

The Modernization of Mobile Apps

Financial Markets Professionals Seek
Continuity of Experience



CONTENTS

- 3 Introduction
- 3 Capital Markets Have Gone Mobile
- 4 The Changing Nature of Work
- 6 Extending the Desktop
- 6 The Three C's of Mobile Apps in Finance
- 7 Institutions Take the Desk (and More) with Them
- 10 Desired Features: Communication and Collaboration
- 14 Calls to Action for Institutions
- 16 Appendix

David Easthope advises on market structure and technology globally.

METHODOLOGY

In 2Q 2022, Coalition Greenwich conducted a research study of institutional capital markets professionals and financial advisors to better understand the current and future use of mobile apps, mobile app capabilities and coverage, expected features and functionality, as well as the most commonly used mobile apps. We interviewed 106 professionals in 16 different countries across North America, Europe and Asia. Participants included 36 portfolio managers/analysts, 51 sales and trading professionals, and 19 compliance professionals. Also in Q2 2022, responses were gathered from 111 financial advisors in 11 different countries across North America, Europe, and Asia.

Over
90%
of institutional
professionals and
FAs use approved
third-party mobile apps



74%
of FAs say staying
connected via mobile
apps is very important
or critical



Executive Summary

Mobile apps have moved beyond the realm of retail investors into professional financial services. What was previously a gradual embrace of mobile apps accelerated dramatically during the pandemic. Based on the results of new research, Coalition Greenwich estimates that the pace of adoption of communication and collaboration technology platforms in financial services has accelerated by five years or more in the space of 12–24 months. Today, institutional capital markets professionals have become heavy users of mobile applications, as have financial advisors (FAs), compliance personnel and professionals in a variety of other front- and back-office roles.

These professionals are using mobile apps as an extension of the desktop experience, allowing even the most desk-centric analysts, portfolio managers (PMs), traders, and salespeople to effectively work from anywhere at any time.

In this report, we present the results of our comprehensive study of the use of mobile apps by financial service organizations and professionals, including an analysis of usage within individual asset classes and across professional functions. We identify the features and functionality valued most highly by financial professionals, and show which apps and providers are used most by professionals in a variety of roles. We also look at the downsides of mobile apps, like the stresses of an “always on” mentality, and examine tools the industry is using to minimize the impact on employee work-life balance.

Finally, we project how mobile apps will evolve in the years to come. With hybrid work arrangements seemingly here to stay and an increasing need across financial markets for uninterrupted connection, we expect mobile apps to continue to proliferate in the industry at a rapid pace. Given that trajectory, we conclude by presenting three guiding principles for mobile app developers looking to deliver the optimal experience to financial service professionals.

Introduction

Mobile apps, once considered mainly the domain of retail investors, are now critical components of capital markets infrastructure for professionals. Apps delivered via mobile devices allow financial professionals to conduct business with the same ease and flexibility that consumer apps have long provided. These mobile apps have progressed rapidly from simple read-only data aggregators to fully functioning applications that facilitate communication, collaboration and transactions among financial professionals and their colleagues, clients and counterparties around the world.

Mobile apps on smartphones and tablets not only enhance the productivity of financial professionals during the workday, but extend the workday as well. While those features represent positive benefits to organizations and workers, the proliferation of apps has also spawned unexpected consequences like increased distraction and a diminished work-life balance. Organizations that deploy apps have some useful tools at hand to counteract these issues. With proper customization, apps can use consistent data and offer a continuous and harmonious user experience across both desktop and mobile. This fosters productivity while helping the end user keep a semblance of work-life balance.

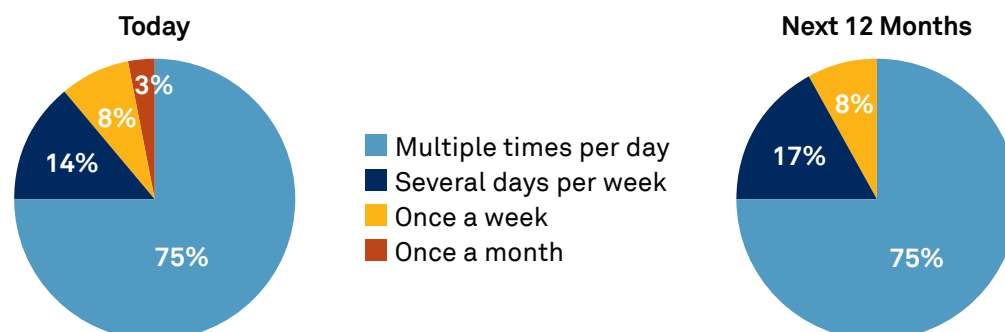
With remote work options seemingly here to stay, a growing desire for hybrid working models among professionals and an overall need for greater real-time connectivity among clients and providers, Coalition Greenwich sees the proliferation of mobile apps for financial professionals continuing in earnest well into the future.

Capital Markets Have Gone Mobile

Institutional capital markets professionals have become heavy users of mobile applications. That trend holds true across roles, including salespeople, traders, portfolio managers, and analysts. With the pandemic's work-from-home requirement as a catalyst, mobile apps have become an integral part of the daily lives of these financial professionals. For instance, 75% of PMs/analysts (the heaviest users across all our segments) use mobile apps multiple times per day for work. Even compliance professionals are ramping up mobile app use. For instance, one professional uses "FactSet, Outlook, Slack, Zoom—all used for data and communication." Another uses "Slack, email and Zoom for communications, Bloomberg for data analytics, and Enfusion for a real-time portfolio management and trading system" on their mobile device.

Mobile app usage is expected to tick up across these different roles over the next 12 months. More and better apps are coming onto the scene, and professionals increasingly value the ability to handle business away from the desk. App use is simply becoming more pervasive.

Mobile App Use Among PMs/Analysts is Very High



Note: Based on 36 respondents.
Source: Coalition Greenwich 2022 Mobile App Study

The Changing Nature of Work

The changing nature of work has been a major driver of mobile app adoption. As firms offer remote work and hybrid options, a resettled finance workforce is leveraging a more flexible and online work environment. For instance, many technology companies like Alphabet (Google) have announced flexible policies like remote first/hybrid working employment arrangements. Other technology companies like Twitter and Reddit have gone even further and opted all-in for permanent remote or hybrid work setups.

Within financial services, the trend has been present as well. Financial services companies like Coinbase have embraced permanent remote and hybrid options, while even capital markets behemoth JPMorgan has offered increased flexibility on return-to-office (RTO) policies. However, while JPMorgan does have an official policy, there likely will be additional pressure from managers for junior bankers to be in the office as much as possible.

While some desks, like equities or fixed-income trading, will continue to be staffed mostly by professionals working in the office, there is potential for greater flexibility. Part of that enhanced flexibility comes from the improving quality of mobile apps and the elimination of many early security concerns, which together allow employees working in environments outside the office to better trust the apps they use.

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The response to the global pandemic simply gave new working arrangements a turbo boost. Our data shows the pace of adoption of communication and collaboration technology platforms in financial services has accelerated by five years or more in the space of 12–24 months. Innovations within those platforms also advanced rapidly as connected users ratcheted up and their needs changed, reflecting their new methods of working.

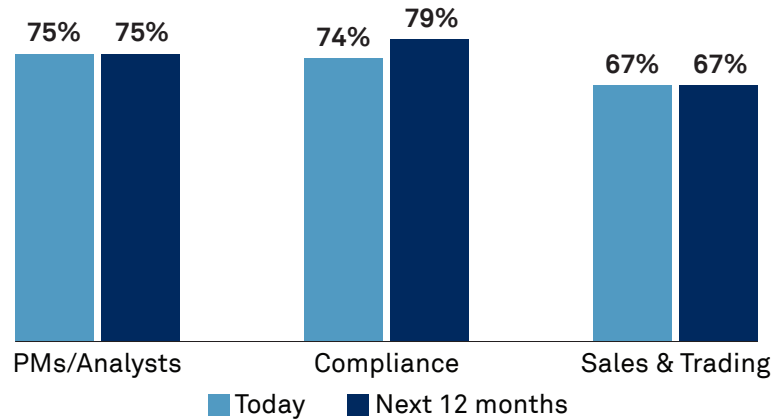
One major shift has been the extension of mobile and tablet apps beyond external communications to include internal communications. In fact, according to our [research](#)¹, over 70% of PMs/analysts and sales and trading professionals say that connections to internal teams and contacts is the most wanted feature in a mobile communications platform.

While salespeople and traders have communicated with their clients via chat for years, taking those conversations on the go via mobile apps is a huge productivity win. And for those not in front-office roles, the ability to chat via mobile rather than email can offer huge advantages. As such, our recent research also showed that 63% of financial market professionals believe better integration of collaboration technology will improve interactions with clients.

As frequent communicators, sales and trading professionals have also become heavy users of mobile apps, with 67% using mobile apps multiple times a day. Moreover, with traders’ heads often on a swivel using multiple screens, the addition of mobile apps on smartphones and tablets is a significant shift in the sales and trading setup.

And while the majority of traders are back in the office nearly full-time today, the ability to work remotely when needed is now a requirement—unlike pre-2020 times. To keep up with mobile traders, compliance professionals, who increasingly have to track all these mobile communications, will become the most frequent users of mobile apps in the next 12 months.

Institutional Use of Mobile Apps is Expected to Remain High Proportion of Respondents Using Mobile Apps Multiple Times per Day



Note: Based on 106 respondents.
Source: Coalition Greenwich 2022 Mobile App Study

¹ <https://www.greenwich.com/market-structure-technology/future-capital-markets-collaboration>

While some institutions struggle to manage compliance monitoring of chat and other messaging apps (and have been fined), many institutions see approved or proprietary mobile apps (and even some third-party apps) as a way to mitigate reputational risk and manage ongoing compliance. However, the increase in the sheer number of apps (professionals regularly use Microsoft Teams, Microsoft Outlook and Bloomberg) and the use of newer apps (like Slack, WhatsApp and Zoom) have sent some compliance teams scrambling to stay on top of messaging.

And while newer apps are beginning to pop up, traditional financial messaging apps remain the most popular, with Bloomberg and Teams being tops among sales and trading professionals and PMs/analysts for communications.

Extending the Desktop

Today's mobile apps are increasingly used as an extension of the desktop experience, allowing even the most desk-centric traders to effectively work from anywhere. On any given day, a portfolio manager, trader or analyst is likely to bring their work-approved mobile device and the apps it contains from home to transit, to work and back again.

It also seems that mobile apps are used more than just at the beginning and end of the day—rather, in a continuous intraday cycle that includes mobile apps employed alongside the use of market data terminals, desktops and laptops in the office and at home. Greater customization of that continuously ebbing and flowing experience through mobile apps has become critical for most in finance, with a strong user experience, well-timed alerts and notifications, and charting as important differentiators for users. However, to bring mobile finance to the next level, we believe app providers must go beyond simple customization.

The Three C's of Mobile Apps in Finance

In an era of hybrid work arrangements and proliferating communications alternatives, professionals can fall prey to an “always on” mentality that drains productivity and acts as the antithesis of a work-life balance. Balancing the benefits of mobile apps against the strains on employee quality of life and significant compliance concerns will remain a central challenge for financial services firms.

A simple extension of the desktop environment to mobile apps won't be enough to maintain worker productivity if the user experience is disjointed, lacks consistent data and if the app cannot be customized to the task at hand. To address these issues, the next generation of mobile apps must deliver a continuity of experience that allows a portfolio manager, analyst, trader, compliance professional, or financial advisor to remain in a virtuous cycle of productivity across a range of technology platforms and devices.

To achieve that continuity of experience, capital-markets-focused mobile and tablet apps must deliver what we have dubbed the “Three C's.”



Consistency—a focus on data quality and breadth of available data, from market data terminal to trading system to mobile device

Attention must be paid to ensure mobile apps can handle more frequent and complicated use by professionals while maintaining data consistency. Although 100% data consistency is not an immediately achievable goal, it should be a helpful guide.



Customization—the ability for users to tailor alerts, research, charts, and portfolios within their apps

Customization is a basic expectation and required for users to maintain productivity (alerts, research, charts, etc.), despite some of the limitations of smaller screens and “heads on a swivel” syndrome, as workers toggle between platforms and apps.



Context—smooth switching between different platforms, allowing a workflow or communication to continue seamlessly when leaving your desk and going mobile or vice versa

The mobile app experience should not feel totally disconnected from other platforms. Professionals seek the ability to switch platforms seamlessly while maintaining access to messages and data, and connections to internal colleagues and clients.

Mobile apps that deliver all Three C's will provide a more integrated experience across devices and worker locations, leading to greater productivity for financial professionals. And productivity is no trivial matter in a workforce that sometimes struggles with focus in an increasingly connected world.

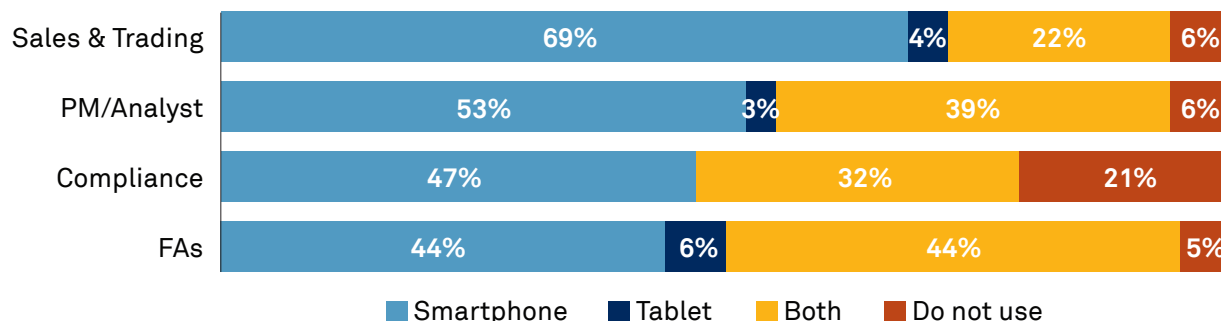
Institutions Take the Desk (and More) with Them

While the Three C's are critical regardless of the type of professional user, how those C's are applied in each user segment varies. Understanding the nuances of different roles is what will allow mobile app developers to properly serve financial markets professionals, from portfolio managers to FAs. Developers must have a clear understanding of the right platforms and approaches for each type of professional.

For institutional professionals, both smartphone and tablets matter—professionals leverage proprietary apps provided by their companies on both of these devices. For instance, over half of PMs/analysts and compliance professionals use proprietary apps on a smartphone alone or both devices, and a third of sales and trading professionals do the same.

App usage also varies by the type of mobile app. Approved third-party mobile apps are the most popular, used by a whopping 95% of all segments (save for compliance).

Use of Approved Third-Party Apps is Ubiquitous



Note: Based on responses from 36 PMs/analysts, 51 sales & trading professionals, 19 compliance professionals, and 111 FAs. May not total 100% due to rounding.
Source: Coalition Greenwich 2022 Mobile App Study

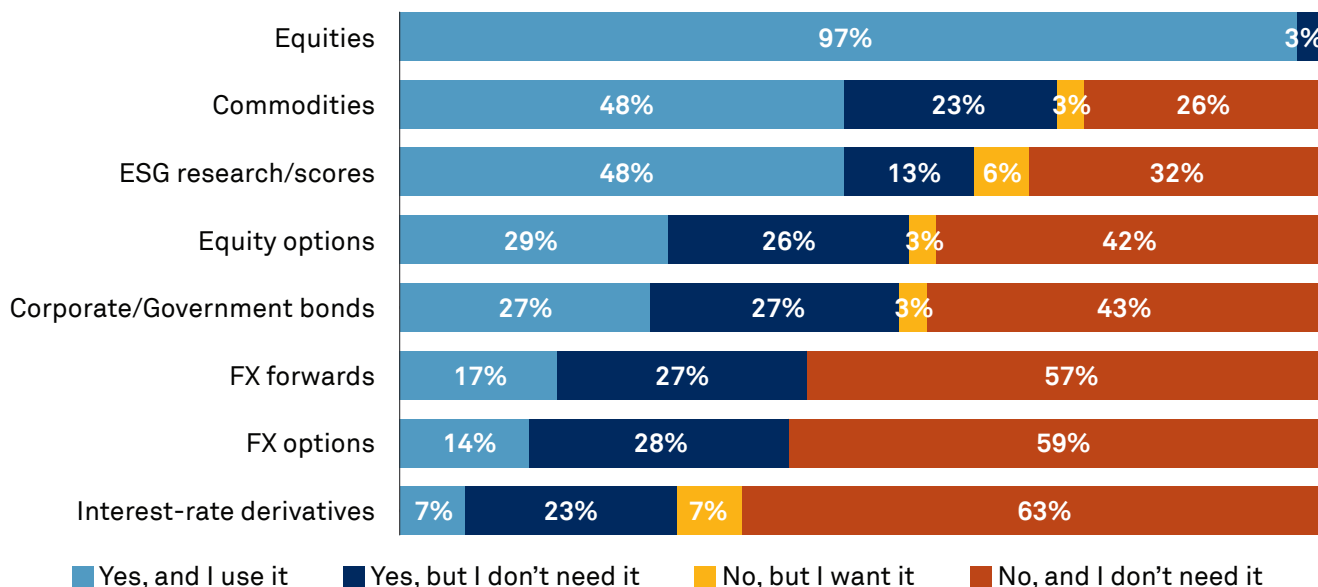
Financial firms themselves have been slower to roll out mobile apps than retail firms and technology firms, so it's not surprising that proprietary mobile apps are less used than approved third-party apps. Moreover, proprietary apps tend to be targeted to FAs, compliance and PM/analyst roles.

Some PMs/analysts, for instance, use approved third-party apps like Bloomberg, FactSet or Refinitiv to “consume business news and stock prices” or to “read research or news while away from my desk or to set price alarms” or simply “when a computer is unavailable or inconvenient.” Messaging also resonates strongly, as users will use apps for “infrequent messaging” or “interaction and contacting colleagues which would elicit a quicker response.” A sales trader will frequently use Bloomberg or Teams, while a compliance professional will use Teams but may also use proprietary compliance-monitoring or trade-surveillance apps.

Mobile apps have expanded their presence across user segments and asset classes. Mobile app coverage of equities is universal and is strong in commodities and even for ESG research, but there are big gaps across other assets. Given the siloed nature of capital markets around asset class, that's not a huge surprise. Mobile apps tend to have less coverage across bonds and FX trading, which may be due to unique market structure characteristics, proprietary data, the prevalence of voice trading in bonds, and other special characteristics that make it harder for mobile apps to cover versus market data terminals and desktop applications.

And while some users, including compliance, want more asset class coverage, some professionals continue to favor depth over breadth, preferring apps that are tailored to the unique market structure of each asset class. In other words, a well-tailored mobile app may be more useful than a comprehensive app across asset classes. Some exceptions may apply, but professionals also seek greater integration of these mobile apps, such as with order management systems (OMS) and execution management systems (EMS).

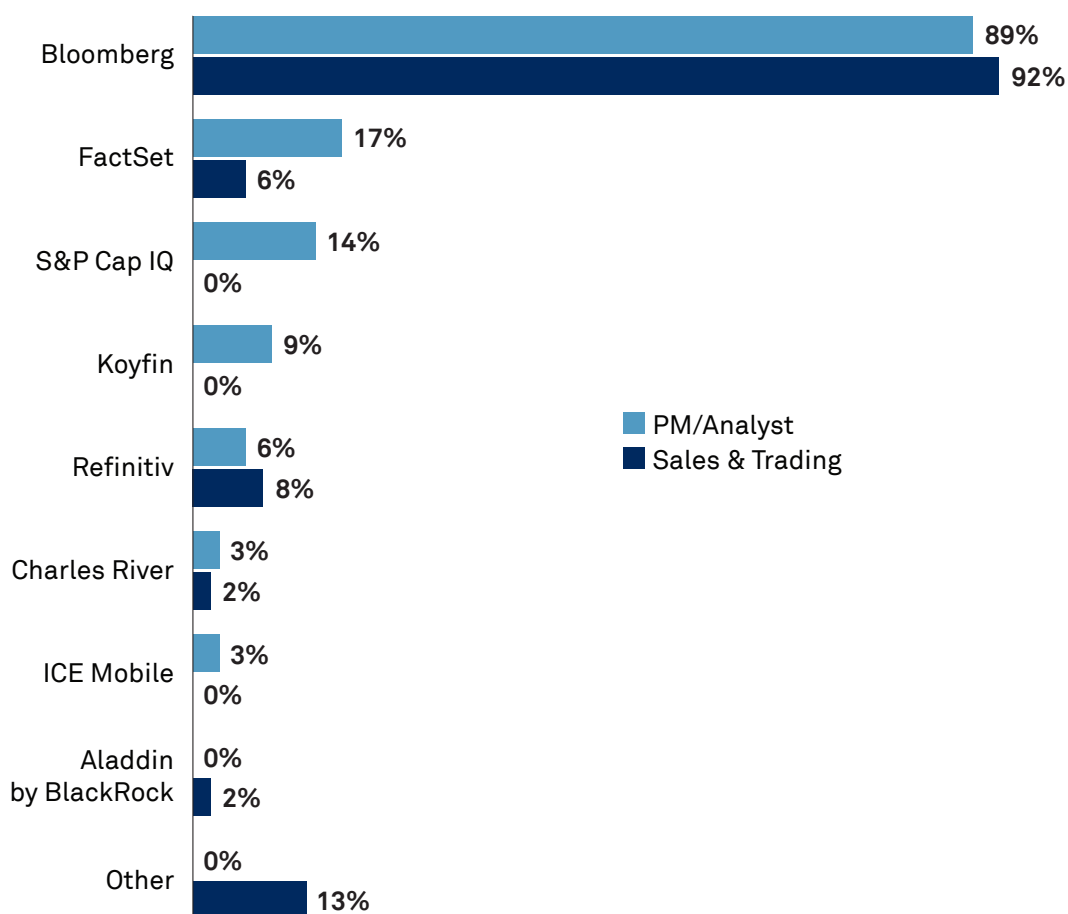
Mobile App Asset-Class Coverage—PMs and Analysts



Note: Based on 36 respondents. May not total 100% due to rounding
 Source: Coalition Greenwich 2022 Mobile App Study

Based on our research, the Bloomberg mobile app is the most universally used by front-office professionals, primarily sales and trading, to analyze investments, consume news and chat with counterparties (92%). This is not surprising, given the ubiquity of the Bloomberg Terminal on trading desks. FactSet and Refinitiv were also used. At the same time, PMs/analysts, who tend to use more apps than other segments, also congregate around the Bloomberg mobile app. FactSet and S&P Capital IQ were much more heavily used by this group as well. PMs/analysts used these apps not only for investment monitoring and market data, but also research, news and charting.

Mobile App Use by PMs/Analysts and Sales & Trading Investments and market data



Note: Based on 48 PM/analyst and 35 sales & trading respondents.
Source: Coalition Greenwich 2022 Mobile App Study

Desired Features: Communication and Collaboration

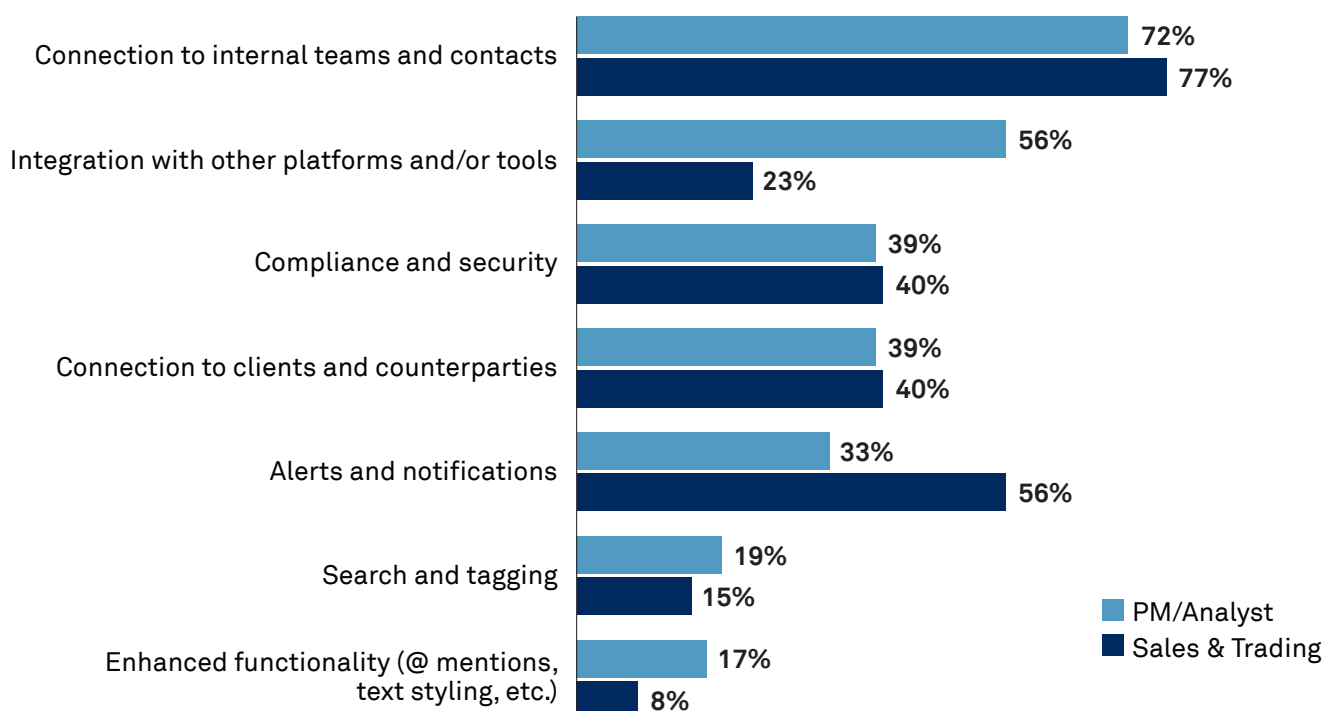
Mobile apps are fostering a move away from email, both for internal and external communication, toward the sharing of text, graphics and charts. Connections to internal teams and contacts has become the most universally desired feature in mobile communication apps over the past few years. Communication in financial markets happens via both financial-markets-specific platforms, such as Bloomberg and Symphony, and more generalized collaboration platforms such as Teams, Slack and WhatsApp.

Not surprisingly, the primary content shared via communication apps is text (73% of responses), well above any other category, with connections to contacts and alerts the most important features. Interestingly, PMs/analysts also care a lot about mobile app integration with other platforms and tools, while sales and trading professionals strongly value alerts and notifications and even the ability to send orders.

Sales and trading professionals are seeking features that would improve their ability to manage relationships and accounts. For instance, sales and trading professionals would like to see “a connection to the OMS” or “an EMS for the phone” or else be able to “send orders via mobile trading.”

But views need to be consistent, with one user suggesting the mobile app “needs to be linked to my EMS, so it should have a duplicate view, so it needs to be the same on both devices.” One mobile user set a particularly high bar, suggesting that for trading, the mobile app “would need to mirror my workstation in real-time.”

Most Wanted Features in Mobile App Communications Platforms



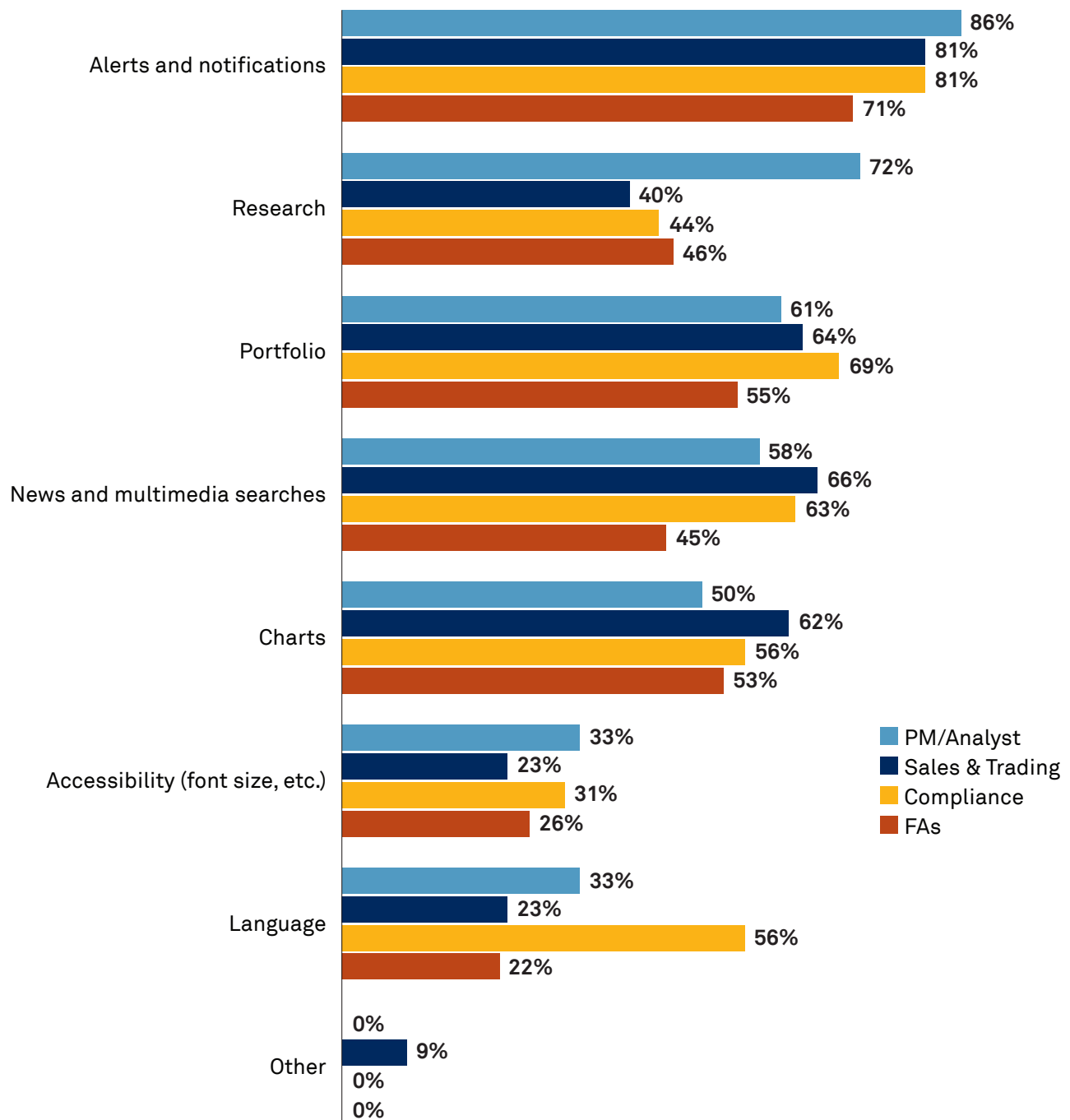
Note: Based on 36 PM/analyst and 48 sales & trading respondents.
Source: Coalition Greenwich 2022 Mobile App Study

There are, however, a variety of problems with consuming content via a mobile app on a smartphone or tablet, centered on connectivity (often outside of the control of the mobile app developer, unless they build in more offline capabilities) and the inherent limitations of a mobile screen. Connectivity in most developed markets is widely available with increasingly higher bandwidths. Even so, apps need to operate with the occasional loss of internet connectivity, leaving users able to still work in the interim until a connection is restored. And while mobile phone screens have grown dramatically in the past decade and the use of tablets has also increased, mobile screens will always offer a form factor different from a desktop environment, requiring a smart porting of enterprise apps that goes beyond simple cut and paste.

With all that in mind, users want to make these apps their own. Changing fonts and switching to “dark mode” are table stakes for developers. More importantly, across all segments, alerts, portfolio, news, and charts are the most desired customization of mobile apps. Naturally, search is commonly requested by PMs/analysts as well, mimicking the experience Google has made us accustomed to in everyday life.

Customized Features Wanted in Mobile Market Data Apps

Investments and market data



Note: Based on 36 PM/analyst, 47 sales & trading, 16 compliance, and 92 FA respondents.
Source: Coalition Greenwich 2022 Mobile App Study

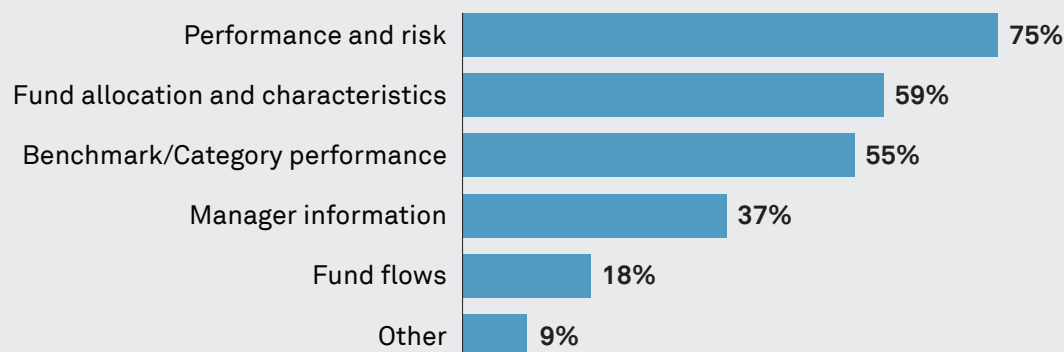
Financial Advisors on the Move

So far, we have talked mainly about institutional professionals, but the use of mobile apps has become a regular experience for end clients at wealth management firms. At the same time, the FAs who serve these clients are also using apps more heavily. Our research shows that 62% of FAs are using apps multiple times per day, with their use expected to increase to two-thirds in the next 12 months. With mobile apps getting better and better over time, it's perhaps no surprise that FAs expect to increase their frequency of use.

Given client interest, staying connected via mobile apps is very important or critical to 74% of FAs. The mobile apps most commonly used to communicate with colleagues and clients are Teams, Outlook and WhatsApp, with WhatsApp more exclusive to Europe.

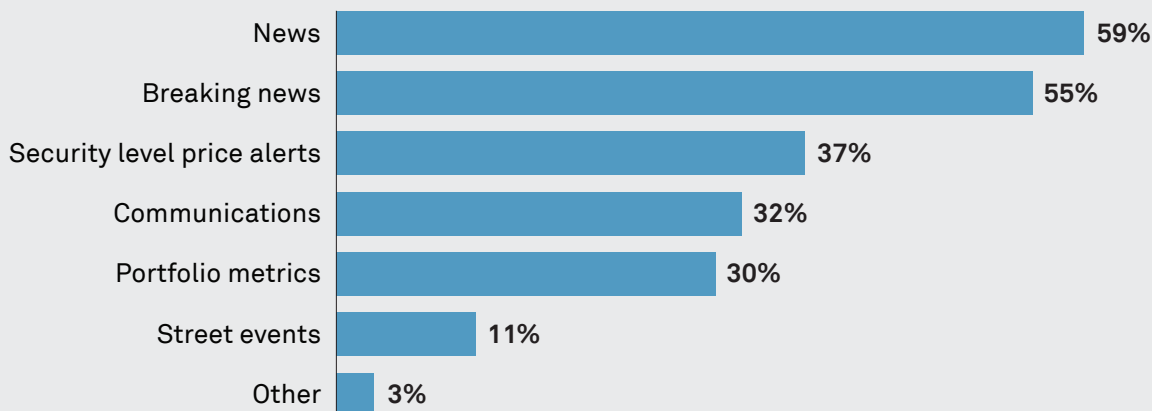
FAs are also consistently hungry for performance and risk attribution data, with 75% identifying this as a key data set. Fund allocation and benchmarking/category performance data are also valued by a majority of FAs.

Key Data Sets Accessed By FAs on Mobile Apps



Note: Based on 101 respondents.
Source: Coalition Greenwich 2022 Mobile App Study

Top Events on Mobile App Notifications Keep FAs Informed

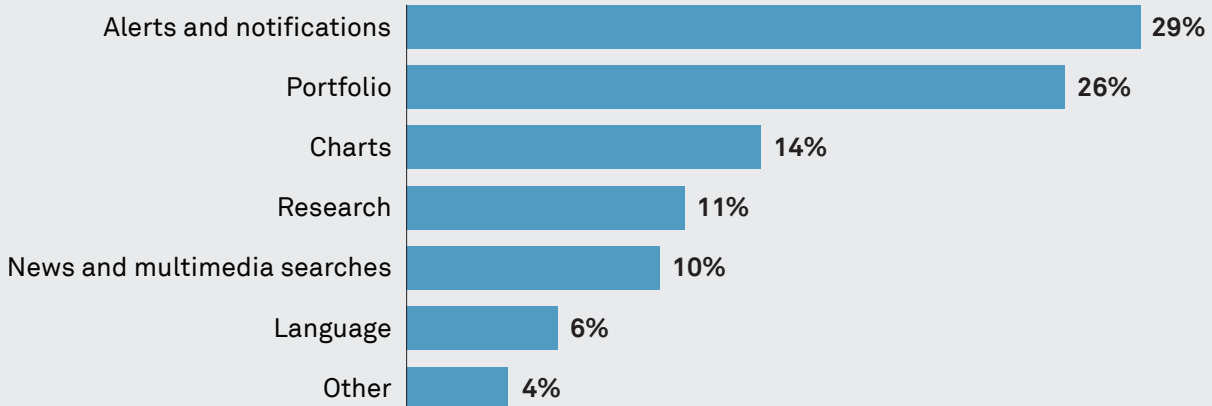


Note: Based on 91 respondents.
Source: Coalition Greenwich 2022 Mobile App Study

Financial Advisors on the Move (con't.)

As for future development, FAs will look to mobile apps for better views into their portfolios, and seek the ability to analyze and adjust them via these apps.

FAs Cite Useful Improvements for Market Data Mobile Apps



Note: Based on 90 respondents.
Source: Coalition Greenwich 2022 Mobile App Study

Communication apps are still leveraged primarily by FAs, which speaks to compliance and other company policies as well as client interest. By far, text is the most frequently shared content.

Calls to Action for Institutions

Once again, while mobile apps were already being adopted by professionals throughout their workflows, the response to the global pandemic gave new working arrangements (including remote and hybrid models) a turbo boost, causing the use of professional mobile apps to skyrocket.

Hybrid working arrangements are not going away. Senior management teams and other decision-makers should realize that mobile app adoption is accelerating, and developers are building apps rapidly to support both FAs and capital markets professionals. Leaders should stay on top of these trends and recognize that mobile devices and tablets are an extension of their platform and, therefore, support continued development.

To provide the best mobile app experience for these professionals, mobile app developers (both third-parties and those at financial institutions) should follow the Three C's as guiding principles. We believe the following actions should be taken:



Consistency

- Developers need to make sure high-quality data is consistently available across platforms, from market data terminals to trading systems to mobile devices.
- With an increasing emphasis on 24/7 online mobile app access, offline mobile app capabilities are also a necessity, allowing users access to stay active and access certain data sets even while offline.



Customization

- Developers must allow professional users to tailor their experience through customized alerts, research, charts, and portfolios within their apps.
- With FAs increasingly using mobile apps (not just for news and prices but also for performance data), greater customization is required for alerts and notifications around performance to make them useful for them and their clients. FAs will also seek the ability to analyze and adjust portfolios via apps on the fly—a leap forward.
- Mobile app developers need to keep compliance professionals top of mind as well, as they will become more frequent users and need their own customized user experiences and views across the trading and investing lifecycle.



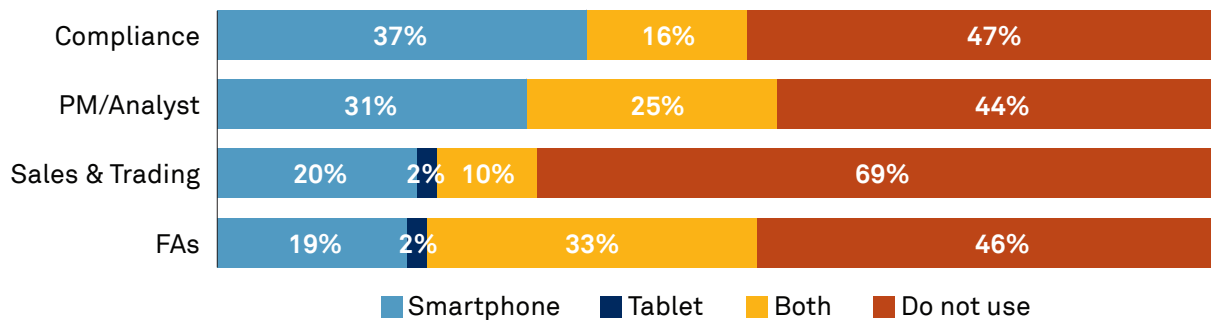
Context

- Developers need to make sure that switching between different platforms is smooth, so that professionals leaving their desk and going mobile (or vice versa) do not see degraded data, communication options or workflow support.
- Mobile apps operate in a regulated construct. Firms should consider deploying more proprietary apps or else increase scrutiny and oversight of third-party apps. (Apps not approved by companies will be far less leveraged, and with recent fines at banks for inadequately supervised communications, these apps will be in greater scrutiny.)
- With professionals increasingly using mobile apps for client communications, and with FA-to-client interaction expanding beyond text, mobile apps must move beyond just basic communications. With collaboration a major feature of mobile apps, connections to internal teams need to be emphasized.

Appendix

Firms are busy building, deploying and improving mobile apps for their professional users. We observe greater than 50% adoption of proprietary mobile apps on smartphones and tablets by FAs, PMs/analysts and compliance professionals. However, for sales & trading, use of proprietary apps is less pronounced, due to sales and trading roles being tied more to an in-person desktop environment, though practices are shifting to more hybrid models.

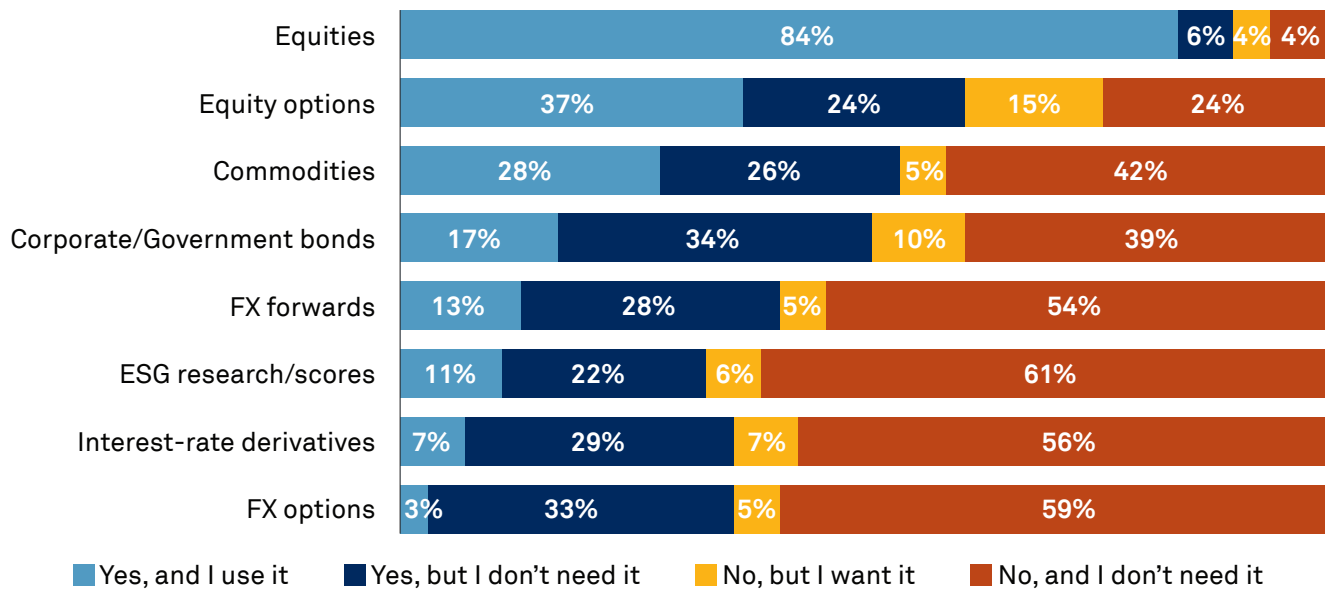
Current Usage of Proprietary Mobile Apps



Note: Based on responses from 36 PMs/analysts, 51 sales & trading professionals, 19 compliance professionals, and 111 FAs. May not total 100% due to rounding.
Source: Coalition Greenwich 2022 Mobile App Study

Sales and trading is increasingly the focus of mobile app developers, as this hybrid model accelerates. However, some asset-class coverage gaps exist. Mobile app asset-class coverage for sales & trading is strong in equities and equity options, with other asset classes like fixed income and FX either less likely to have available coverage, or for sales & trading professionals unlikely to use it.

Mobile App Asset-Class Coverage—Sales & Trading



Note: Based on 49 respondents. May not total 100% due to rounding.
Source: Coalition Greenwich 2022 Mobile App Study

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