



# The Future of Work

PART 2 of 2

Six Trends & Takeaways for  
Companies Navigating the  
New Normal  
August 2020





# Measuring the Pandemic's Impact on Knowledge Workers

In Part 1 of [The Future of Work](#), we outlined four trends informed by Nitro Analytics customer data as offices shifted to remote work in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Now widening our scope, we've conducted a new survey of knowledge workers (similar to [The Nitro 2020 Productivity Report](#)) to examine document behaviors, productivity levels, job satisfaction, and the impact of remote work during this global crisis.

This report covers six trends that merit close attention as the “new normal” becomes the “now normal.”

# Six Trends of Remote Work in the Pandemic Age

We partnered with Qualtrics to conduct a research study of 1,632 full- and part-time knowledge workers (those whose labor is mental rather than physical), to assess usage behaviors and perceptions of their workplace document practices. Further, we studied their successes and challenges as they worked during the global pandemic.

Overall, knowledge workers were well suited for the sudden shift to remote work, but they've had to adjust. Some of these brought positive (and even unexpected) outcomes, while others only made existing shortcomings more apparent—as demonstrated by **six global trends**.

**A close consideration of these trends will help organizations meet the crucially current needs of knowledge workers today.**

## Top Trends

### TREND 1

Productivity Is Steady—with Less Stress

### TREND 2

Working from Home Brings Higher Job Satisfaction

### TREND 3

Document Processes Remain a Pain Point

### TREND 4

Remote Work Requires New Solutions

### TREND 5

Digital Transformation Is Necessary, and More Urgent

### TREND 6

The Novel Is Becoming the Norm

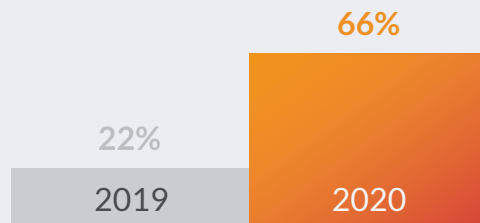


## TREND 1

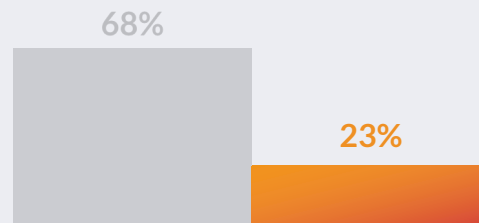
# Productivity Is Steady – with Less Stress

Work shifted from office to home almost evenly during the COVID-19 pandemic

Work from Home

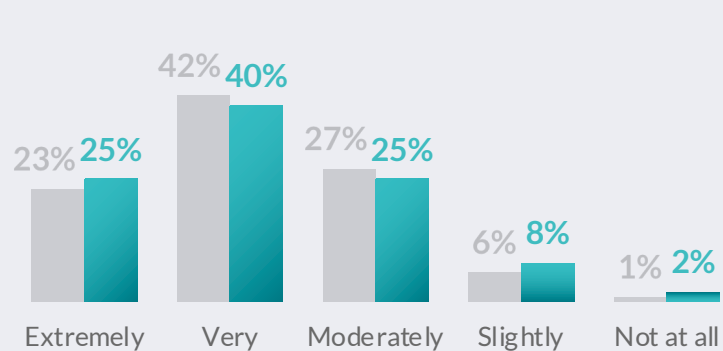


Work in the Office

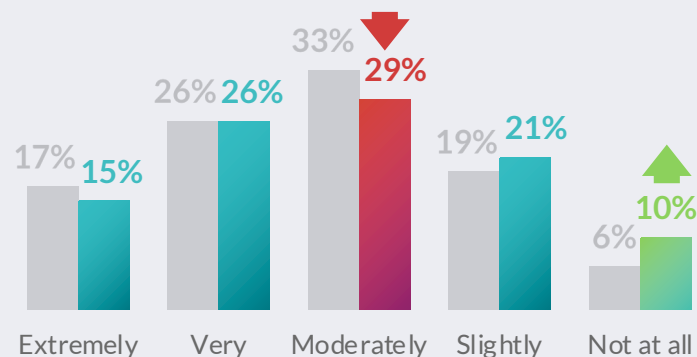


Interestingly, workers report being as productive, but feeling less stressed

Feel Productive at Work



How Often Stressed at Work



Knowledge workers, making a near universal shift to working from home, noted no significant change in the number of hours worked. Productivity is also virtually the same.

However, even with this stasis, workers reported lower stress. Most strikingly, 29% feel moderately stressed (a drop of 4 percentage points versus 2019), while 10% feel no stress at all (a rise of 4 percentage points). We attribute this to increased control over the workday (like the subtraction of commute time and physical-office distractions), allowing them to better balance work-related tasks and domestic responsibilities during this period.

## Key Takeaway

This may be a honeymoon phase. As novelty eventually becomes normal, workers are less likely to overlook productivity challenges and will require attention.



## TREND 2


# Working from Home Brings Higher Job Satisfaction

**Workers are feeling positive, despite no improvement in productivity**



**Time is stretched, and some document tasks now more challenging**

With the pandemic placing new demands on workers' time—having family at home, assisting children with distance learning, taking care of a loved one, etc.—doing tasks became slightly less easy, while giving tasks away became easier:

  
became slightly less easy

- Editing PDFs
- Merging/combining documents
- Reviewing documents
- Signing PDF documents
- Signing electronically

  
got easier

- Converting documents to PDF
- Preparing documents for others to sign

Knowledge workers report significantly greater job satisfaction (64% vs. 60% in 2019). Some of this is gratitude for being able to continue their work from home in a time of economic upheaval, but a significant uptick in feeling supported by management (now 41%) is also having a positive effect during this crisis.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, fewer have considered changing jobs in the last 6 months. But digging further, those who still find it difficult to get resources are more likely to be dissatisfied. And as new demands on workers' time grew (i.e. domestic needs), doing tasks became slightly harder, while giving tasks away was easier.

## Key Takeaway

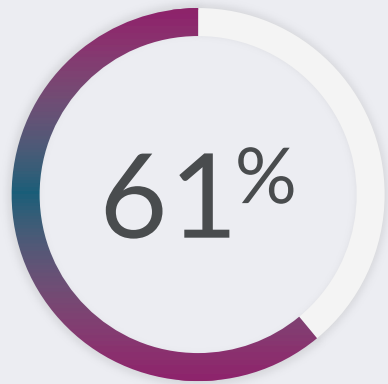
Before the halo dims, leaders must proactively mitigate potential concerns as the workforce permanently shifts to working from anywhere with documents. Introducing time-saving tools will allow workers to manage competing priorities.



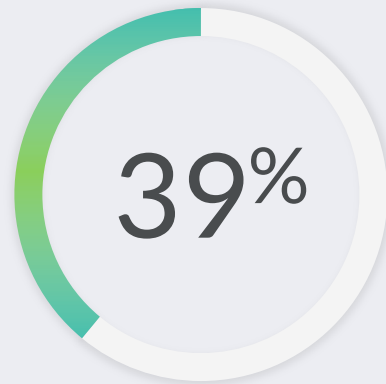
**TREND 3**

# Document Processes Remain a Pain Point

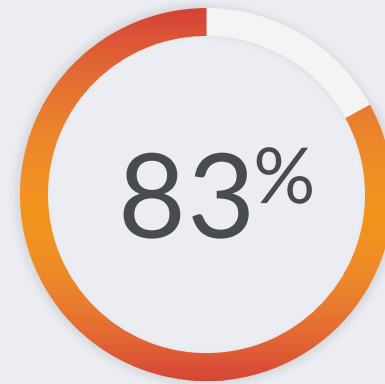
Workers are significantly more likely to indicate workflows are less efficient and not as up-to-date compared to last year



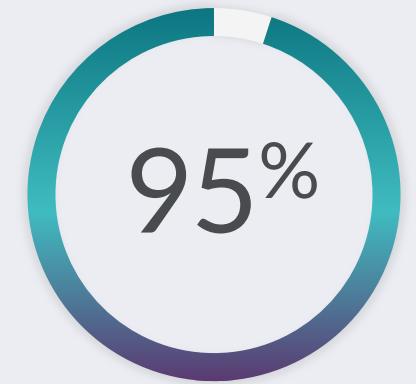
say their workflows are very efficient (vs. 71% in 2019)



say their workflows are somewhat up-to-date at best (vs. 35% in 2019)



say the way their company handles documents has not improved significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic



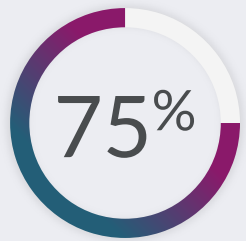
see room for improvement in how their organizations handle documents (vs. 97% in 2019)

### TREND 3

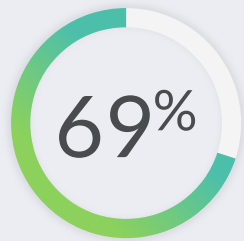
# Document Processes Remain a Pain Point

**PDFs continue to play a critical role, however, especially when contrasted against paper's decline within this all-remote environment**

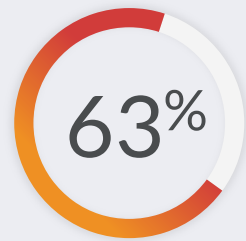
## PDFs Dominate During the Pandemic



of the documents knowledge workers encounter are PDFs



work with PDFs once or more a day



work with more than six documents a day

## Paper's Waning Reign



Current document workflows are considered less efficient, outdated, and a hindrance to productivity, especially by knowledge workers who spend more than eight hours daily on a computer.

This is as they're working with slightly fewer documents and with nearly all actions down versus 2019. Printing and scanning have decreased most significantly (recalling Nitro Analytics data in Part 1), but 56% of workers are still printing and 50% still scanning, even while working from home.

An overwhelming majority, 95%, see room for improvement in how their companies handle documents, a number that remains essentially unchanged from last year.

## Key Takeaway

IT leaders can no longer ignore document workflows that are becoming even less efficient. New processes must be instituted, particularly in an all-remote work environment. Change isn't easy, so make the most of workers' current goodwill before it's gone.

## TREND 4

# Remote Work Requires New Solutions

Workers want to improve their organizations but see hurdles that must be overcome

### Would Improve Organization



### Barriers to Improvement



As in 2019, knowledge workers are eager for improved document processes, suggesting the solutions of better training, more automated processes/workflows, and increased standardization. Now, an extended stretch of working from home has informed a fourth: better/more tools to enable remote work.

The barriers haven't changed—IT budget, capacity, and time—and the same productivity issues exist regardless of setting (office versus home). But not only do workers report that management is unaware of the challenges, there's no way to provide input to decision makers.

### Key Takeaway

The start of the pandemic pressed pause on addressing longtime issues, but as remote work becomes permanent, IT has run out of hall passes. Expect increased pressure for tangible solutions.

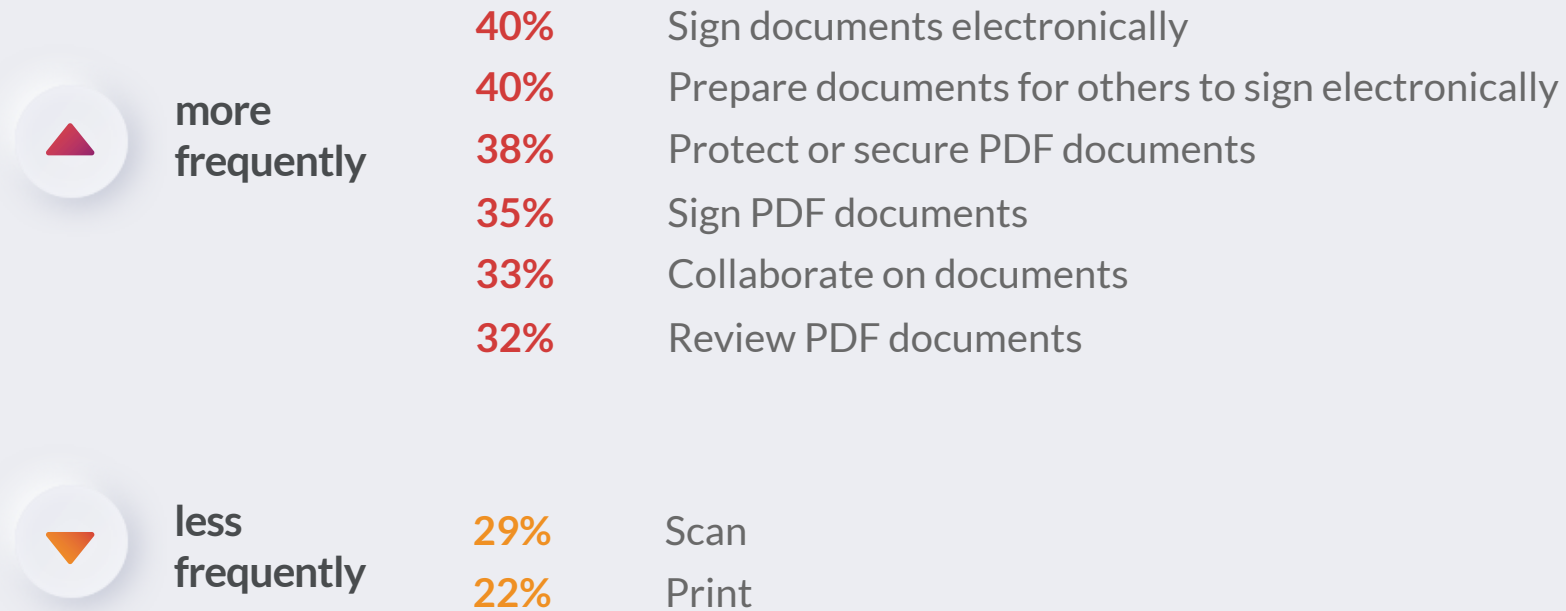




## TREND 5

# Digital Transformation Is Necessary, and More Urgent

Workers are using digital actions and workflows more frequently while working remotely



Knowledge workers have made certain short-term accommodations out of necessity, but a continuing lack of access to programs and equipment is the biggest barrier to handling documents (over 60% don't have printers/scanners at home).

eSigning and PDF collaboration have increased during the pandemic, illustrating that some well-ingrained paper-based behaviors are positioned for change as remote work becomes more permanent.

## Key Takeaway

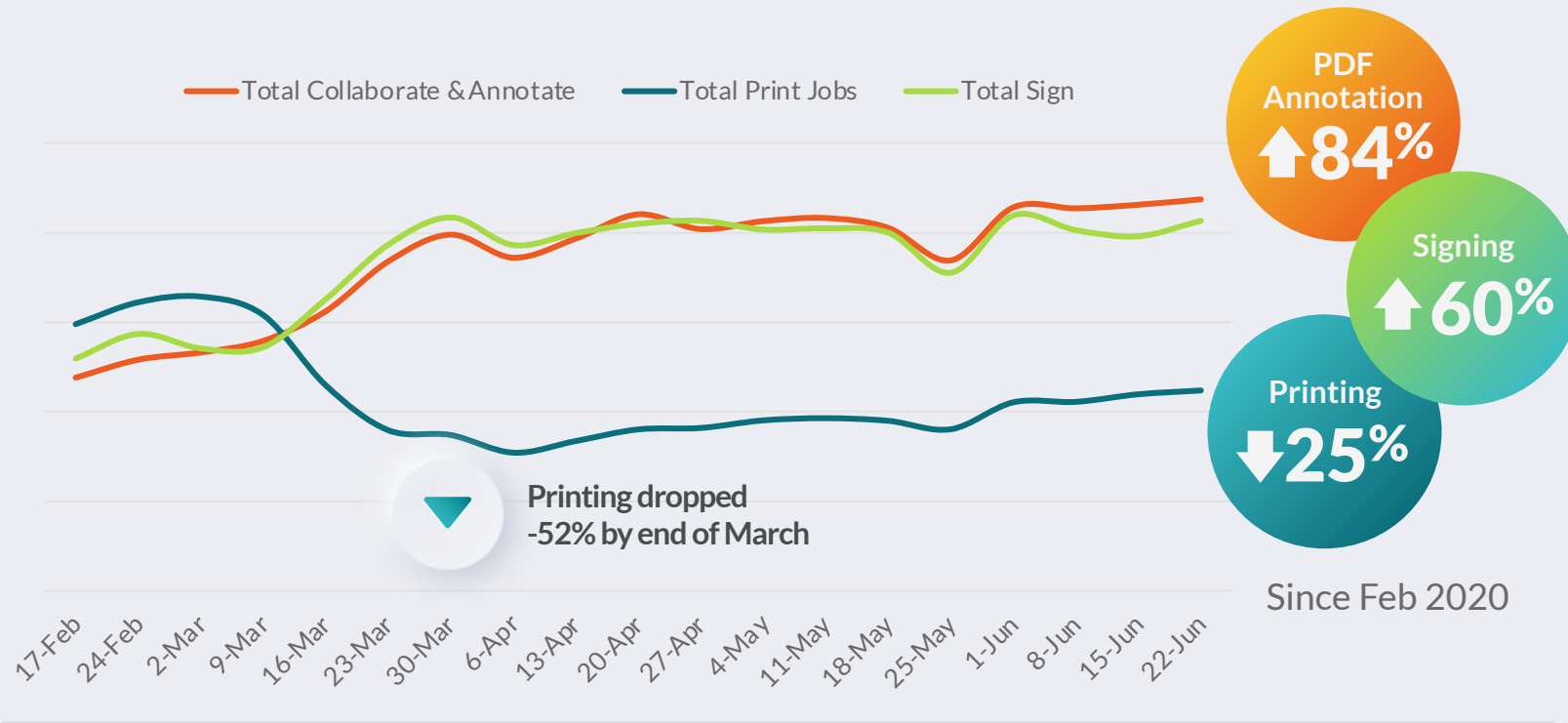
IT leaders and management must commit to complete digital transformation throughout their organization. The right tools need to be in the hands of everyone, not just the lucky few. Set goals and share progress with measurable steps.





### Nitro Analytics show continued increase in digital actions, while printing remains down

As shown in The Future of Work Part 1, PDF collaboration and adding signatures have risen exponentially among Nitro users, while printing has declined during the same period. Considered together, these moves indicate the potential for previously ingrained paper-based behavior to further decline as companies move toward digital workflow adoption.



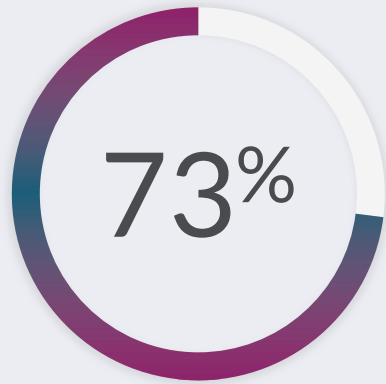
“Typical insurance document workflows include review of policies for new language, incorrect details, missing items, and more. Typically, our teams would print all these documents at the office and manually mark up any comments with a pen. When our workforce started working remotely because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many had to adjust to not having printers at home. With quick training on features like PDF annotation and adding signatures, they were able to transform their workflows to be less reliant on paper. This saved significant time for our users, and helped our team maintain high service levels during a very challenging time.”

**Business Application Support Manager  
Top 10, US-based Insurance Broker and  
Consulting Firm**

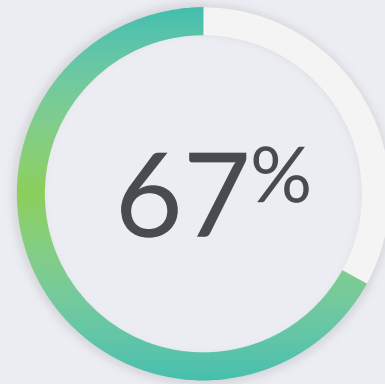
## TREND 6

# The Novel Is Becoming the Norm

**A work-from-home model is now less the exception and more of an expectation**



plan to work from home as much or more frequently after COVID-19



say WFH is very or extremely important when considering future job opportunities

*“Although JLL already had several digital transformation initiatives underway well before 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic certainly accelerated the need to equip all our teams now working remotely with critical collaboration tools and document productivity apps, and Nitro has been a central component of that effort. With many of our staff not having printers at home, we've seen a marked shift in terms of their increased use of digital tools – and electronic signatures in particular – in order to help maintain business continuity and optimize efficiencies in this new way of working.”*

**Gerard Ding, Head of Information Technology ANZ**

JLL

46% of knowledge workers say their company was only somewhat prepared at best when offices closed in response to the global pandemic.

Several months into this novel shift to all remote work—with no return on the horizon—workers view it as permanent. Remarkably, 73% expect to be working from home as much or more frequently after the pandemic has ended.

70% say their company supports full-time work-from-home (WFH) policies, and having acclimated to both the benefits and challenges, 67% say WFH policy is very or extremely important to future job opportunities.

## Key Takeaway

Companies should invest in digitization tools and resources that prioritize remote work in the interest of retaining team members and attracting new talent.



## CONCLUSION

# The Future is Here— and Anywhere

Though we've only just marked the midpoint of 2020, our survey of knowledge workers indicates the future of work is here, even as we're still finding our footing. There's much yet to be tested and implemented as **more organizations recognize the unique needs of remote work** and seek the best document processes and productivity tools to meet them.

Building upon the **Key Takeaways** we've shared, we suggest 3 short-term steps:

1

### Assess current document challenges in your organization

Determine areas lacking efficiency or otherwise in need of attention. Customers with Nitro Analytics can track key document actions and then analyze behavioral data and trends to make improvements.

2

### Capture candid feedback at the source

Consult with knowledge workers to reveal their workflow needs and shortcomings, particularly with remote work. Support the introduction of new tools with robust training, just like one Nitro customer that noticed teams not taking full advantage of the PDF annotation features in Nitro Pro and provided how-to sessions.

3

### Transform paper-based processes

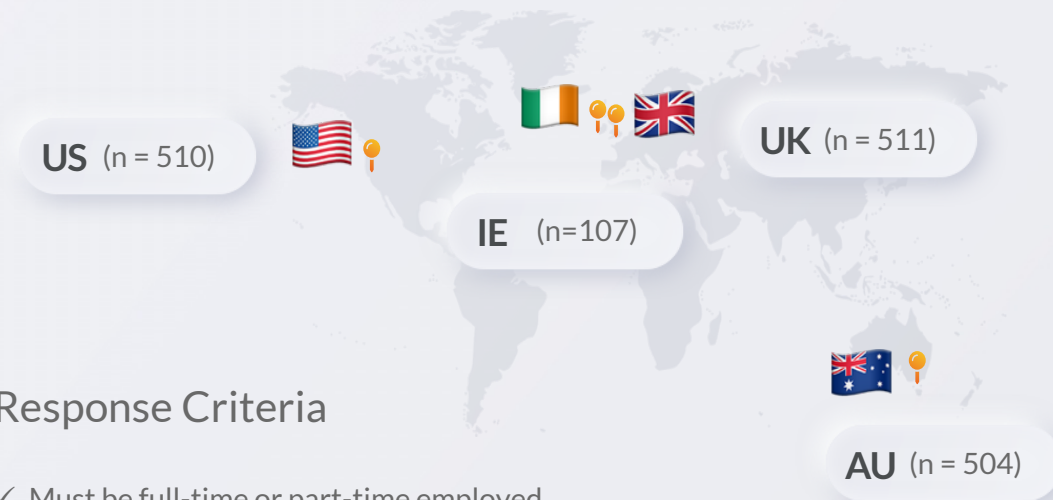
In this new realm of working from anywhere, ingrained document behaviors demand new paper-free approaches. With access to printers and scanners now limited, implementing an electronic signature solution like Nitro Sign eliminates the need for them and delivers a more streamlined workflow for all stakeholders.

*With hope that our report has helped illuminate the path ahead for The Future of Work, Nitro looks forward to navigating the new normal of working from anywhere, anytime—together.*



# Survey Methodology

Partnering with Qualtrics, the survey reached 1,632 full or part-time knowledge workers in May/June 2020, assessing usage behaviors and perceptions of their workplace documentation practices, successes, and shortcomings. Further, the study explored their successes and challenges through adjusted work settings during the COVID-19 pandemic.



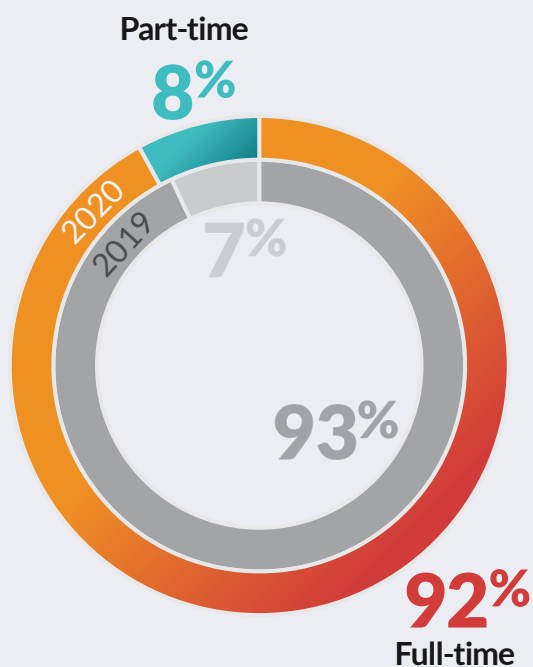
## Response Criteria

- ✓ Must be full-time or part-time employed
- ✓ Not from the field of education
- ✓ Must work 25 hours or more per week (pre-Covid-19)
- ✓ Must use a computer 3 hours or more per day
- ✓ Must regularly sign/prepare/print or work with documents
- ✓ Must deal with documents on a daily basis



# Survey Methodology

## Employment Situation



## Industry



## Hours per Week

|                    | 2019 | 2020 |
|--------------------|------|------|
| Less than 10 hours | 0%   | 0%   |
| 10-24 hours        | 0%   | 0%   |
| 25 - 34 hours      | 17%  | 19%  |
| 35 to 40 hours     | 62%  | 60%  |
| More than 40 hours | 21%  | 21%  |

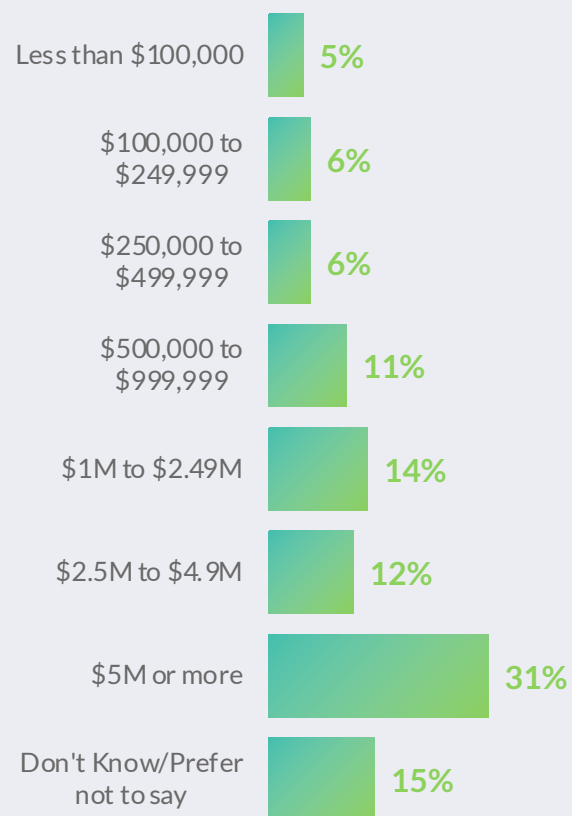
## Hours on a Computer

|            | 2019 | 2020 |
|------------|------|------|
| 8+         | 27%  | 25%  |
| 6-8        | 36%  | 32%  |
| 5-6        | 25%  | 29%  |
| 3-4        | 12%  | 15%  |
| 2 or fewer | 0%   | 0%   |

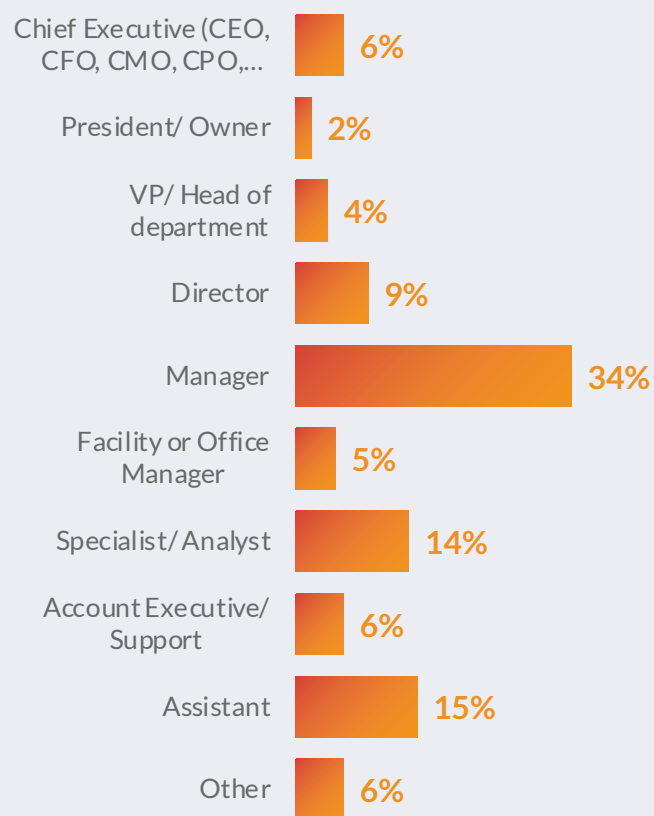


# Survey Methodology

## Company Annual Revenue (2020)



## Current Role (2020)



## Number Employees

|                | 2020 |
|----------------|------|
| Fewer than 500 | 38%  |
| 500-999        | 20%  |
| 1,000-2,499    | 12%  |
| 2,500-4,999    | 10%  |
| 5,000-7,499    | 6%   |
| 7,500-9,999    | 4%   |
| 10,000 or more | 11%  |

## Duration in Role

|                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| Less than 3 months | 2%  |
| 3-6 months         | 8%  |
| 7-11 months        | 12% |
| 1-2 years          | 24% |
| 3 or more years    | 55% |





Nitro is a global document productivity software company driving digital transformation in organizations around the world across multiple industries.

Nitro has over 2 million licenses sold, and over 11,000 business customers in 144 countries around the world, including over 65% of the 2019 Fortune 500, and two of the 2019 Fortune 10.

Our core solution, the Nitro Productivity Suite, provides integrated PDF productivity, eSignature and business intelligence (BI) tools to customers through a horizontal, SaaS and desktop-based software suite. Now available standalone, Nitro Sign is the electronic signature solution that allows individuals and teams to get documents signed smarter, faster, and more securely.



For more information on Nitro: [www.GoNitro.com](http://www.GoNitro.com)

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