

Managing Online Meetings

Keeping People Engaged

Survey Results and Tactics for Success

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Virtual meetings that involve dispersed teams or groups connecting via technology are here to stay. These meetings – mostly online today – pose many challenges to effective collaboration and to achieving strong business results.

Because meetings are often the forums for dispersed teams getting important work done, we know that improving the productivity of meetings should produce a comparable boost in overall productivity in the organization.

To ascertain common virtual meetings issues, Interaction Associates surveyed 200 business professionals about their experience and challenges with virtual meetings. Interaction Associates employed an online survey in late October and early November, 2009 to gather responses.

The survey demographics and key findings are detailed below. We focused on three critical questions:

1. What challenges do people face when they lead or participate in virtual meetings?
2. How often are individuals in organizations meeting this way?
3. What platforms are they using?

SNAPSHOT OF SURVEY RESULTS

Experience with Online Meetings

While half of respondents reported they meet online frequently or as the primary way they meet, more than two-thirds also said they spend 25% of their time or less meeting in this way. That adds up to about 4 hours or fewer each week spent in online meetings. About a third meet once a week online.

62% of respondents declare they are “somewhat satisfied” with the effectiveness of web meetings they attend.

For details, see [page 4](#).

Challenges to Effective Online Meetings

Lack of participation and engagement were the most-often cited issues interfering with effective online meetings, according to our respondents. In the survey, 73% cited participants multi-tasking during the meeting as “always or often challenging.”

Of those surveyed, 55% said that “building relationships” and “creating an engaging visual experience” were always or often challenging. The technology platforms were sometimes challenging according to 44% (technical issues) and 42% of respondents (ease of use).

For details and other reported challenges, see [page 6](#).

Platform Use

The three most popular platforms are WebEx by Cisco (99 responses), LiveMeeting (78), and GoToMeeting (60). For details and other platforms cited, see [page 8](#).

MEETING YOUR CHALLENGES

Do you lead or participate on a dispersed team? Do you participate in virtual meetings as a regular part of your work week? If so, you know that, while collaboration offers a competitive advantage in theory, realizing that advantage in reality can be daunting. Because meetings are the place where most work gets done, improving the productivity of meetings should produce a comparable boost in overall productivity in the organization.

Because meetings are so ubiquitous, their efficiency -- or lack thereof -- has broad repercussions inside the corporation. We call meetings “the microcosm of an organization.” This survey sheds some light on where things can go wrong in that microcosm.

Interaction Associates has four decades of experience helping companies achieve important goals through successful collaboration – in person and from afar. Included with these survey results, we are happy to provide a few methods to help your online meetings run more smoothly.

Let's get started.

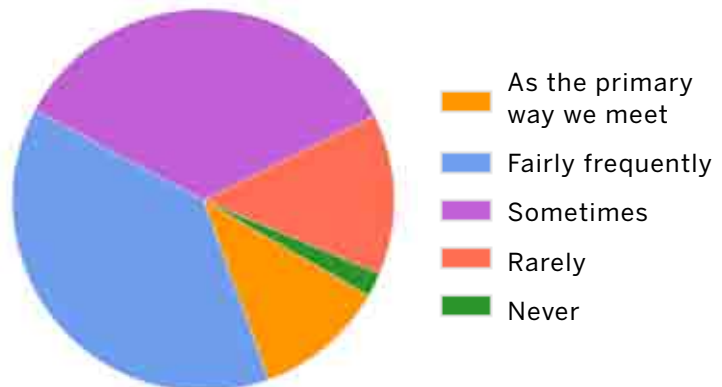
Because meetings are the place where most work gets done, improving the productivity of meetings should produce a comparable boost in overall productivity in the organization.

FINDINGS

EXPERIENCE WITH ONLINE MEETINGS

About half of respondents meet online “fairly frequently” or as the primary way they meet. Yet, in a typical week, 43 percent reported they spend less than 10 percent of their time in online meetings. The vast majority (77 percent) spend less than 25 percent of their time in online meetings.

What is your organization's level of involvement/experience with online meetings? We conduct online meetings:



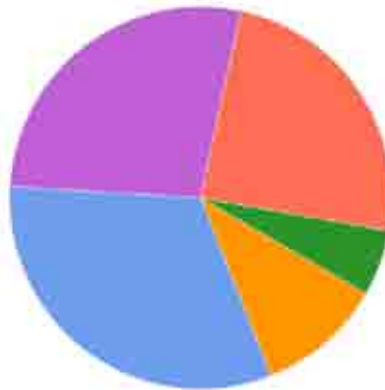
In a typical week, approximately what percentage of your time is spent in online meetings?



- Greater than 75%
- 51-75%
- 26-50%
- 10-25%
- Less than 10%

About a third of respondents meet online at least once a week and another 27 percent meet virtually at least once a month.

How frequently do you, personally, lead or participate in online meetings?

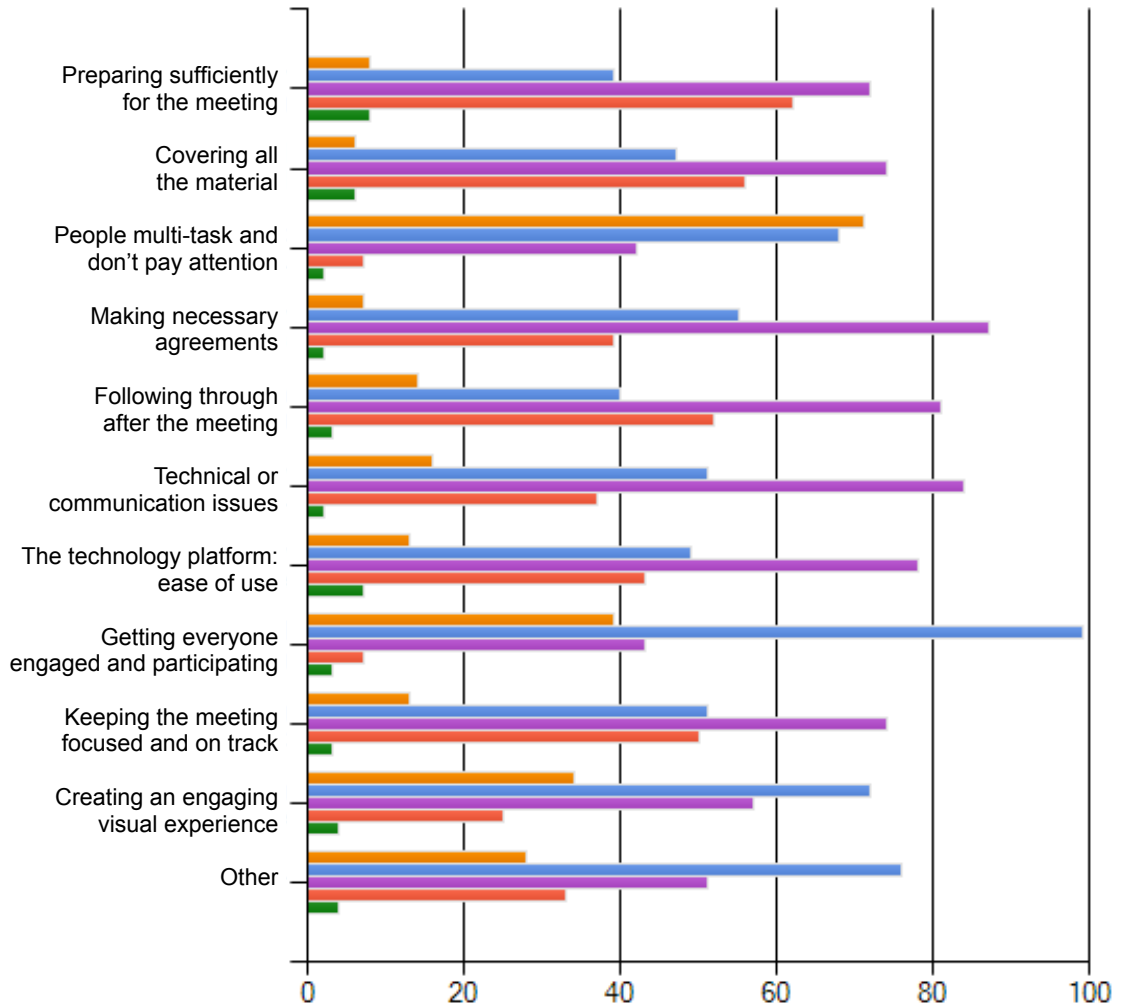


- Daily
- At least once a week
- At least once a month
- Rarely
- Never

ONLINE MEETING CHALLENGES

Thinking about your virtual meetings, what do you find challenging?
Please rate these specific obstacles to successfully leading or attending an online meeting.

- Always Challenging
- Often a Challenge
- Sometimes a Challenge
- Rarely a Challenge
- Never a Challenge



Lack of participation and engagement were the most-often cited issues interfering with effective online meetings, according to our respondents. Multi-tasking was a commonly-cited derailer, with 73 percent saying this is “always or often challenging.”

But many other problems were cited. Of those surveyed, 55 percent said that “building relationships” and “creating an engaging visual experience” were always or often challenging.

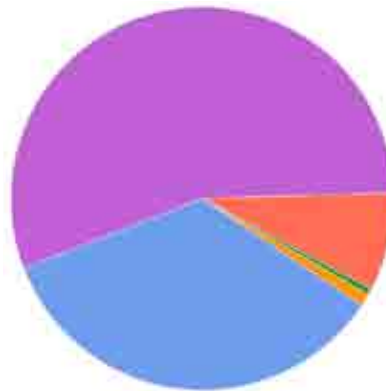
The technology platforms were sometimes a challenge according to 44 percent (technical issues) and 42 percent of respondents (ease of use).

We solicited additional challenges and the most-often cited “other” issue was language. One respondent flatly said, “This form of meeting does not truly engage those whose way of thinking/working works best with face-face interaction.”

Others bemoaned late comers and early leavers, too much talk, and grossly unrealistic timeframes allocated for meetings and, especially, decisions.

Participants in the virtual space have no visual cues which allow them to know when it is their turn to speak.

How often are participants engaged meaningfully during a typical online meeting?



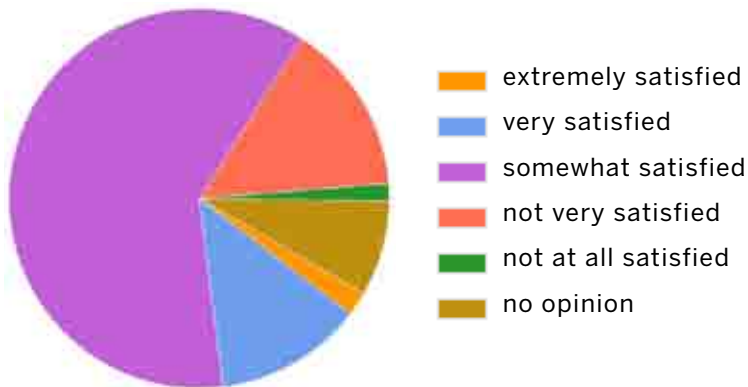
- always engaged
- often engaged
- sometimes engaged
- rarely engaged
- never engaged

According to the survey, 90 percent of participants say people are “often or sometimes engaged” during online meetings. In cross-referencing our previous question, it seems to be a challenge to get people to the “always engaged” status.

SATISFACTION RATINGS

About 62 percent of respondents declare they are “somewhat satisfied” with the effectiveness of web meetings they attend.

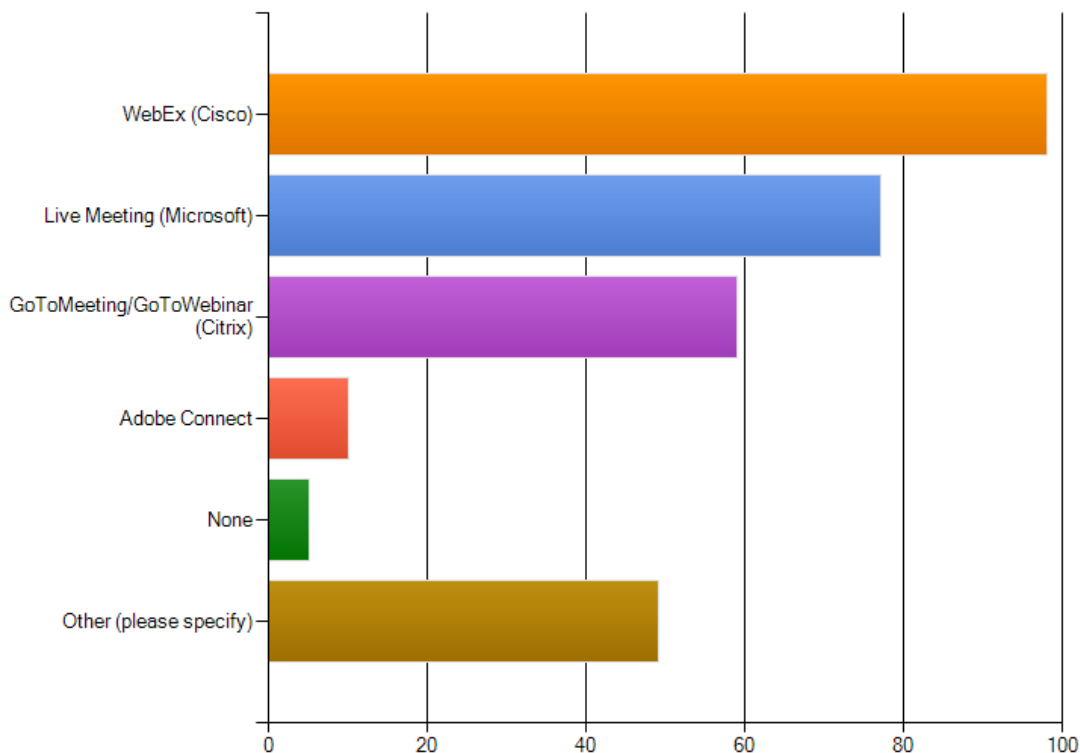
How satisfied are you with the effectiveness of the web meetings you lead or attend?



MOST-USED PLATFORMS

Most respondents are using WebEx by Cisco (99 responses) and LiveMeeting (78). Other top platforms include GoToMeeting (60), Adobe Connect (10) AT&T and AT&T Connect (8), NetMeeting (8), and Lotus Notes Sametime (6).

What online-conferencing platforms or meeting software are used to conduct online meetings in your organization? (Choose as many as apply)



RECOMMENDATIONS: IMPROVING ONLINE MEETINGS

Our online meeting survey shows that online meetings can be challenging. But tackling those challenges and improving your company's meetings is crucial. What's more, doing so will impact company performance and bottom line results. Boosting the quality of meetings produces a ripple effect throughout an organization: higher levels of productivity, involvement and employee satisfaction. We have found that meetings are the first place to invest effort to create quick, highly-profitable gains in productivity and efficiencies that affect the entire enterprise.

Better, stronger, better-run meetings help companies:

- Reduce cycle time
- Meet customer demands more efficiently
- Make cross-functional decisions faster and more efficiently
- Accelerate the implementation of large scale change efforts (such as reengineering, IT implementation, quality, and team-based initiatives)
- Be more agile, innovative and productive.

More so than with in-person meetings, the challenges for virtual collaboration can be daunting at many companies. The most significant issues ("always or often a challenge") include:

Getting everyone engaged and participating	74%
People multi-task and don't pay attention	74%
Creating an engaging visual experience	66%
Building relationships with others	54%
Keeping the meeting focused and on track	33%

No doubt these are the same challenges that you deal with, so let's explore tips and best practices that address them.

TIP #1. KEEP PEOPLE ENGAGED WITH REGULAR INTERACTION

At critical junctures in the meeting, when a team agreement is being reached or when input is required, go around the virtual room and call everyone by name, asking if they agree or have an idea to share.

Participants in the virtual space have no visual cues which allow them to know when it is their turn to speak. Meeting leaders may say: "What do you all think?" as a way of getting input. That technique is not sufficient to generate input and get buy in.

Instead, actually call each member by name. If you have just presented the context for the meeting and want to make sure everyone understands it before you moved to the first topic, ask: "Martha, does that make sense to you?" and Martha would reply: "Yes." "Alice, did you get all that?" and Alice would reply: "Check." And so on, until everyone in the group has had a turn to respond.

This technique may seem time consuming, but participants report a significant increase in feelings of inclusion and control when the meeting leader takes the time to check with each by name. It also reduces the incidence of virtual participants multi-tasking and dozing off if they know they will be periodically called on to give input. This technique should be used several times during the start up when you are getting team members oriented to the meeting purpose, and then used for each key agreement or decision and before a shift to a new content area.

Mix up this verbal technique with the use of the “raise hands” or “checkmark” features on your online meeting platform. Go for variety and participant engagement will rise.

TIP #2. **KEEP PEOPLE ENGAGED WITH COLOR COMMENTARY**

When there is some kind of activity going on at the meeting leader’s location, it is helpful for him/her to describe to remote listeners what is happening. For instance, “We’re waiting a moment while Mimi gets out the notes.” Or “Everyone in Phoenix appears to agree with the points that are being made. Let’s check with Salt Lake.” These verbal descriptions of activity make the meeting more “real” to virtual participants and increase feelings of inclusion and openness. The leader may wish to set up a special role, a kind of “phone buddy,” to take on the task of providing this commentary for remote listeners as a way of sharing responsibility for success and making sure the task is performed. It is also helpful to review progress and summarize discussions as you go. These periodic reviews and summaries help keep people focused on the task at hand.

TIP #3. **KEEP PEOPLE ENGAGED WITH COMPELLING VISUALS**

Most people are visual. Striking, interactive, or even humorous visuals can help people stay tuned in during the meeting. As you present material, illustrate it with visuals and not text. Brainstormed “lists” or meeting notes can be created on the spot in web meetings so that all participants have access to the same group memory. If using power point, be sure to drop the bullet points and use plenty of surprising visuals. These presentations can be used to keep people moving through a content-dense presentation without losing track of the idea flow.

Some good, free resources for creating engaging visuals can be found at
Beyond Bullet Points (<http://www.beyondbulletpoints.com/>)
Presentation Zen (<http://www.presentationzen.com/>)
Made to Stick (<http://www.madetostick.com/bookresources/>)

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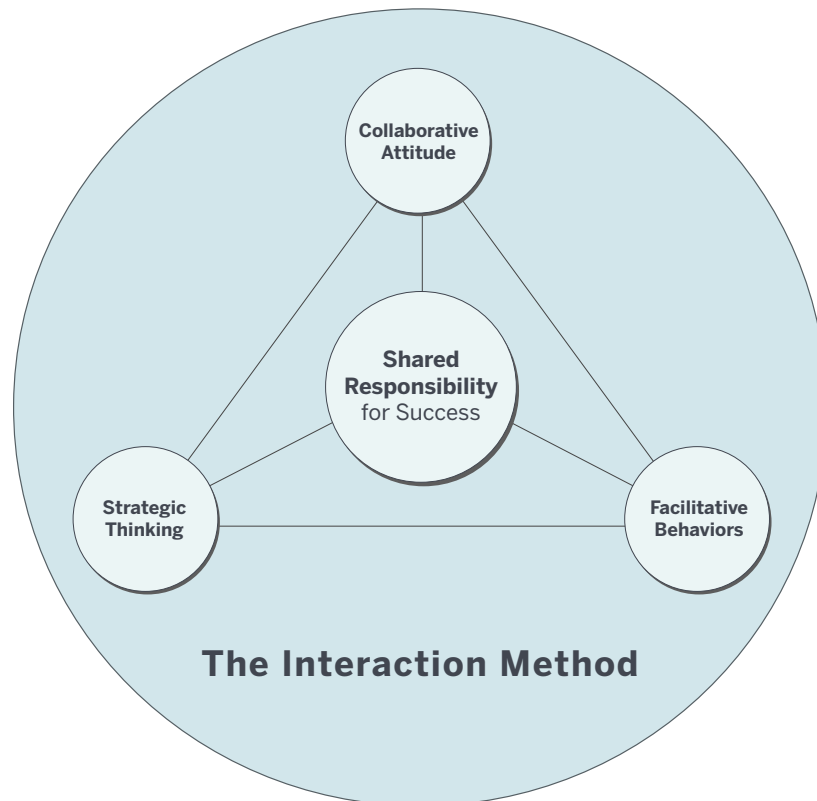
UNDER THE HOOD: THE INTERACTION METHOD™

Recent research on high-performing companies — [Building Trust in Business: Best Practices in Trust, Leadership and Collaboration](#), published by Interaction Associates — makes a strong case for the impact of collaboration on business results. The findings show that, although technology may play a minor role in collaboration, the interplay of interpersonal skills and process discipline are where most of the focus belongs. In fact, our 211 respondents from 150 companies pointed to “people and process skills” as 90% of the collaboration equation, and “technology” only 10%.

Let’s assume the technology is in place, and that 10% is working efficiently. What are the remaining necessary elements (the 90%) that contribute to effective virtual collaboration?

The **Interaction Method™** is a facilitated approach to building understanding, generating agreements, and helping people take focused, effective action. The interplay of elements forms the basis for effective collaboration.

Boosting the quality of meetings produces a ripple effect throughout an organization: higher levels of productivity, involvement and employee satisfaction.



ELEMENTS OF THE INTERACTION METHOD™

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

The *principle*

... that everyone in a meeting can play an active and positive role in producing meaningful results.

Shared Responsibility means that everyone involved is encouraged and counted on to contribute meaningfully to the outcome.

We've all worked on teams or been in meetings where roles and responsibilities were unclear or ill-defined. In a meeting, that often means that one person, usually the person who called the meeting, tries valiantly to keep the meeting on track, contribute their ideas, and take notes while the rest of the meeting attendees looked expectantly to them for guidance. With shared responsibility, everyone is sharing the load and making success possible.

COLLABORATIVE ATTITUDE

The *mindset*

... that guides individuals to act in a cooperative and impactful manner.

Collaborative attitude taps into our desire to contribute to meaningful outcomes. Often, meeting attendees would gladly contribute, if only they had a sense of the direction to pursue. In addition to sharing responsibility for the work of the meeting (discussed above), the group's efforts will be more focused if everyone knows why they are together (the purpose) and what the meeting is expected to produce (the desired outcomes).

STRATEGIC THINKING

The *mental process*

... of selecting an appropriate course of action to achieve desired results.

The essence of strategic thinking is making choices. Strategy involves decisions about what will and won't be done. In a meeting or interaction, strategic thinking comes into play in recognizing when the group has a choice about how to proceed.

FACILITATIVE BEHAVIORS

The *practical tools, techniques, and actions*

... that help people build understanding and agreement.

There are literally hundreds of behaviors that can be employed by any member of the meeting to help ensure its success. These are not necessarily intuitive, but can be taught. Interaction Associates has been teaching these behaviors, and modeling them, for forty years.

The Interaction Method™ is both descriptive and prescriptive. It both identifies the conditions required for effective collaboration and provides a diagnostic framework for recognizing how collaboration has broken down.

Some capabilities found inside The Interaction Method include:

- Having the finesse and tools to lead complex, multi-sector stakeholder projects;
- Being able to manage both face-to-face and virtual meetings and conversations in ways that both build inclusion, yet are efficient in producing results;
- Knowing how to strategically manage the decision-making process to involve the right people at the right time in the right decisions;
- Being able to develop and promote a vision for success that enrolls employees and other stakeholders;
- And finally, but not least, the simplest of collaboration tools that yields enormous payoff — being able to build agreement in ways that increase commitment and accountability.

MAKING VIRTUAL MEETINGS WORK

Given that online meetings are a growing part of our global work day, and are here to stay – where does that leave us? It leaves us with an enormous opportunity and a significant risk.

The risk lies in a steadfast, narrow focus on technology: investing time, effort, and funding in technology, while the people who are your greatest resource struggle with process and people issues.

The opportunity? To invest a bit of time, effort, energy and money in “finding the hidden millions.” Increase the success and efficiency of your online meetings, and lift the success and efficiency of all your business endeavors.

APPENDIX

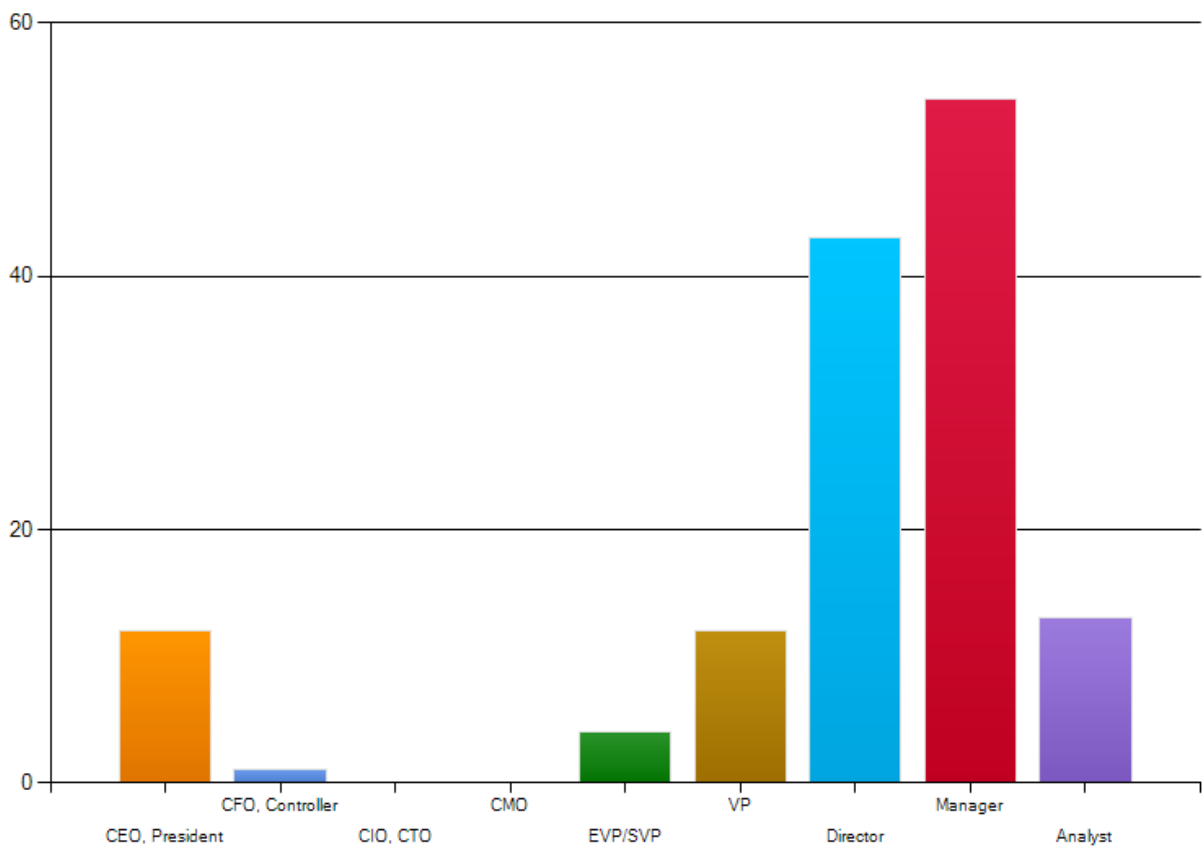
SURVEY RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHIC SNAPSHOT: 200 RESPONDENTS

Interaction Associates deployed an online survey via email to 6,000 contacts. We also used Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook to push the survey out across the internet. Within a week, we had 200 responses from business professionals at 150+ companies. The majority of our respondents were from the HR function, with Marketing/Sales, Executive Management and Operations also weighing in.

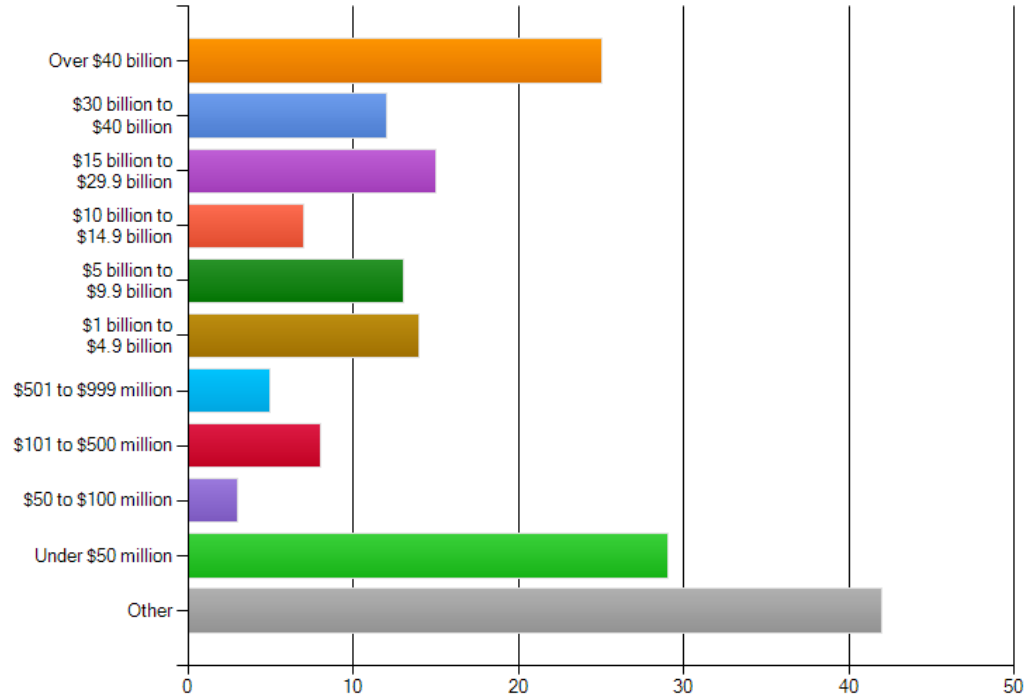
TITLES

Which of the following best describes your title within your organization?



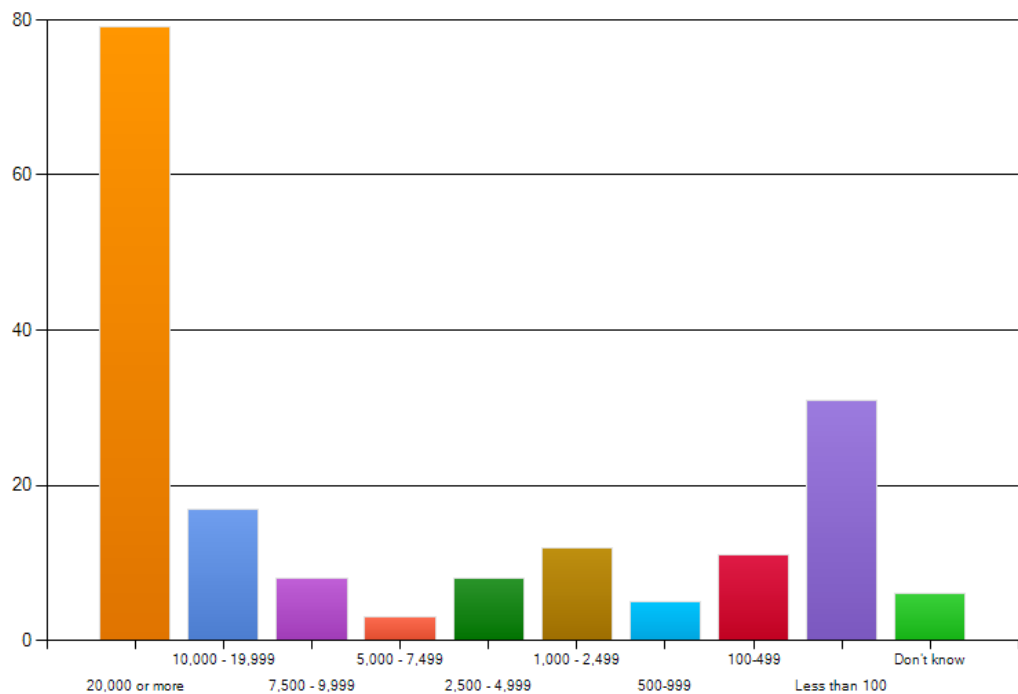
WORLDWIDE REVENUES

Please select the dollar amount that best represents the annual gross sales or revenue for your organization, include all plants, divisions, branches, parents and subsidiaries worldwide.



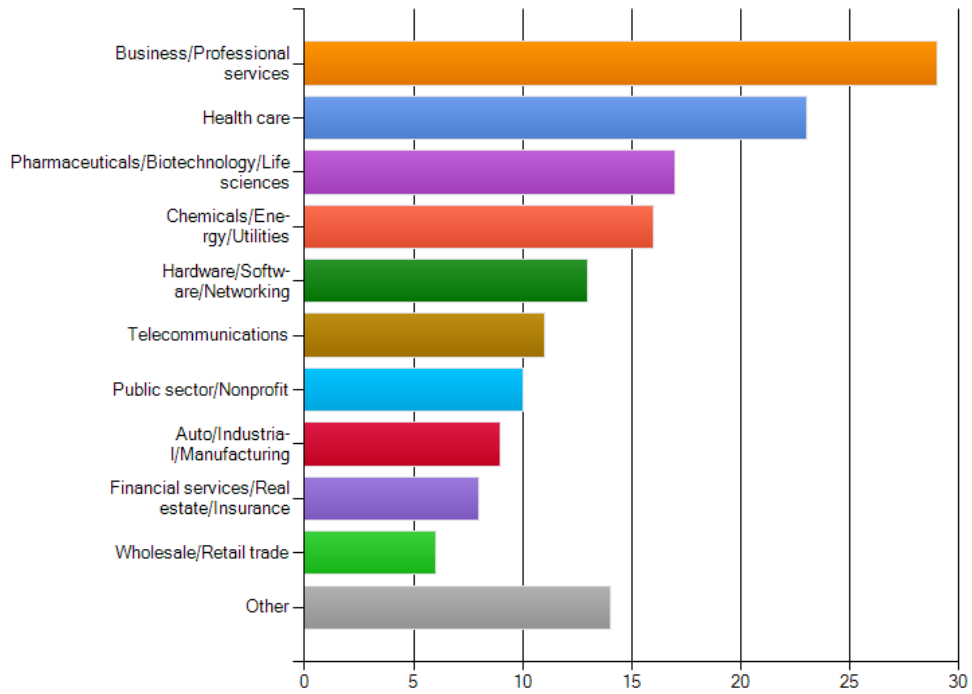
WORLDWIDE EMPLOYEES

Approximately how many people are employed in your entire organization or enterprise? (Please include all plants, divisions, branches, parents and subsidiaries worldwide.)



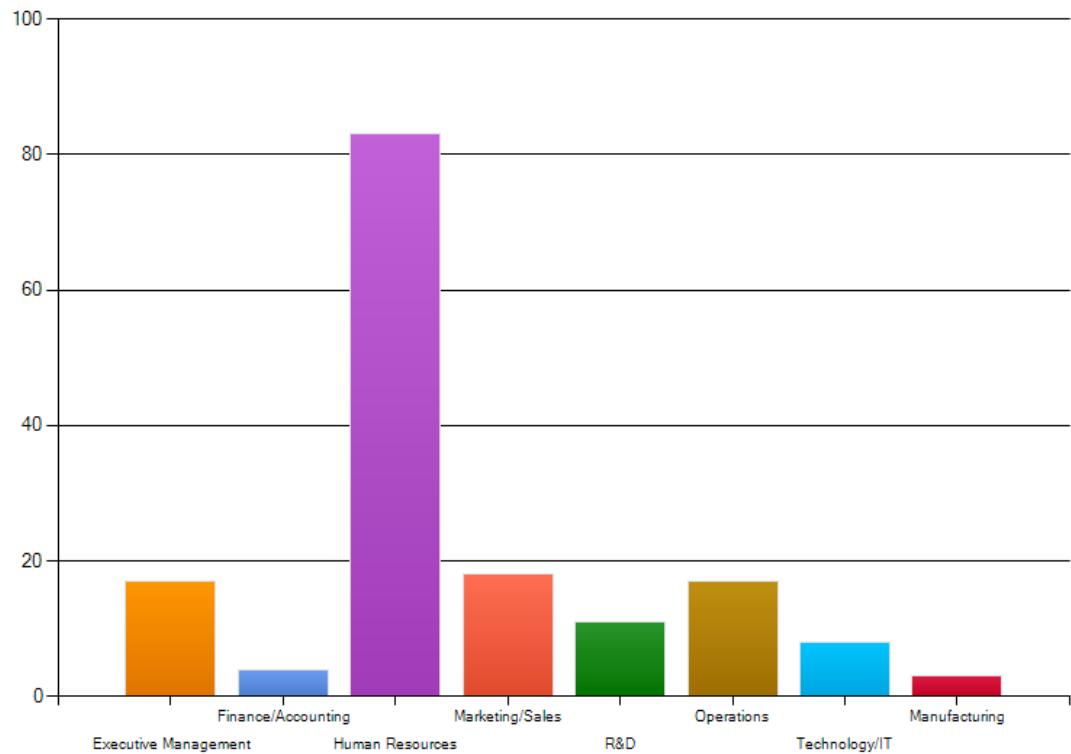
REPRESENTED INDUSTRIES

What is your organization's primary business activity or industry?



FUNCTIONAL AREAS

Which of the following best describes your functional area within your organization?



ABOUT INTERACTION ASSOCIATES

Interaction Associates (IA) has 40 years' experience helping companies find breakthrough solutions to business challenges. Fortune 500 companies, government agencies and nonprofit organizations throughout the world have used IA's integrated management consulting and learning and development services. Interaction Associates helps these enterprises set strategic direction, inspire commitment, and build leadership capabilities, leveraging the power of collaborative action for long-term, sustainable results.

Learn more at <http://interactionassociates.com>