The Work From Home Report

April 2020

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A Rapid Transition Toward the Future of Work

Remote work isn't relegated to just knowledge workers anymore — **it's everywhere.**

Companies across industries that traditionally rely on physical office spaces have had to quickly adopt work from home policies in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak. With no physical office, corporate VPN, or standard equipment they've been forced to innovate new modes of connection and productivity.

For contact centers, in particular, this has presented a challenge. To take a deeper look at this impromptu shift to remote work, **LiveVox conducted a survey of over 300 decision-makers within the financial services space** to discover how people have safeguarded against downtime and unearth the creative ways people have responded to such an unprecedented event.

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Key Takeaways

> Only 25% of respondents said they had a business continuity plan (BCP) for all of their staff to work from home. 50% said they had planned only for some of their employees to work remotely, primarily managers.

> The main form of communication for respondents has been email due to low-quality voice connections or complications regarding cell phone use.

> The interest in incorporating digital channels has increased among contact center leaders, with webchat and two-way messaging seeing a spike in consideration.

> 62% of respondents said they're considering keeping a portion of their agents remote after society re-opens.

25% of organizations **were prepared** with a continuity plan that covered the entire business

80% of contact centers have **turned to email** as the primary method of outreach.

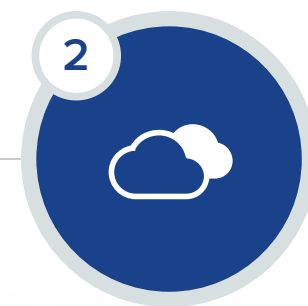**63**% of contact center leaders are pushing for **wider use of digital channels.**

62% of contact center leaders are considering **keeping at least some of their workforce remote** post-pandemic.

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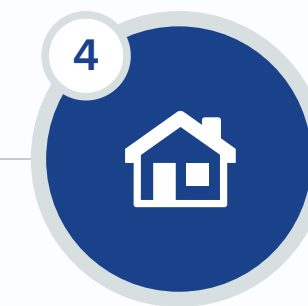Broadly speaking, our findings can be classified across four themes:

1

Preparation should encompass the entire workforce.

2

The urgency of **moving to the cloud** is more apparent than ever.

3

Digital channels have increased in prominence — both in use and adoption.

4

Remote work *works.*

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To contextualize the survey data and arrive at these themes, **we analyzed hundreds** of open-ended responses submitted by survey participants.

The findings draw upon the ingenuity and creativity of contact center leaders and **represent the state of contact center work now** as well as offer a vision for the lasting impacts that the current coronavirus crisis may have on the state of work.

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Finding #1
Failing to prepare means preparing to fail.

Business continuity plans (BCP) have one guiding principle — to keep your organization running as smoothly and productively as possible in the event of an emergency with minimal downtime and limited impact to your bottom line.

Your BCP exists to mitigate damage and ensure the normal flow of operations before scenarios become existential business threats. When incidents like the coronavirus pandemic strike, businesses look to a BCP to outline what to do, when to do it, and how it will be done. Such guidelines keep risks mitigated and your business above water. By and large, contact centers were not in a position to support all of their workforce with the business continuity plans they had in place prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Over half of organizations were only ready to move managers to WFH.

Understanding the big picture in an emergency setting is not just the domain of the manager. We found that over half of respondents only factored in managers and above for emergency work from scenarios.

Nearly a quarter of respondents were ready to leap into action.

24% of contact centers were prepared to move all staff to a remote environment. Interestingly, we found a direct correlation between these folks and higher levels of productivity while working remotely, meaning this cohort was more likely to be operating at or near-normal capacity amidst the pandemic.

We also noted a relationship between remote-work readiness and the use of digital channels. Even more striking, these folks were less likely to report obstacles related to their transition.

Some weren't prepared at all.

Another 24% of respondents either had no plan in place at all (8.72%) or were not prepared to migrate agents to a remote setting (14.83%).

We found no relationship between emergency preparedness and organization size, however, there was a correlation between work from home preparedness and primary outreach method; that is, the data suggests that those organizations whose contingency plans did not include work from home primarily conduct their outreach over the phone.

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The results speak to two different experiences:

> Organizations whose BCPs **enabled workforces to WFH in their entirety** had a competitive edge in terms of productivity levels and faced fewer obstacles.

What best describes your Business Continuity Plan (BCP) prior to March 2020?

- **52.33%** — BCP included plans for work from home for some staff
- **24.13%** — BCP included plans for work from home for all
- **14.83%** — BCP did not include plans for work from home
- **8.72%** — We did not have a BCP in place

> Those organizations whose plans **did not extend to the entire workforce** had greater difficulty transitioning.

What percent of the employees do you now have working-from-home at or near normal capacity?

- **62.50%** — 76% to 100% of employees
- **16.57%** — Less than 25% of employees
- **11.92%** — 51% to 75% of employees
- **9.01%** — 25% to 50% of employees

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Cloud is key.

The long term business benefits of moving to the cloud have long been proven by researchers and analysts elsewhere, but the value of cloud connectivity is prevalent in our data. Moving to the cloud makes access easier, improves collaboration, increases security, and enables working on the go. During the coronavirus pandemic, cloud access has proven to be an architectural foundation for work from home enablement.

An overwhelming majority of contact centers rely on secure corporate VPNs to allow agents access to their systems. A smaller subset relies on the public internet, and about 40% use a mix of both.

During the coronavirus pandemic, cloud access has proven to be an architectural foundation for work from home enablement.

The biggest challenge to work from home setups faced by respondents was agent access to reliable internet connections. However, respondents have taken creative action to address this issue by communicating the minimum bandwidth requirements for internet activity and testing and validating internet speed.

✔ **39.83% of survey participants rely on a blend of VPN and public internet.**

Many contact center leaders have taken advantage of a combination of digital workspaces and VPNs to maintain security and unity in a multi-device remote environment.

This cohort was more likely to be working at or near normal capacity and reported minimal service interruptions and obstacles to adapting to working from home, apart from variables such as internet bandwidth. Interestingly, these cloud users reported less issues with agent internet access due to the low bandwidth of cloud software by design.

✘ **45.64% of respondents rely solely on a VPN connection.**

While this offers security, it does limit flexibility.
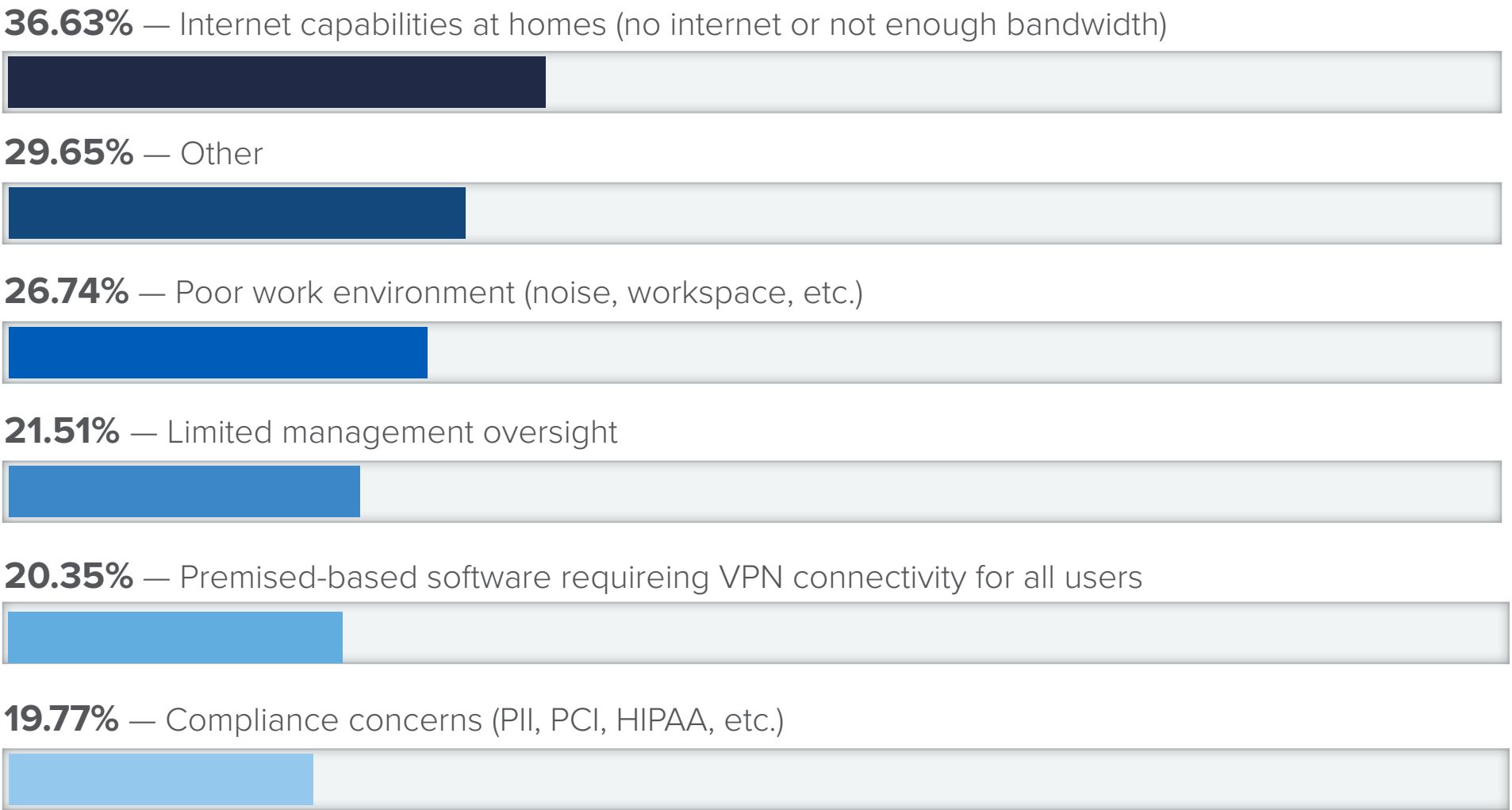
Here's what the data says:

› Seek out providers that **don't have heavy bandwidth requirement needs** with software that is designed to operate in cloud environments that already have low bandwidth needs.

What best describes your internet connection method for your contact center solution and system of record in a Work from Home scenario?

- **45.64%** — VPN Connection
- **39.83%** — VPN and Public Connection
- **8.14%** — Public Internet Connection
- **6.10%** — Other
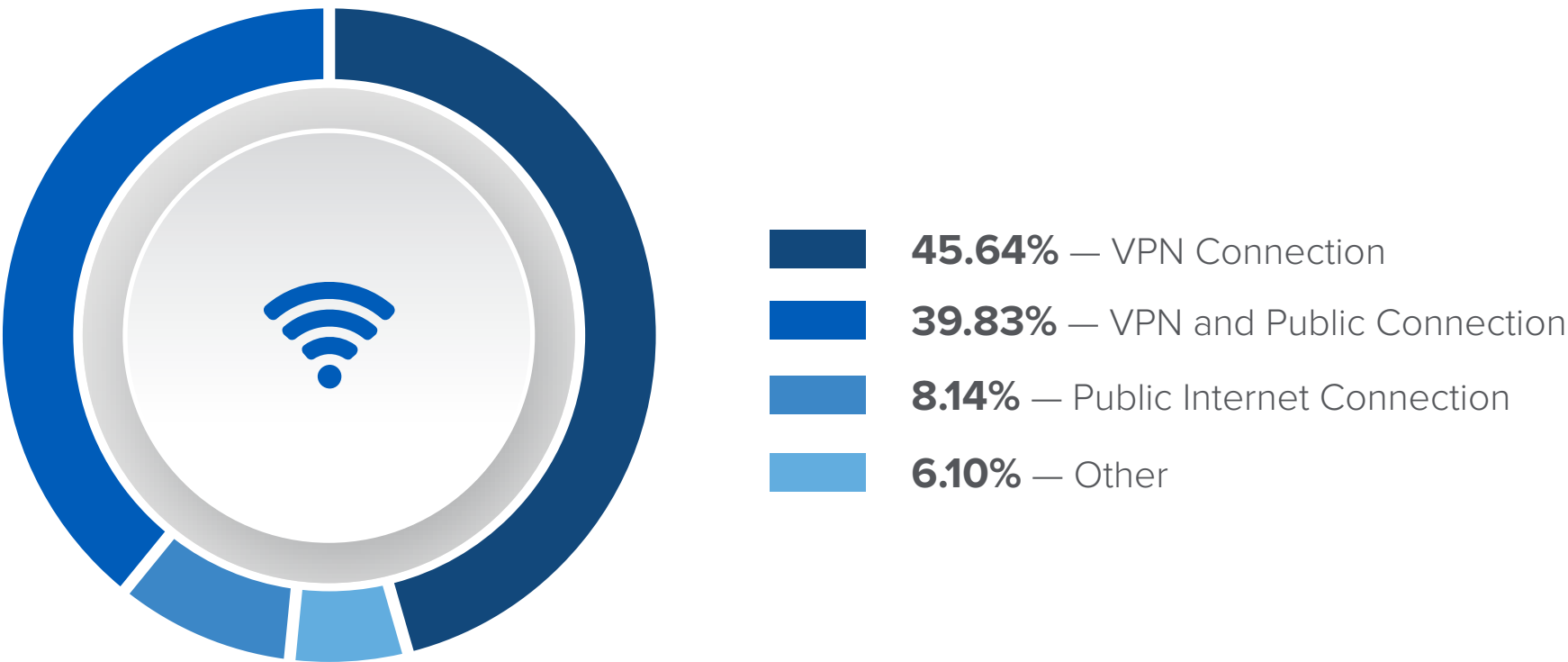
› The results show that **combining VPN access with cloud computing** affords the greatest opportunity for productivity.

What has been your biggest challenge in transitioning to a Work from Home scenario? *(multi-select)*

36.63% — Internet capabilities at homes (no internet or not enough bandwidth)

29.65% — Other

26.74% — Poor work environment (noise, workspace, etc.)

21.51% — Limited management oversight

20.35% — Premised-based software requireing VPN connectivity for all users

19.77% — Compliance concerns (PII, PCI, HIPAA, etc.)

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Digital Channels Shine.

This shift to remote work has brought with it the need to embrace all kinds of new things. From a change in the way we connect to everyday tools to how we hold our meetings and, of course, to the types of channels we choose to connect on.

Since the pandemic began, the LiveVox platform voice utilization has dropped from a pre-pandemic February baseline and digital channel usage has increased over the same period. This has occurred for two reasons: with fewer contact centers up and running there are fewer agents operating within the system. Secondly, more contact centers have turned to digital channels to deflect higher than average call frequency. **Our digital utilization is higher than the February baseline** as contact centers incrementally move agents back onto the platform in a digitally-equipped fashion and look for ways to engage with consumers.

Chat

SMS

Email

U-CRM

Email & SMS Campaigns with Compliance

Basic Voice

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Email is the most-used digital channel at the moment with over 90% utilization.

Despite the rumors of its demise, email remains the old standby with over 90% of contact centers relying on email communications to reach customers during the pandemic. The benefits are self-evident: it's fast and reliable and enables mass communication.

Voice is the second most used channel at 82%, but wide gaps in performance management are present.

With an increase in economic uncertainty comes consumer volatility and an uptick in call volume. Voice remains one of the highest-trafficked channels but contact centers report a lack of much-needed performance monitoring and oversight in their newly distributed environments.

The use of call & screen recording, real-time intervention, and quality maintenance and management tools all hover in the 20-30% range among those polled, while a vital aid like speech analytics shows a 9% utilization rate. Such tools are particularly helpful in remote settings because they allow managers to make sense of the reams of data present when customers call in. This information can be used for training material and to assess any gaps in service ability or identify areas for agent improvement.

Asynchronous channels like SMS & Webchat increase in consideration-share.

63% of respondents said they're interested in bringing asynchronous channels like two-way messaging and webchat into their CX suite as a result of the pandemic.

Back in January, LiveVox conducted a study on omnichannel trend predictions for 2020. A similar cohort of decision-makers was polled (Director-level or above leaders within the financial services space) and found that 50% were interested in bringing webchat online in their contact center, while only 35% were seeking a two-way SMS solution.

Over a quarter of respondents feel automation or bots would benefit their work from home setup.
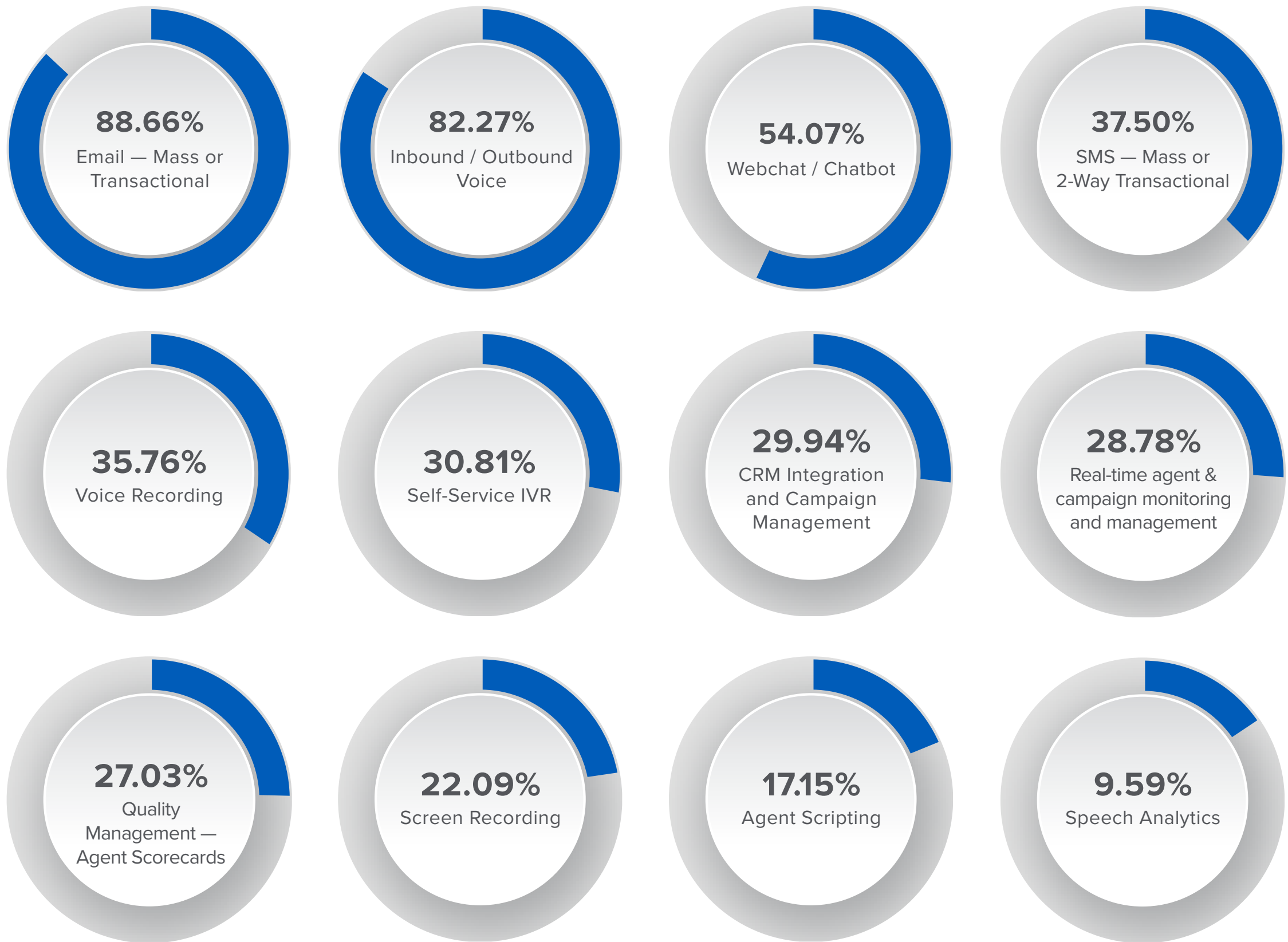
27% of respondents feel a bot offers unique benefits to their work from home contingency. This is likely due to the ability of a bot to field less sophisticated customer inquiries, thereby freeing up agent time and thinning call queues. Additionally, in the face of potential staffing shortages, bots and other automation tools can offer round the clock service.

Interestingly, back in January, 31% of respondents shared they had no interest in automating any part of their workflow so it appears that gap has narrowed quickly.

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Trends in the data:

> **Web-based communication is key** to connecting distributed teams. Digital channels see a 10% boost in use on the LiveVox platform, while contact centers not using them look to adopt SMS & webchat in greater numbers than before.

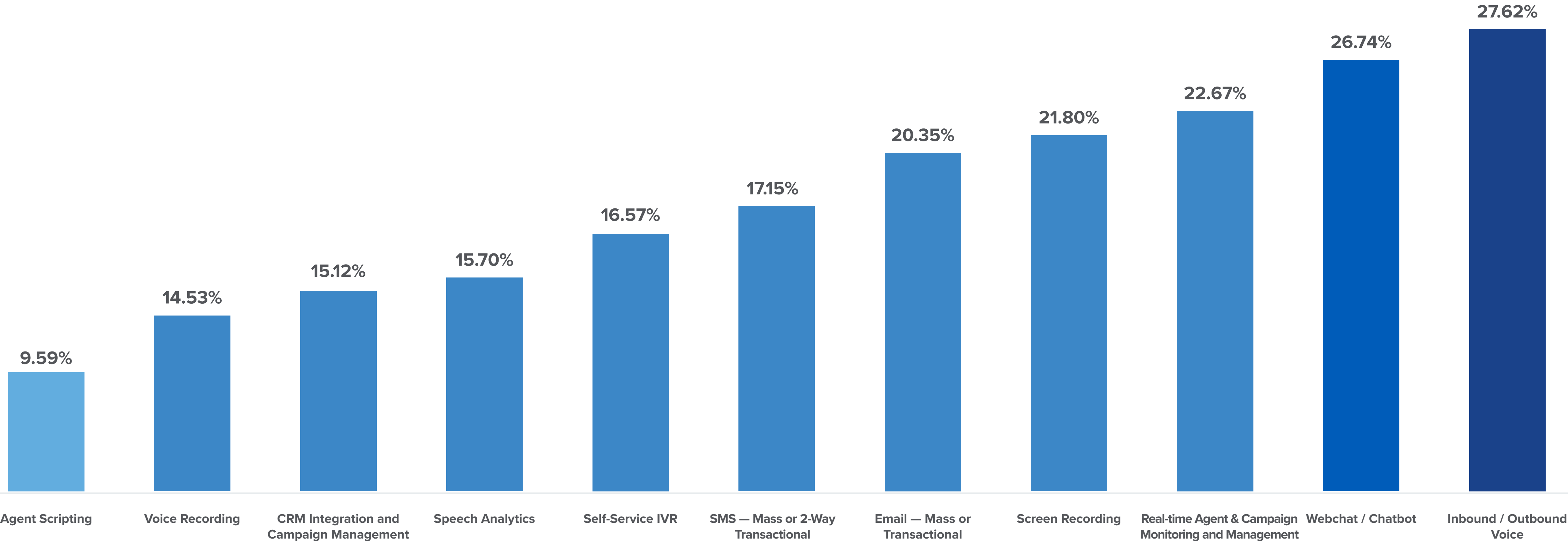Which capabilities **are you currently using** in your Work from Home environment? *(multi-select)*

88.66%
Email — Mass or Transactional

82.27%
Inbound / Outbound Voice

54.07%
Webchat / Chatbot

37.50%
SMS — Mass or 2-Way Transactional

35.76%
Voice Recording

30.81%
Self-Service IVR

29.94%
CRM Integration and Campaign Management

28.78%
Real-time agent & campaign monitoring and management

27.03%
Quality Management — Agent Scorecards

22.09%
Screen Recording

17.15%
Agent Scripting

9.59%
Speech Analytics

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> **Voice channels are more high-volume than ever**, but performance management lags behind.

What communication channels do you plan to use currently and in the next 12 months? *(multi-select)*

Currently

Next 12 Months

Other	2-Way SMS	Voice — IVR/Self-Service	Voice — Agent Assisted	Email

16.57%
16.28%

38.95%
45.93%

51.16%
54.65%

52.03%
52.03%

91.86%
88.37%
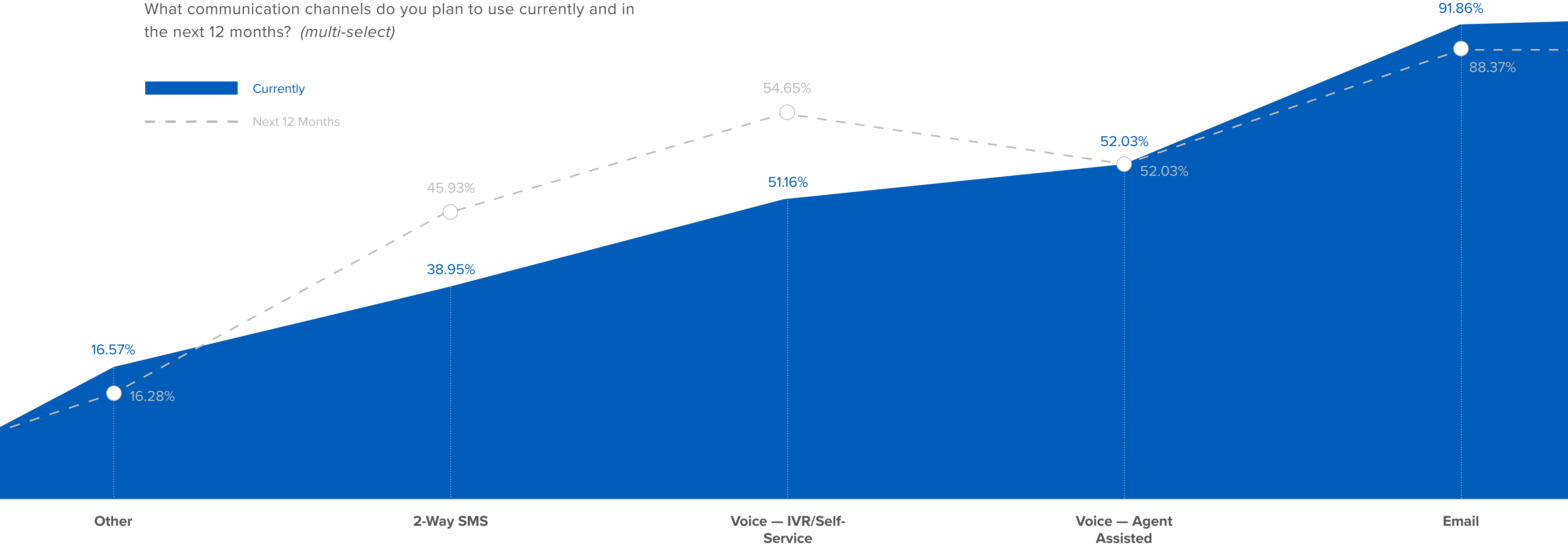
The Future of Work is Here
(Albeit Earlier than We Expected)

With over 60% of respondents saying they're considering keeping remote work policies in place after the pandemic has ended, it's clear that the future of work has arrived. Our survey respondents aren't alone, either. According to a recent Gartner poll, 74% of CFOs intend to keep at least 5% of their headcount fully remote post-pandemic. Further, in a survey conducted by Glassdoor in March 2020, 67% of people said they'd be satisfied with going full remote.

The option appears to be a win-win. And for many reasons. Remote work can be viewed as a strategic business initiative that opens up talent pools, increases workplace productivity and employee morale, in addition to being a creative cost-savings with minimal downside impact.

While the influx of and reliance on technology in a remote setting has undoubtedly complicated some areas of work-life within the contact center, it has also unlocked new potential in others.

63%
of respondents say work-from-home is here to stay.

50%
A Stanford University study found that employers who offered a work from home option saw employee turnover drop.

80%
Another Stanford study found that the majority of employees reported a greater sense of loyalty to employers who offered work from home.

$11k
Employers offering at least part-time telecommuting can save on average $11,000 per half-time remote employee each year.

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> *We have begun to implement Chromebooks for agents already using virtual desktops. This provides a low-cost portal into the virtual desktop through a VPN without the overhead of a full-blown laptop."*

"We've been able to provide more accessibility for systems and software through Citrix (MyWorkSpace) to comfortably work from home at 100% capacity."

"We use Amazon Workspace, which is a secure, cloud-based desktop solution that provides agents access to tools they use in the office every day."

"We've deployed a virtual training content program for clients, leaders, and agents. We've also implemented "bring your own device model" and facilitated a channel shift from voice to digital."
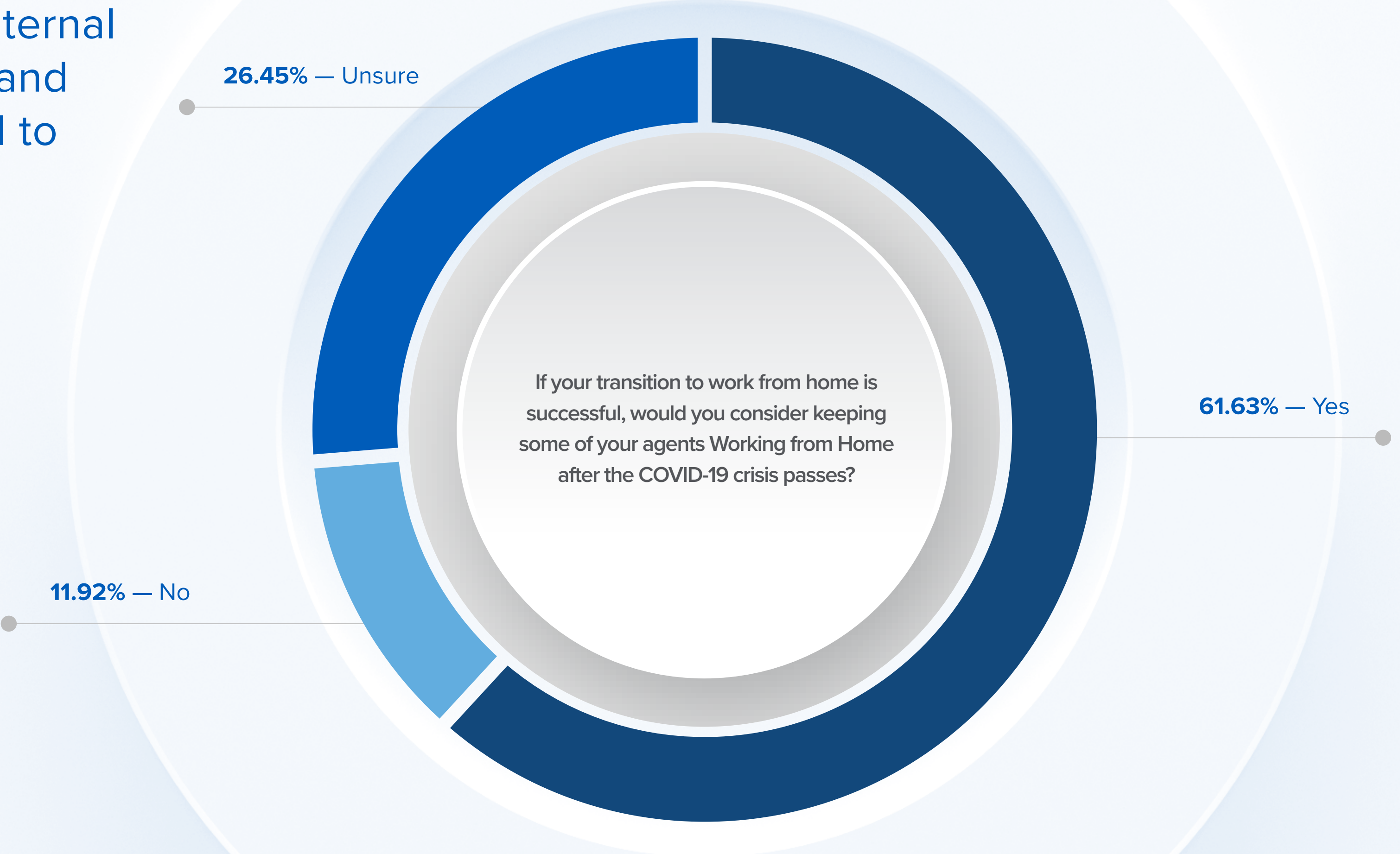
"We created a shared folder in a cloud drive for our BCP plan that houses all documentation and files for working from home. This includes instructions for everything from how to plug in equipment to FAQ's/basic errors and correction instructions, as well as our call tree and who to contact with what issues."

What People Are Saying

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> To work from home successfully, **agents need clear direction** and limits and internal communication and monitoring need to be ramped up.

26.45% — Unsure

If your transition to work from home is successful, would you consider keeping some of your agents Working from Home after the COVID-19 crisis passes?

61.63% — Yes

11.92% — No

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Looking Ahead

Work from home is no longer a niche.
It's a competitive advantage available
to any company in any industry.

The data shows us that a majority of contact center leaders are considering keeping their work from home policies in place long term. With the right infrastructure in place, like digital channels to handle increased inbound and performance management to scale remote monitoring and coaching, they now have an opportunity to adopt fundamentally better technology and practices.

Whether work from home becomes a permanent option, the capabilities that underpin a successful remote operation — wider digital channel use, better training, secure cloud connection— help businesses to be more resilient, more present, and more prepared for the next curveball.
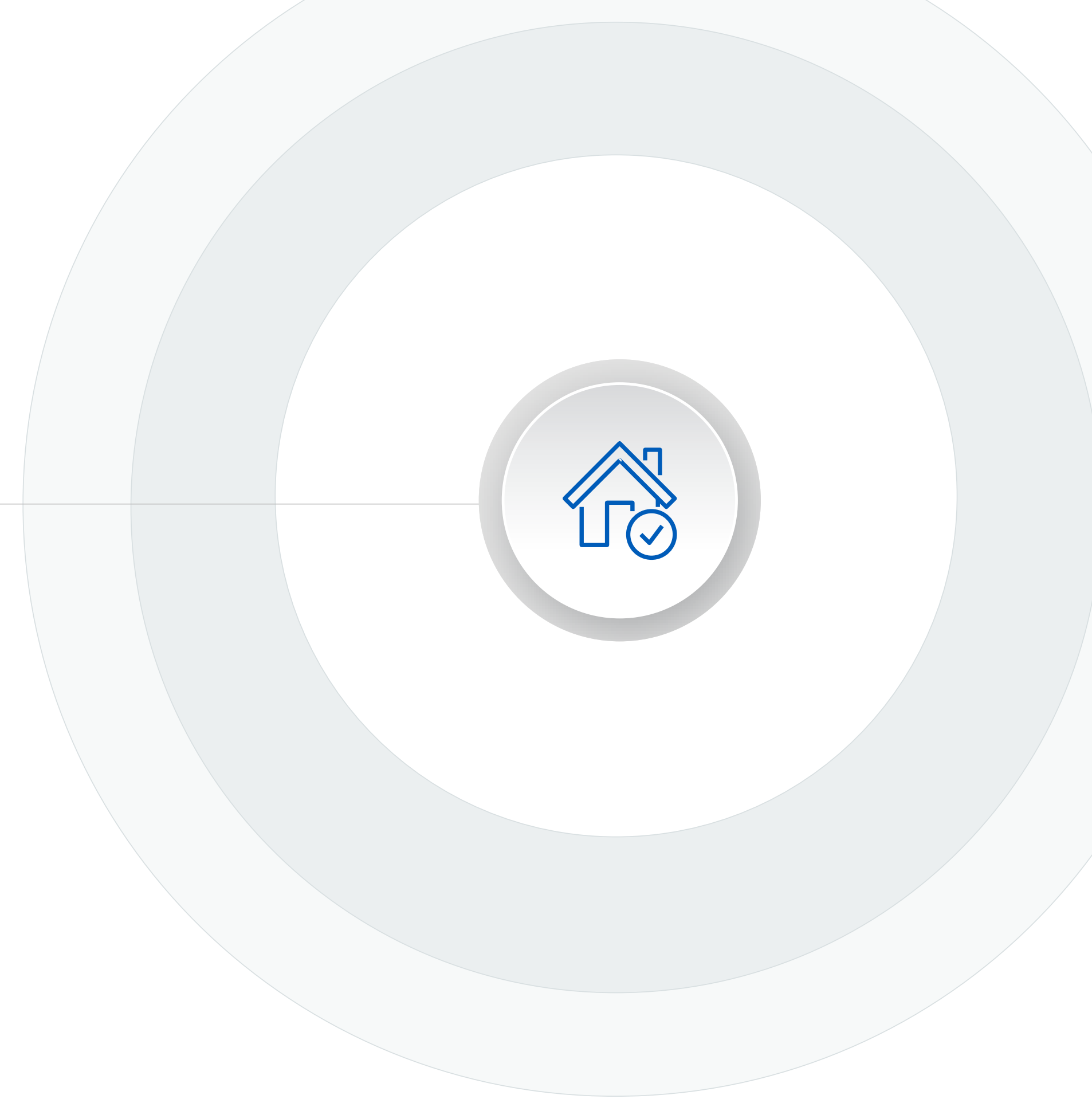
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