PULSE zix

Complex challenges in SMB IT need simple solutions

Small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) are faced with a variety of challenges when it comes to IT productivity, data retention and recovery, and security. Traditional in-house IT teams at these smaller companies are stretched thin when trying to manage and govern the myriad of complex solutions that exist for today's digital workforce. Can outsourcing or automating some of the IT load help, or will it just introduce more complexity?

Zix and Pulse surveyed 100 SMB IT leaders to understand their biggest pain points, consolidate peer advice, and find out how outsourcing and / or automating IT might help alleviate their biggest challenges.

Data collected: April 14 - May 11, 2021

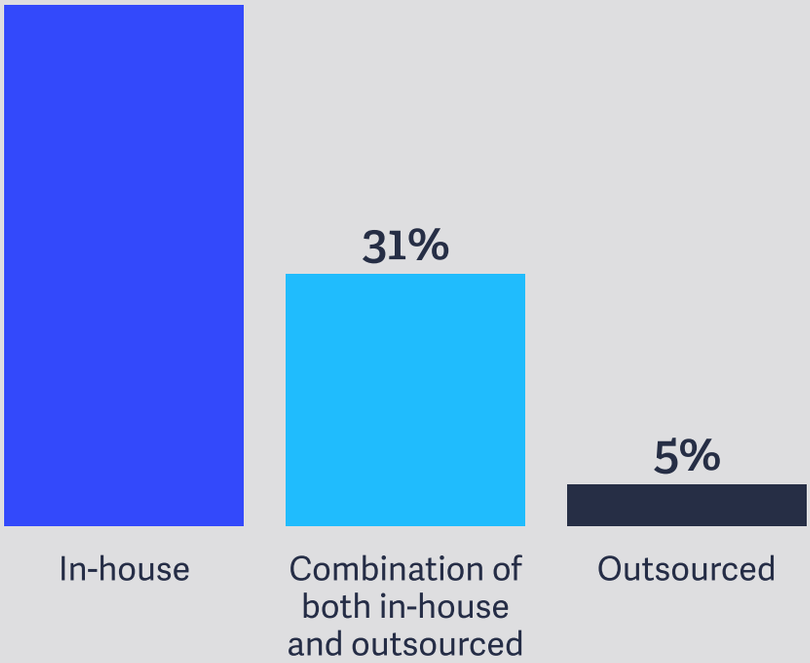
Respondents: 100 SMB IT Leaders

Staff and skills deficit is the biggest challenge to SMB IT productivity, but the complexity of disparate systems a close second

The majority of SMB IT leaders (64%) do not outsource their IT staff.

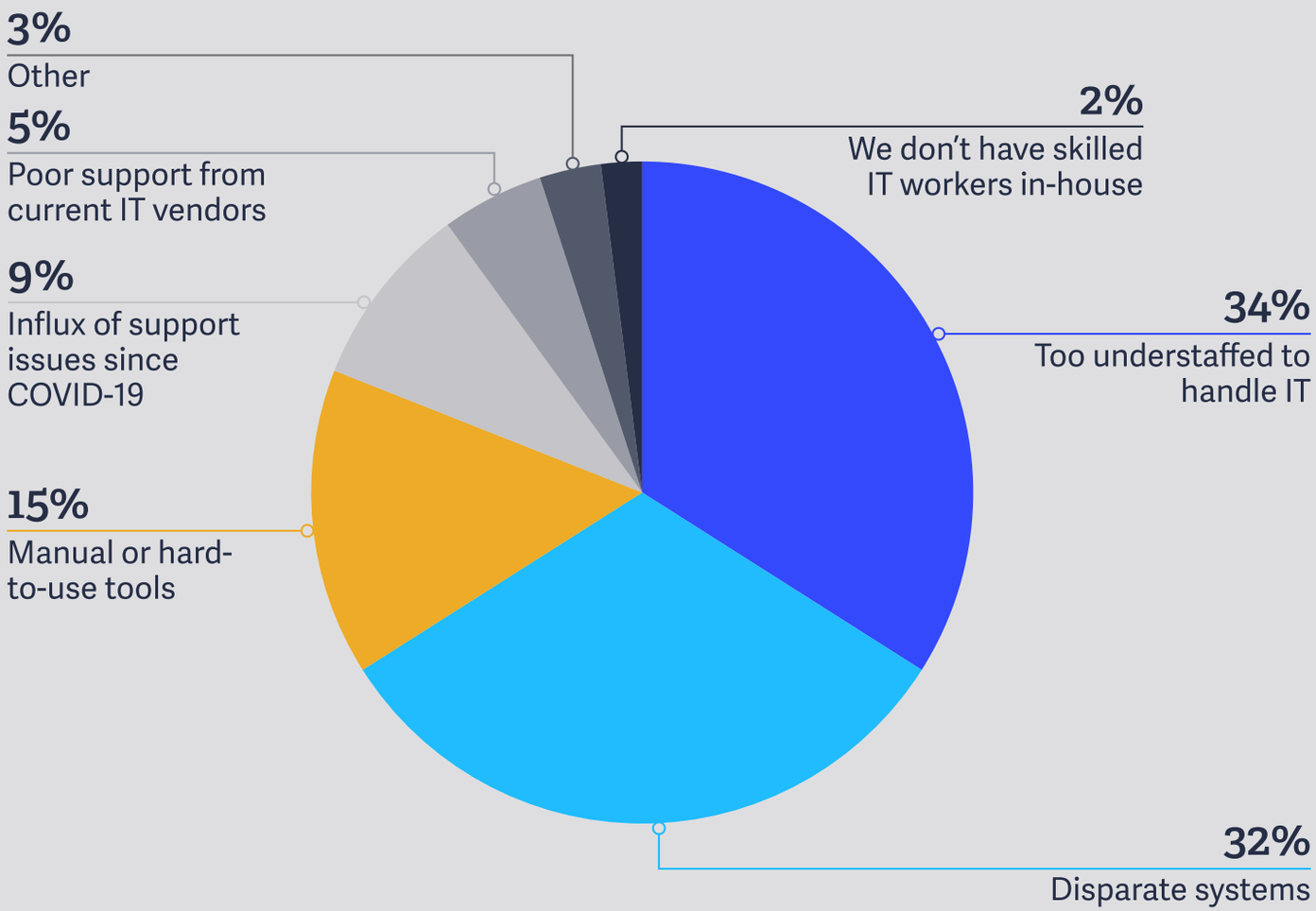
Is your IT staff in-house or outsourced?

64%



And many are challenged by lack of staff. 34% of SMB IT leaders say their productivity suffers mostly due to understaffing. On the other hand, 32% say managing disparate systems is the biggest productivity challenge they face.

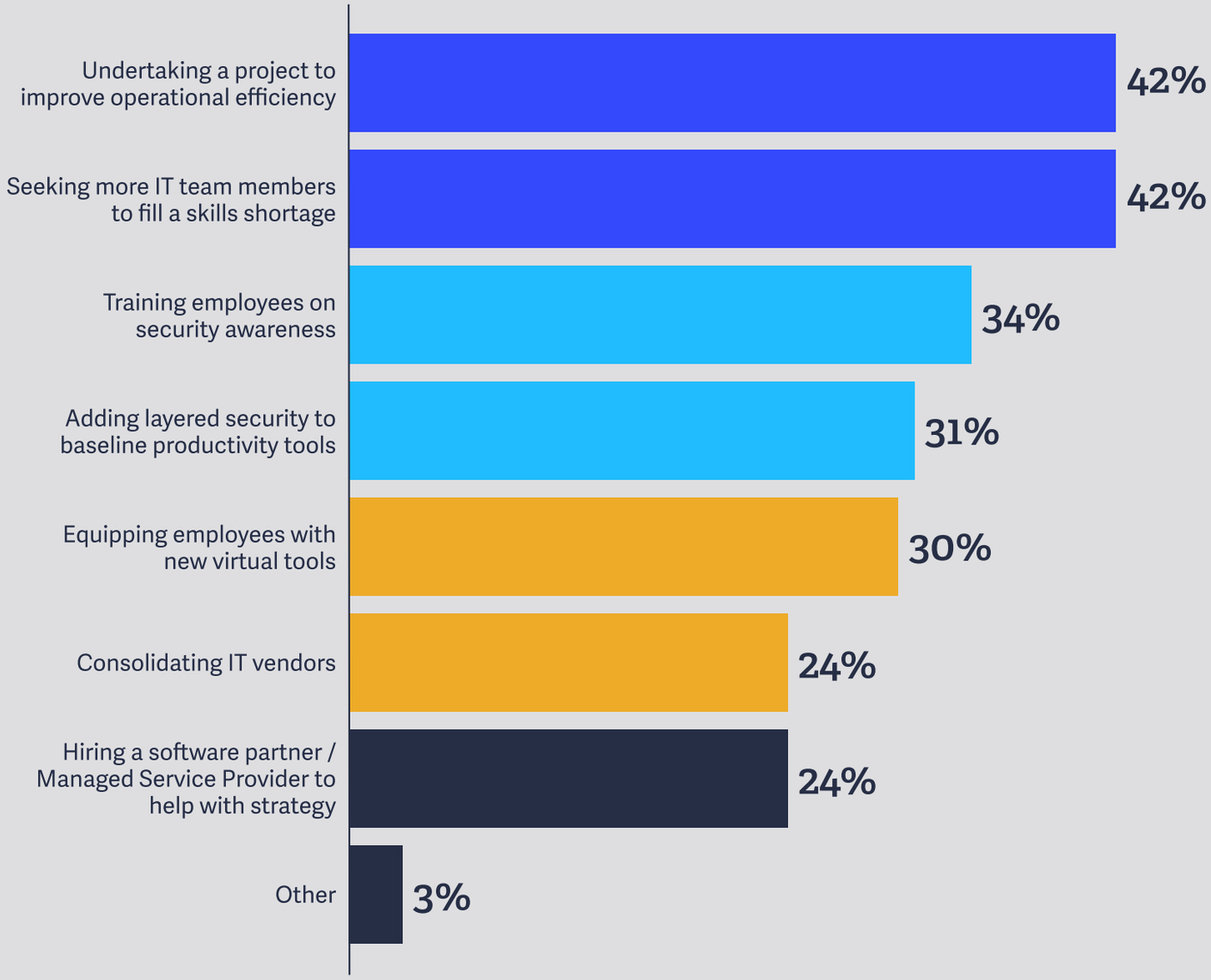
What is the biggest productivity challenge you face today?



Only 1 in 5 respondents whose IT staff are outsourced said they experienced the challenge of understaffed IT, and they completely avoid the challenge of not having skilled IT workers in-house.

To improve productivity in their IT teams, these leaders say their companies are focused on improving operational efficiency (42%) and filling the skills shortage (42%)

What is the company focusing on to improve IT team productivity?



Taking on a vendor partner or MSP can help to improve productivity by filling the skills shortage.

Peer Advice

"Be open minded to solutions and use consultants to help you find the best fit solution. There are hundreds of products outside the big 5 vendors that may save you time and money"
- Manager, professional services, North America

"Outsource the things you cannot handle and find a good partner to help with the rest"
- Manager, manufacturing services, North America

"Simplify and layer your solutions. Reduce complex overlapping solutions."
-C-Suite, software services, North America

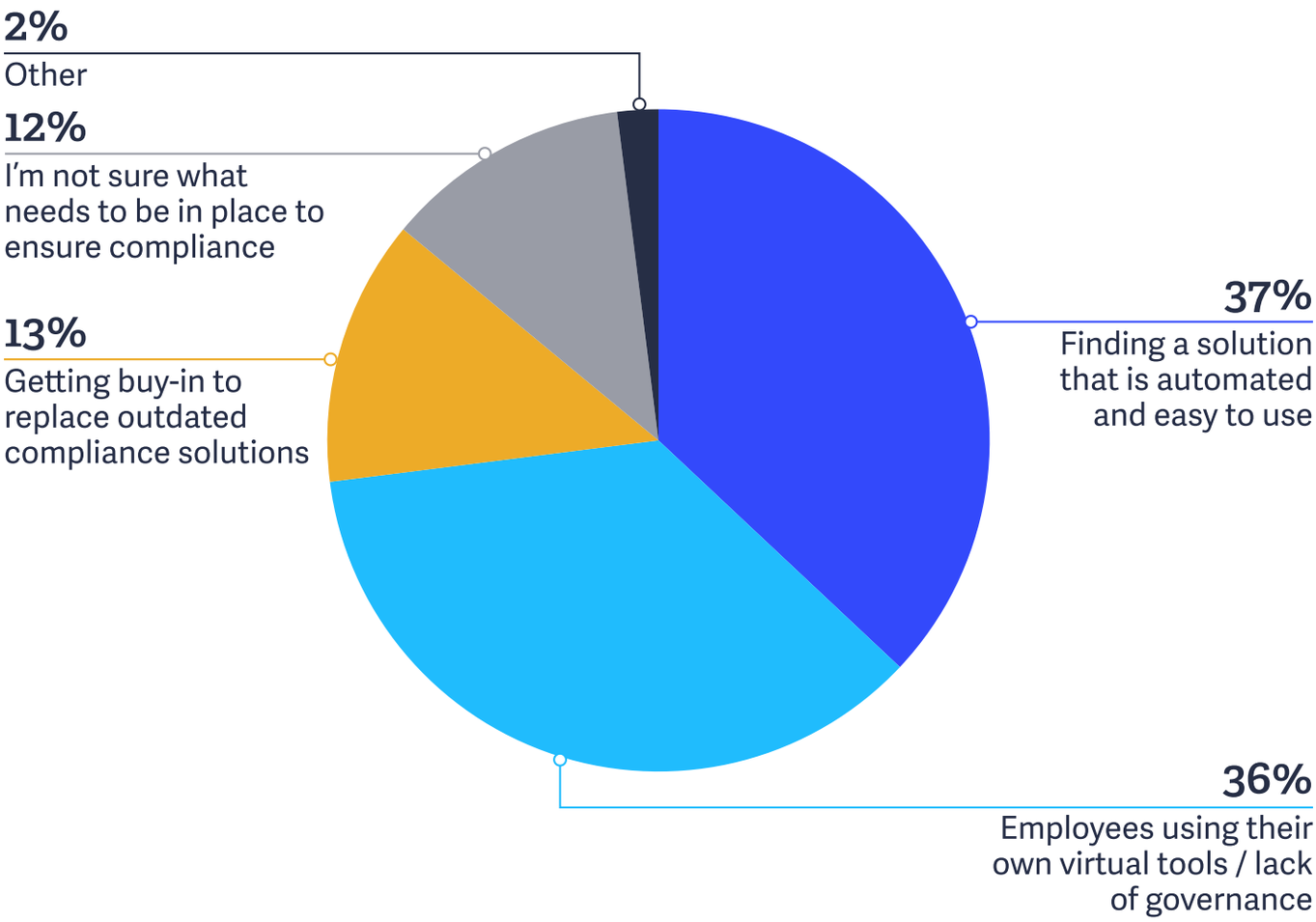
"[Deploy] more automated tools."
-Director, finance, banking, and insurance, North America

"Find a trusted managed service provider"
-Director, educational services, North America

SMB IT leaders struggling to find easy-to-use solutions for governance and compliance

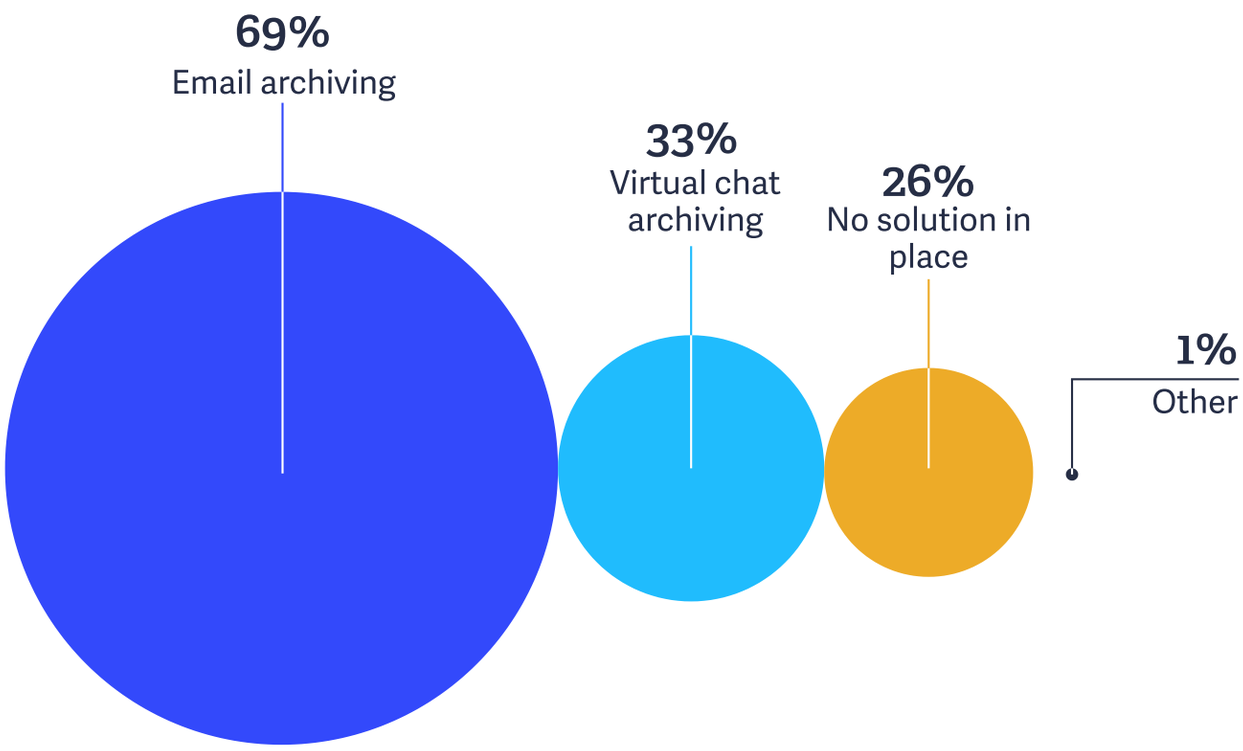
When maintaining compliance with a virtual workforce, the biggest challenge SMBs face is finding a solution that is automated and easy to use (37%), followed by employees using their own virtual tools with a lack of governance (36%).

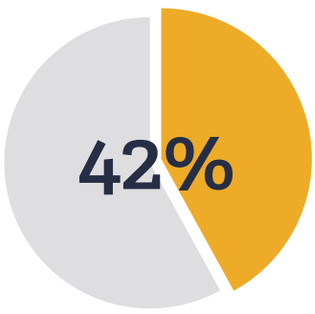
What is the biggest challenge you face in maintaining compliance with a virtual workforce?



The majority (69%) of organizations have an email archiving solution in place for compliant communication retention, but 26% have no solution in place at all.

Which of the following communications retention solutions do you have in place?





42% of respondents are archiving only email communications, without a solution for archiving other virtual communications through apps like Zoom and Microsoft teams.

Peer Advice

Delegate who owns a tech solution in your organization to help with governance, and speak with peers and partners to find out best practices for easy-to-use compliance tools.

"Implement service owners across business groups to enforce the consolidation of tools."
-Director, construction services, North America

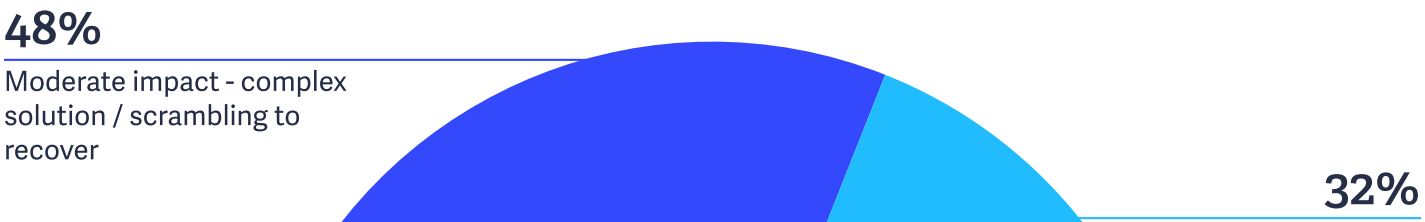
"Software partners are a good resource."
-Manager, manufacturing services, North America

"Resist the urge to reinvent the wheel and speak to others about their experiences and solutions." **-Director, educational services, North America**

Business resilience a concern due to lack of robust data loss recovery solutions

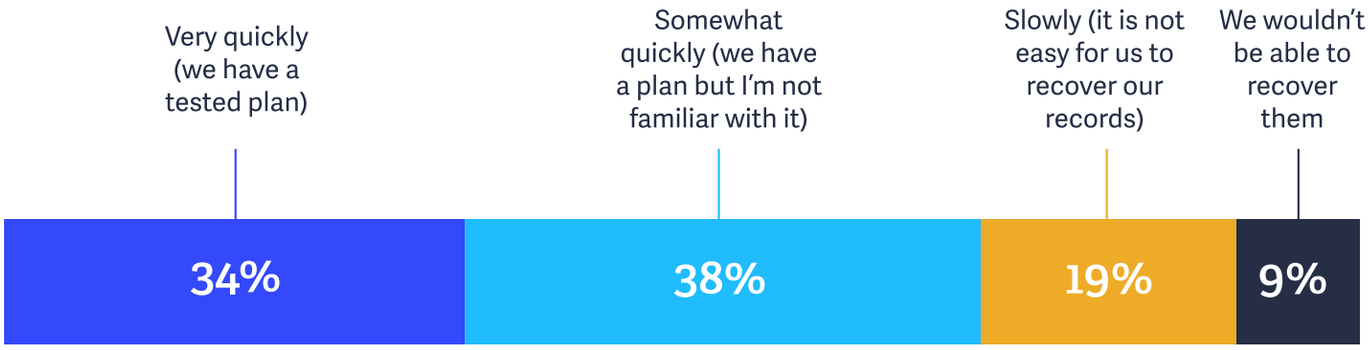
Almost two-thirds of organizations (62%) say a data loss event in one of their cloud solutions would have a moderate to major impact on their business because of lack of recovery solutions or complexity of recovery.

If your cloud solutions (ex. Salesforce, Dropbox, Microsoft) experienced data loss today, how much of an impact would that have on your workforce?



Only 34% of organizations feel they'd be able to very quickly recover records in the event of a data loss with one of their cloud solutions. A further 9% wouldn't be able to recover them at all.

If you experienced data loss with one of your cloud solutions (ex. Salesforce, Dropbox, Microsoft), how quickly would you be able to recover your records?



Peer Advice

Develop a *resilience* plan and adopt or move to the cloud when possible to reduce complexity and improve security.

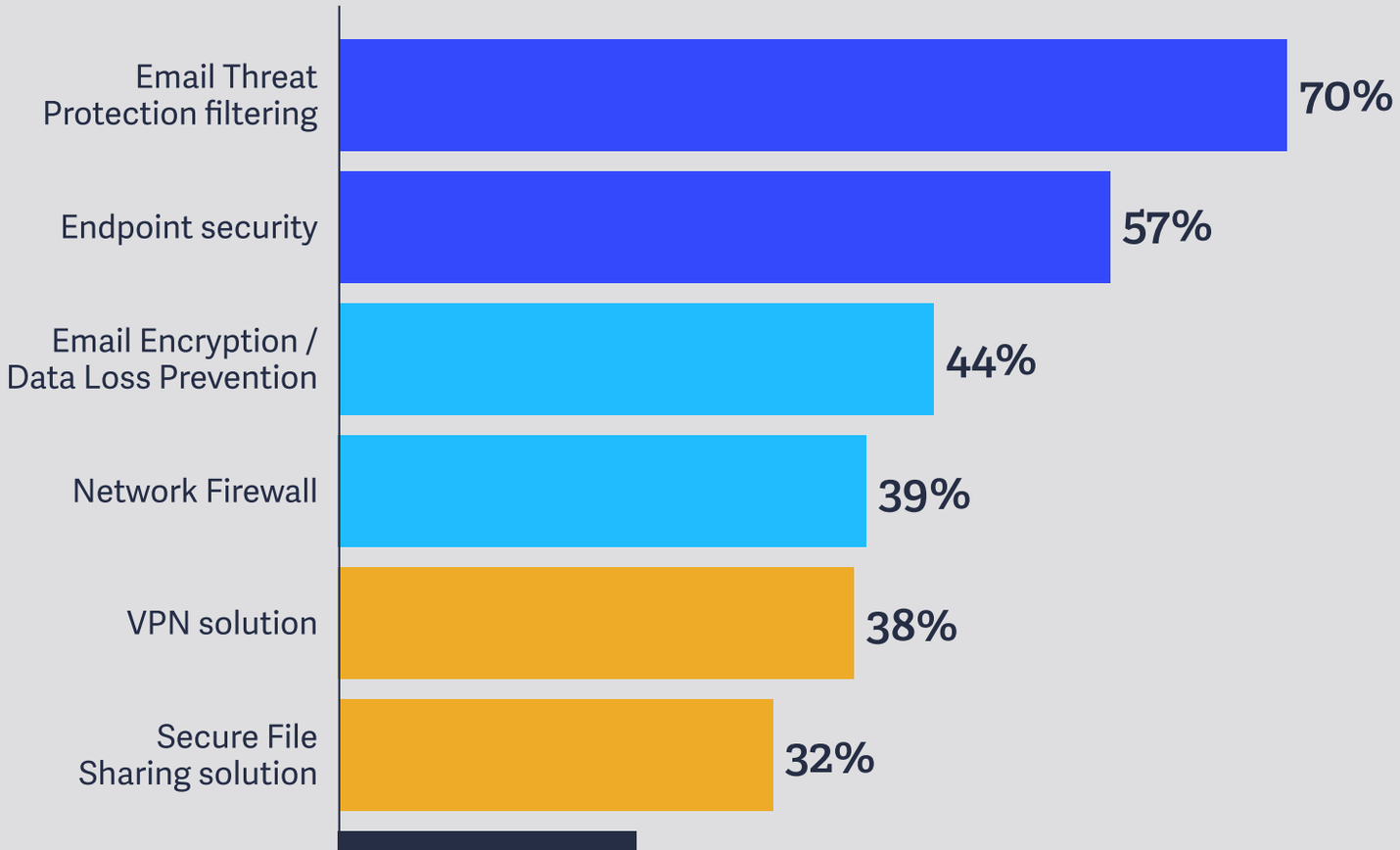
"Make a budget of the best, worst & expected scenarios and pivot when things won't be going as you trusted them." **-C-Suite, transportation and warehousing, EMEA**

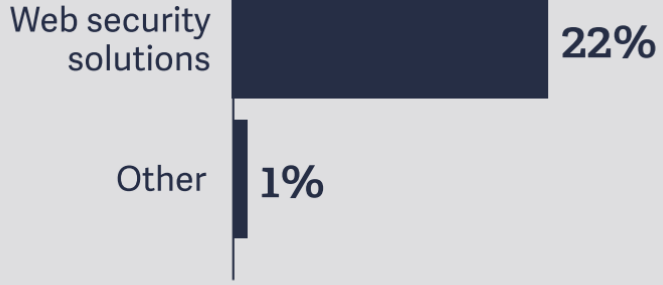
"Move to the cloud, adopt cloud services and cloud management solutions, it can significantly reduce the efforts and increase your overall security posture." **-C-Suite, professional services, EMEA**

SMB IT leaders are not satisfied with their email security solutions, which they consider most important to overall workplace security

The three most important workplace security solutions for SMB IT leaders are email threat protection filtering (70%), endpoint security (57%), and email encryption (44%).

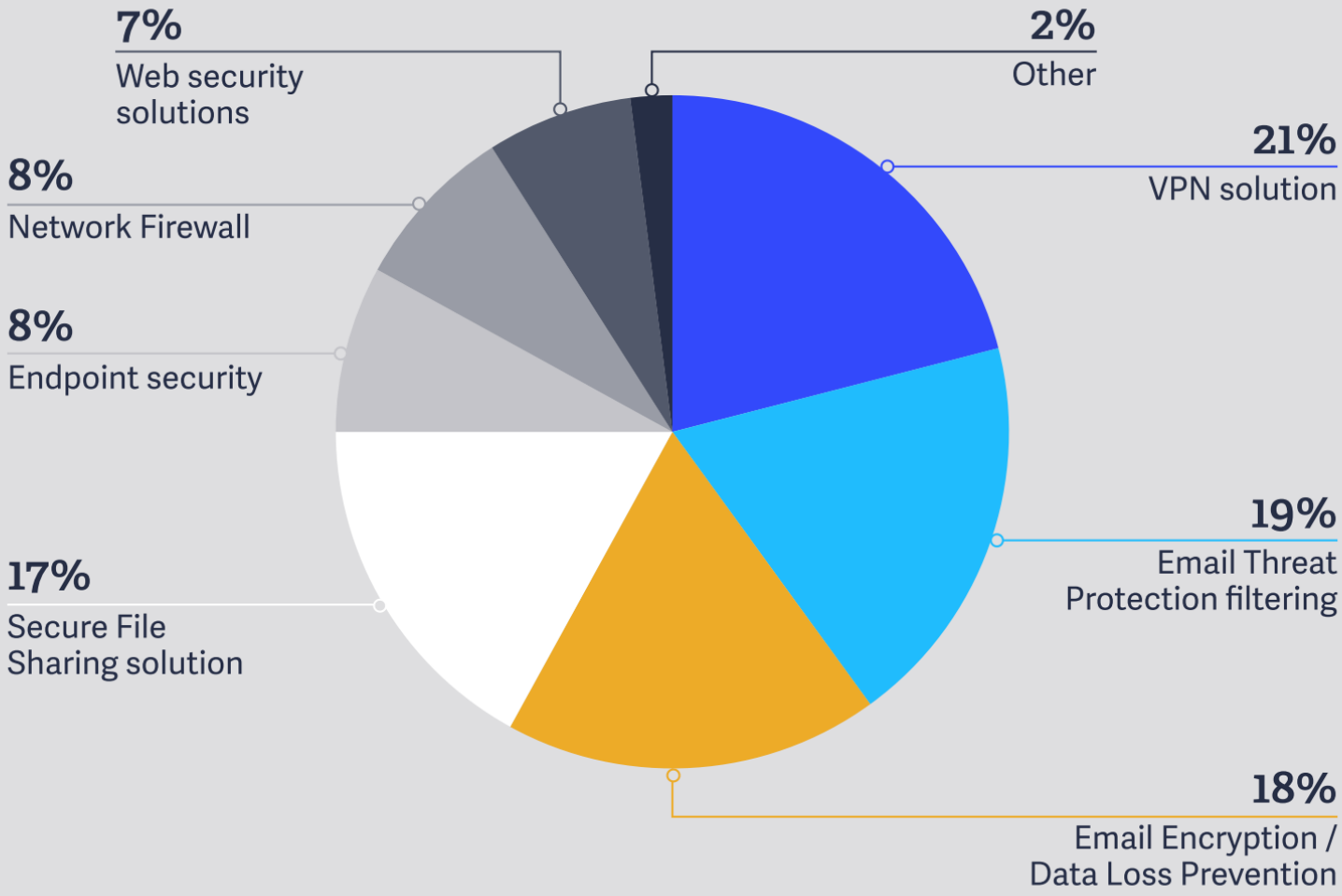
Which solutions do you view as most important to your overall workplace security?

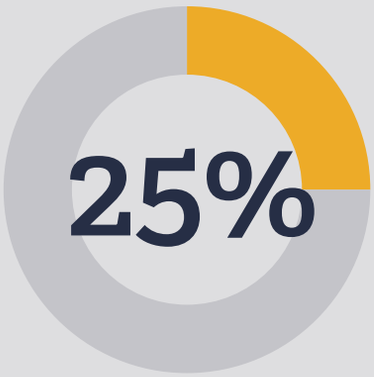




Of their current IT solutions, SMB IT leaders are least satisfied with their VPN solution (21%); however, solutions for email threat protection filtering (19%) and email encryption and data loss prevention (18%) are also among the top three solutions that they are least satisfied with.

Which of the following IT solutions do you have deployed that you are LEAST satisfied with?

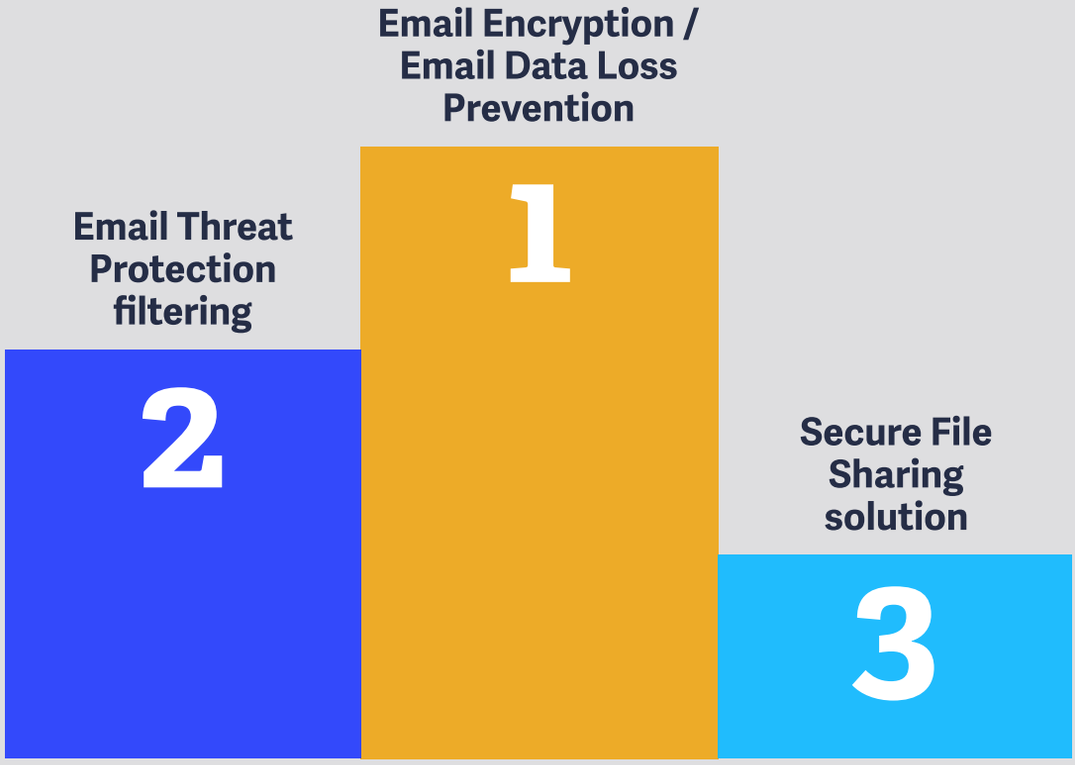




25% of respondents that selected email encryption and data loss prevention solutions as most important to overall workplace security are not satisfied with the solution they have deployed.

Complexity may be the issue that SMB IT leaders are facing with some of these security solutions. The email and file sharing solutions that IT leaders find least satisfactory are also ranked as the most complex to manage and govern.

Rank the level of complexity from most to least complex involved in managing and governing each of the following



4. Web security solutions

5. Endpoint security

6. VPN / Network protection

7. SIEM Management

Peer Advice

In order to reduce complexity, avoid over-tooling, look for vendors who act as partners to provide robust solutions and expert recommendations, and be open to adjusting solutions to suit their organization.

What advice would you give to a peer trying to reduce complexity during this "new way of work" we are experiencing?

"Try not to over-tool. Be thoughtful about all the new ideas and approaches. There are great ideas out there but employees don't always need another app."**-C-suite, professional services, software, North America**

"Document everything and know that you are going to iterate to a solution. You will not magically pick the right one from the start."
-Director, educational services, North America

"Update systems to accommodate the 'new way of work' / new remote workstations, and upgrade services. Outdated equipment raises complexity."
-IT Manager, manufacturing services, North America

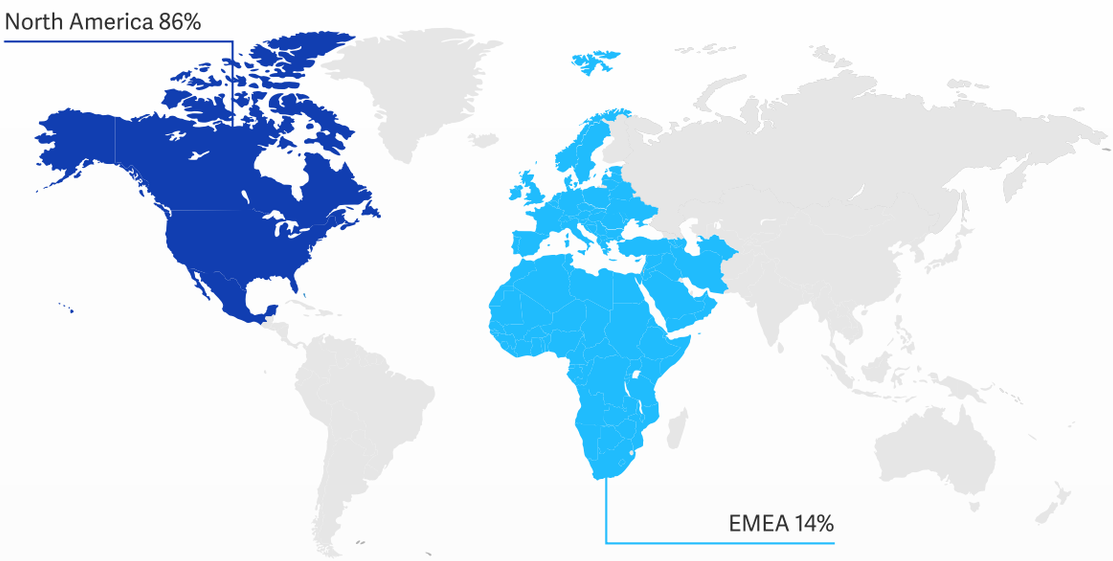
"Choose a good partner to work with."
- C-Suite, consumer goods, North America

"Find a solution provider who can offer you multiple solutions to your initiatives allowing you to reduce the number of vendors you deal with." **-C-Suite, educational services, North America**

"Simplify, simplify, simplify"
-Director, educational services, North America

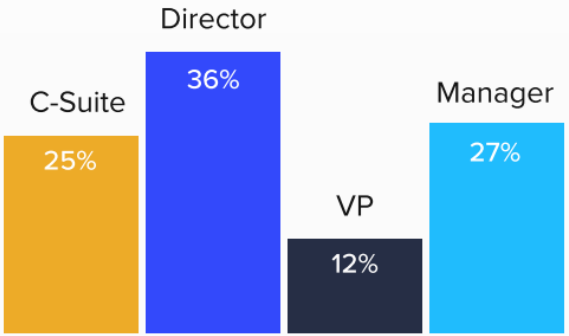
Respondent Breakdown

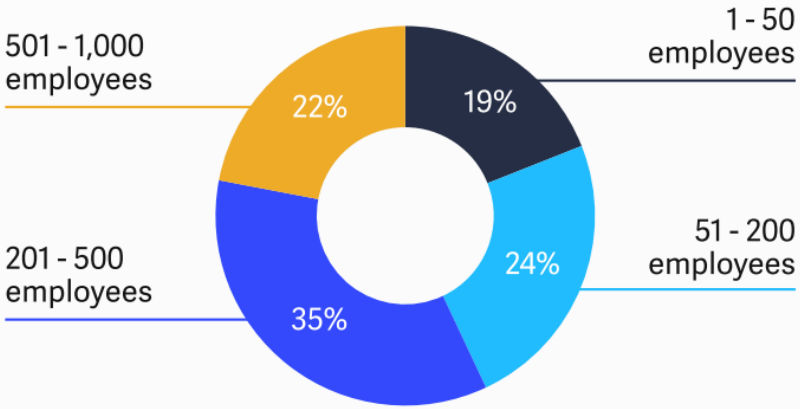
Region



Title

Company Size





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