UNILY

The Digital Noise Impact Report

2024

Contents

Drowning in a digital symphony?

A cacophony of noise: Exploring the impact of digital notifications on today's workforce.

Introduction

Many people expected hybrid work and workplace digitalization to reduce work related stress—offering employees more flexibility and control over their schedules, eliminating commutes, and providing access to efficient digital tools. But, on the contrary, we're now under more pressure than ever at work. Gallup's 2024 "State of the Global Workplace" report found that an eye watering **41%** of employees report experiencing "a lot of stress at work." In this research, Unily set out to interrogate this finding, learn how digital tools impact our workplace stress levels, and explore potential solutions.

44% of survey respondents experienced high stress the previous day

Executive summary

Digital notifications represent a cacophony of noise that disrupts the focus of one in three workers every 15 minutes or less. Despite high employee approval of tools like email and intranets, this relentless assault on our attention makes it a constant struggle to stay focused. Digital overload fuels record-breaking workplace stress and hinders productivity, particularly for managers. Unily's research reveals the extent of this problem across industries, with Financial Services, Business Services, and Professional Services the most severely affected.

Employees and managers alike crave more control over their digital environments. Most see AI-powered intranets and employee apps as a promising solution to consolidate tools, streamline workflows, and filter out noise. However, there's a gap between AI's potential and current implementation, highlighting an opportunity for organizations to invest in AI-driven solutions that enhance the employee experience.

By embracing these super apps, employers can empower work ers to manage their digital experiences more effectively, increasing focus, productivity, and overall job satisfaction. This is crucial to addressing the growing digital noise issue and building more positive, efficient workplaces.

Methodology

To learn more about the impact of digital noise on workers' productivity and wellbeing, Unily partnered with global research agency Vanson Bourne to survey 500 respondents across the US and UK. Working for organizations with 5,000 or more employees, they came from the following sectors:

- **Business and Professional Services**
- **Financial Services IT, Technology and Telecoms**
- **Manufacturing and Production**
- **Retail, Distribution and Transport**
- **Private Healthcare**

About Unily

Unily is the leading employee experience platform used by enterprises to engage, empower, and inspire employees everywhere. It has been crowned as a Leader by the three of the foremost market analyst firms. Enterprises around the globe, including CVS Health, Johnson & Johnson, The Estée Lauder Companies, Shell, Wipro, and many more rely on Unily's world-class, AI-enhanced SaaS technology to transform their employee engagement and alignment effectively and create exceptional employee experiences.

We're more stressed and distracted than ever

Today's employees are inundated with digital tools designed to streamline tasks and enhance collaboration. However, the constant barrage of notifications, messages, and updates is taking a toll on our mental wellbeing and productivity. Nearly six in ten (**59%**) employees report that digital tools add to their workplace stress. But the negative impact of excessive digital noise on employees' wellbeing isn't spread evenly across organizations. Unily's research found that managers often bear the brunt. The y are distracted more often and are more stressed by digital tools than their reports.

The mental toll of digital noise: Managers vs employees

Digital tools add to my workplace stress

71% of managers

59% overall

Digital tools are complex and confusing

41% of managers

33% overall

The impact on productivity

But workers' peace of mind is not the only thing being disrupted. Excessive notifications are significantly impacting productivity, too. Over three-quarters (**77%**) of respondents said notifications from workplace digital tools are a distraction, and nearly half (**45%**) are regularly distracted by notifications that aren't relevant to their job. To make matters worse, these distractions are startlingly frequent – as the visualization below highlights.

A ticking time bomb: How often are you distracted?

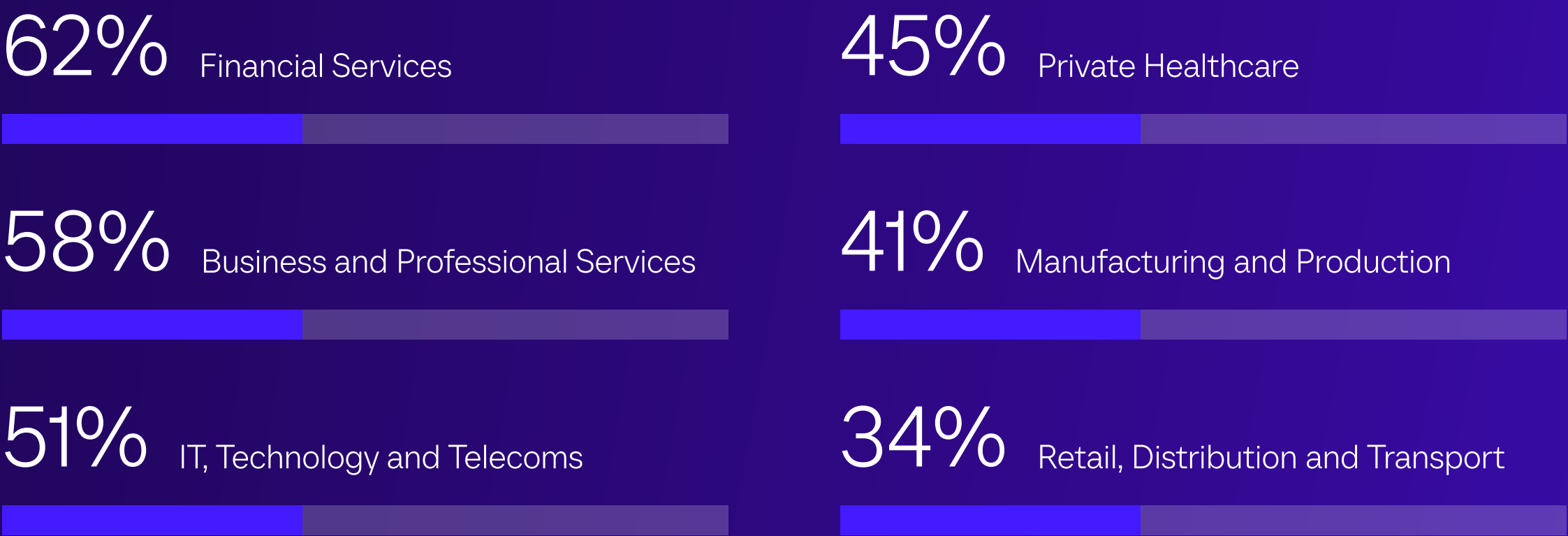| Every 30 minutes	Every 15 minutes	Every five minutes or fewer
48%	31%	13%
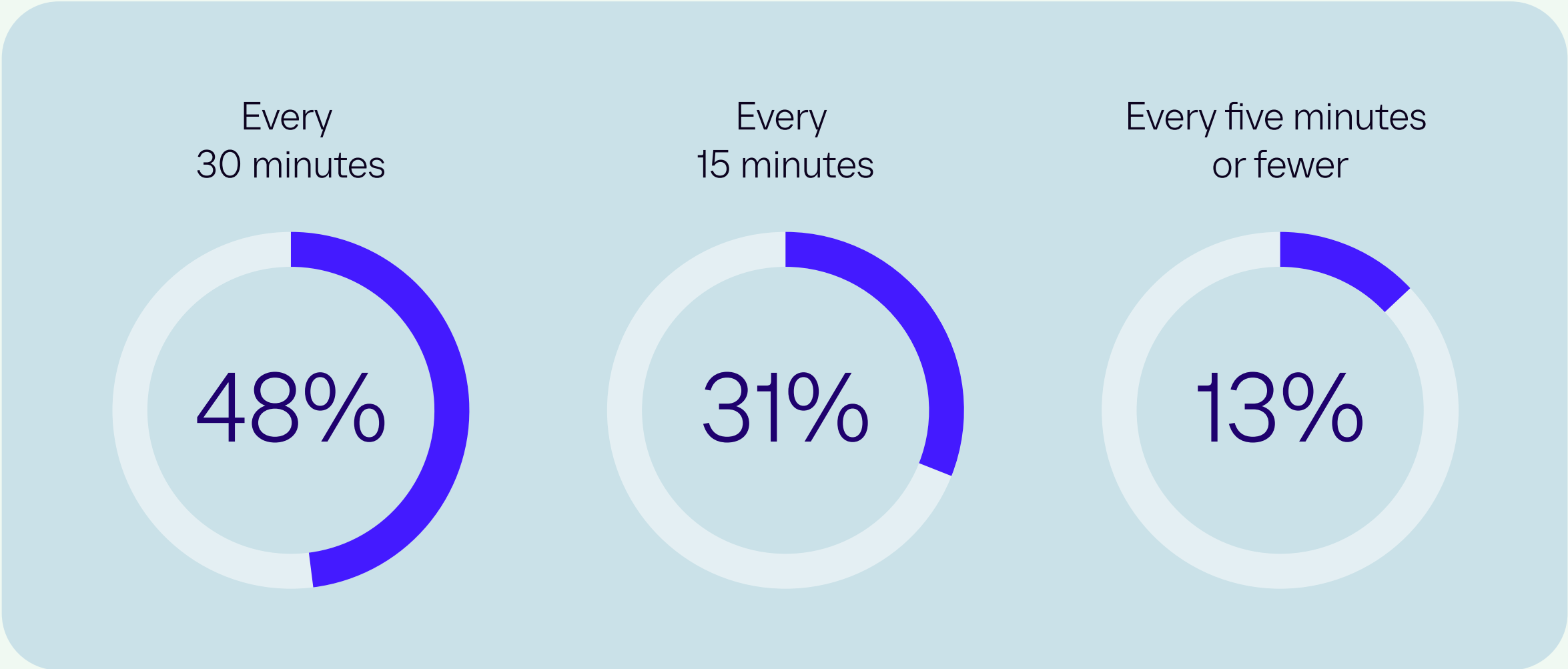
Perhaps unsurprisingly, desk-based workers report being far more distracted by digital noise than non-desk-based workers. Over half (**55%**) lose focus every 30 minutes, compared to **21%** of non-desk-based workers. Again, managers' concentration is disproportionately impacted. An eyewatering **59%** of managers report being distracted every 30 minutes or fewer (compared to **48%** overall), **39%** say they're distracted every 15 minutes (compared to **31%** overall) and **18%** say they're distracted every five minutes or fewer (compared to **13%** overall).

The most distracted industries

Unily's research shows that the problem of digital noise applies to all industries. However, workers in the Financial Services, Business Services, and Professional Services are the most impacted. Retail, Distribution, and Transport workers are the least affected by digital noise – a finding we can likely attribute to the high proportion of non-desk-based workers in these industries.

Industry divide: The percentage of employees distracted every 30 minutes or fewer

62% Financial Services

45% Private Healthcare

58% Business and Professional Services

41% Manufacturing and Production

51% IT, Technology and Telecoms

34% Retail, Distribution and Transport

Perceived inaction from employers

Employees and managers alike aren't happy with how their companies are handling the growing problem of digital noise. Well over a third (**39%**) of respondents think their company isn't doing enough to limit it while almost half (**47%**) of managers agree. This suggests that senior leadership and staff aren't on the same page about how distracting digital noise can be, and the problem isn't being taken seriously enough.

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Not all digital tools were created equal

Despite the challenges of digital noise, Unily's research highlights that employees clearly value their digital tools and recognize their effectiveness. Nearly three-quarters (**73%)** of respondents report that digital tools help them feel connected in the workplace. Meanwhile, respondents' near-universal approval of email (**91%**), intranet platforms (**84%**), and messaging apps (**83%**) shows how deeply embedded these tools are in the modern workplace.

However, there's a catch. While email is the most valued tool, it creates the most notification stress for employees. Almost two-thirds (**61%**) feel overwhelmed by email notifications, followed by messaging notifications (**57%**). Interestingly, though intranet platforms are highly valued for their effectiveness, they cause significantly less notification fatigue than other tools (**49%**). This could be due to more centralized updates, employees having better controls over notification settings, or better governance, which ensures messages only reach relevant employees.

It's time to bring order to the chaos

Overall, Unily's research paints a picture of a workforce that relies heavily on digital tools but struggles with the constant interruptions they bring. There's a massive appetite (**67%**) among respondents for more control over how and where they receive notifications, rising to **83%** among managers.

The key takeaway for organizations is clear – to maximize the benefits of digital tools, employees need more control over their notifications, enabling them to focus on their work without sacrificing connection or access to information.

1/10 employees would consider changing jobs over excessive digital noise.
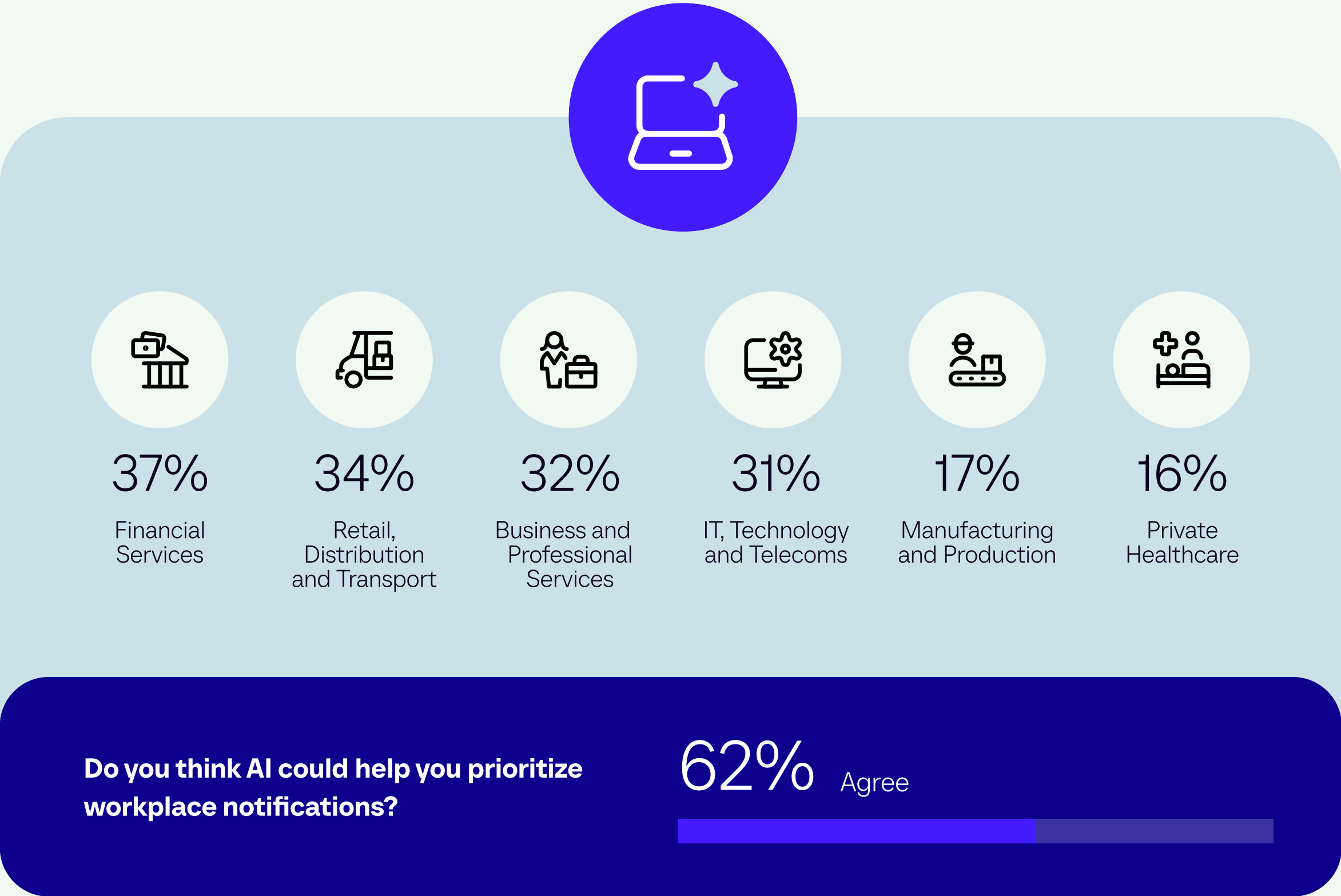
Could a superapp strategy be the answer?

A superapp is a single platform that integrates multiple tools, services, and communication channels into one unified interface. It acts as a central hub for employees, simplifying access to email, messaging, project management tools, HR systems, social media, and more. By consolidating disparate systems, a superapp streamlines workflows, reduces digital noise, and improves overall efficiency. How much time could a superapp save employees? The answer clearly varies based on job function and seniority, but a 2022 Harvard Business Review study found that employees spend an average of **9%** of their annual time at work toggling between different apps. Minimizing this by consolidating applications could clearly offer significant time savings.

The vast majority (**83%**) of respondents to Unily's research said adopting a unified superapp in their organization would make their lives easier, rising to **91%** among managers. The high level of support for a superapp, even among non-desk-based workers (**76%**), highlights the universal appeal of streamlined communication and simplified workflows. The research also reveals a clear appetite for AI-driven solutions to streamline workflows and reduce information overload. In particular, the promise of AI-powered superapps as a solution to digital noise resonates strongly with both employees and managers. The majority (**59%**) believe AI could significantly reduce excessive notifications and help them prioritize what's important, with managers (**72%**) and desk-based workers (**63%**) showing the most enthusiasm.

However, there's a disconnect between aspiration and reality when it comes to AI. Around half of workers (**51%**) report that AI isn't improving their employee experience yet, suggesting a gap between AI's theoretical potential and its real world implementation. To bridge this gap, organizations need to actively explore and adopt AI-driven tools that deliver tangible benefits and empower employees to manage their digital environments more effectively. Employee appetite for this is significant, with **59%** agreeing that AI could reduce excessive notifications from workplace digital tools and **62%** agreeing that AI could help them prioritize notification

Sector divide: Is AI already improving employee experience?

37%	34%	32%	31%	17%	16%
Financial Services	Retail, Distribution and Transport	Business and Professional Services	IT, Technology and Telecoms	Manufacturing and Production	Private Healthcare

Do you think AI could help you prioritize workplace notifications?

62% Agree

Conclusion: The message is clear

In today's workplace, dealing with digital noise has become part of the job for most workers. Employees are overwhelmed and distracted and are looking to simplify their tech landscape with better streamlined, integrated, and intelligent communication tools.

Forward-thinking organizations, especially those looking to operate at new speeds and achieve execution excellence, should embrace the potential of intranet superapps to boost employee experiences and minimize digital noise. In today's uncertain economic era, these innovative tools have the power to deliver a more personalized, efficient, and less overwhelming communication experience. By incorporating AI capabilities to prioritize notifications, filter out noise, and automate routine tasks, businesses can reduce organizational lethargy and velocity drain, to empower employees to take control of their digital environment and focus on what truly matters. This is not just a vision of the future, but a tangible opportunity to transform the way we work through deeper alignment, engagement and empowerment of hyper-distributed employees and teams.

For organizations that are unsure how to prioritize their AI investments, this presents a golden opportunity. By concentrating their AI efforts on reducing digital noise, they can not only address a pressing productivity issue but also demonstrate their commitment toemployee satisfaction and well-being. This approach is not just about implementing new technology, but about listening to our employees and valuing their input. It's a strategy that fosters trust and engagement, ultimately leading to increased productivity and a more positive workplace culture.

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The modern intranet is no longer just a repository for information. With the integration of AI, it's evolving into a dynamic superapp that understands, anticipates, and caters to each employee's individual needs. By harnessing the power of AI to filter, personalize, and prioritize content, we can create intranet experiences that genuinely enhance engagement, productivity, and overall employee wellbeing.

SAM HASSANI, CTO, UNILY