI communications strategies that equip employees and develop new and enhanced skill sets while increasing their confidence in your company by connecting these tools to your business objectives, mission, and future.

The AI Integration Curve:
Ruder Finn's roadmap to AI Leadership

The potential of AI is transformational, but its success is linked directly to thoughtful integration with ways of working.

We approach AI integration in the same way we approach change management. We call it our AI Integration Curve. While every company is on its own journey and position on the AI Integration Curve, there are simple steps you and your colleagues can take to maximize the potential of AI across your organization and build your AI leadership.

LEADING WITH A
GROWTH MINDSET

ENGAGEMENT
& INSPIRATION

Behavior change

UPSKILLING
JOURNEY

AI AS
STRATEGY
ENGINE

SUPER-USERS
& OWNERSHIP

Mindset shift

RISK MANAGEMENT
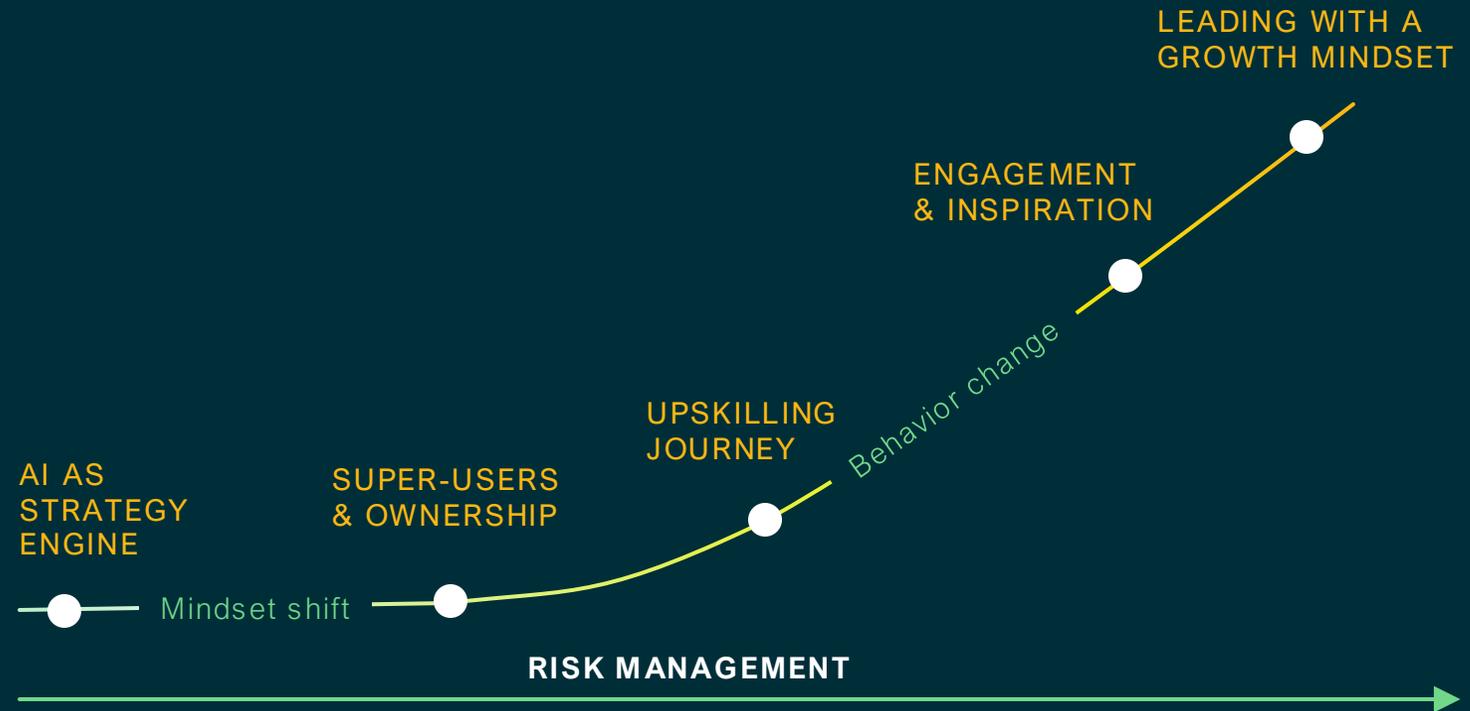
Ruder Finn can help you integrate AI:
What internal communicators can do

AI AS STRATEGY ENGINE

Set the vision and contextualize the AI strategy.

- Create a core AI narrative and messaging

- Amplify AI message via leadership voices

- Integrate AI narrative throughout internal content and across internal communications channels

SUPER-USERS & OWNERSHIP

Inspire colleagues to believe in the change and cultivate champions to serve as ambassadors.

- Identify 'AI super-users' across your organization

- Implement an AI ambassador program to champion AI within super-users' teams

- Leverage AI ambassadors as internal storytellers

UPSKILLING JOURNEY

Demystify AI by educating and training employees on AI and the practical applications within their functions and roles.

- Develop easy-to-access AI 'how-to' resources and manuals

- Hold ongoing AI training sessions and workshops (e.g., generative AI prompt training workshops)

- Provide guidance on the appropriate and responsible use of AI and approved tools for internal use

- Bring in outside AI experts to inspire

ENGAGEMENT & INSPIRATION

Enable adoption, recognize success, measure the change and seek feedback.

- Develop AI use cases that highlight individuals and teams leveraging AI technologies

- Recognize the individuals driving AI forward through internal award and recognition programs

- Gather feedback and measure success of AI adoption and integration through pulse benchmark surveys

- Identify AI key performance indicators (KPIs) and regularly report on progress toward goals

- Adapt AI strategy and implement new communications strategies, as needed

LEADING WITH A GROWTH MINDSET

Lead within your organization, industry and broader external environment.

- Amplify internal AI voices, with a unique point of view, externally (through media, speaking opportunities and events)

- Recognize shifts in AI strategy internally and externally

- Highlight new AI technologies and partnerships

- Provide a point of view on key AI trends within your industry

About Ruder Finn

Ruder Finn is one of the world's largest independent global communications and creative agencies. Founded in 1948, Ruder Finn has defined and redefined PR for 75 years, shaping communications that move industry-defining brands, companies, and leaders from what's now to what's next. Ruder Finn provides clients with bold communications strategies based on a global perspective and localized market knowledge that redefine leadership, reimagine the marketplace, and rethink customer experiences.

The agency is organized around five core areas of expertise—Healthcare, Technology, Commerce, Leadership and Workplace—with AI-powered creative hub RF Studio53 and tech incubator RF TechLab providing cutting-edge predictive analytics, breakthrough creative, and customer-focused digital engagement. Ruder Finn has offices across 3 continents including the U.S., Asia and Europe. Wholly owned agencies within Ruder Finn Group include: Ruder Finn Inc., RF Studio53, rf.engage, Touchdown, Peppercomm, RF Comunicad, Mantis, jacobstahl and RF Bloom.

For more information visit www.ruderfinn.com.

About Ragan

For more than 50 years, Ragan has been delivering trusted news, training, and intelligence to leading communications, HR and marketing professionals via its conferences, webinars, awards, subscriptions and membership divisions.

Would you like to talk about what's next in AI
in your internal communications strategy?
We'd love to connect!

Please reach out to rf.engage@ruderfinn.com