



The **Alto**gether Team Collaboration Report



There's no doubt that COVID-19 has impacted businesses of all sizes. In the property market, one of the biggest changes has been the way in which people work together, even when they're not physically together.

Remote working, online viewings and periods of mandatory self-isolation are just three ways in which teams have had to adapt. New processes have been developed; new ways of working refined.

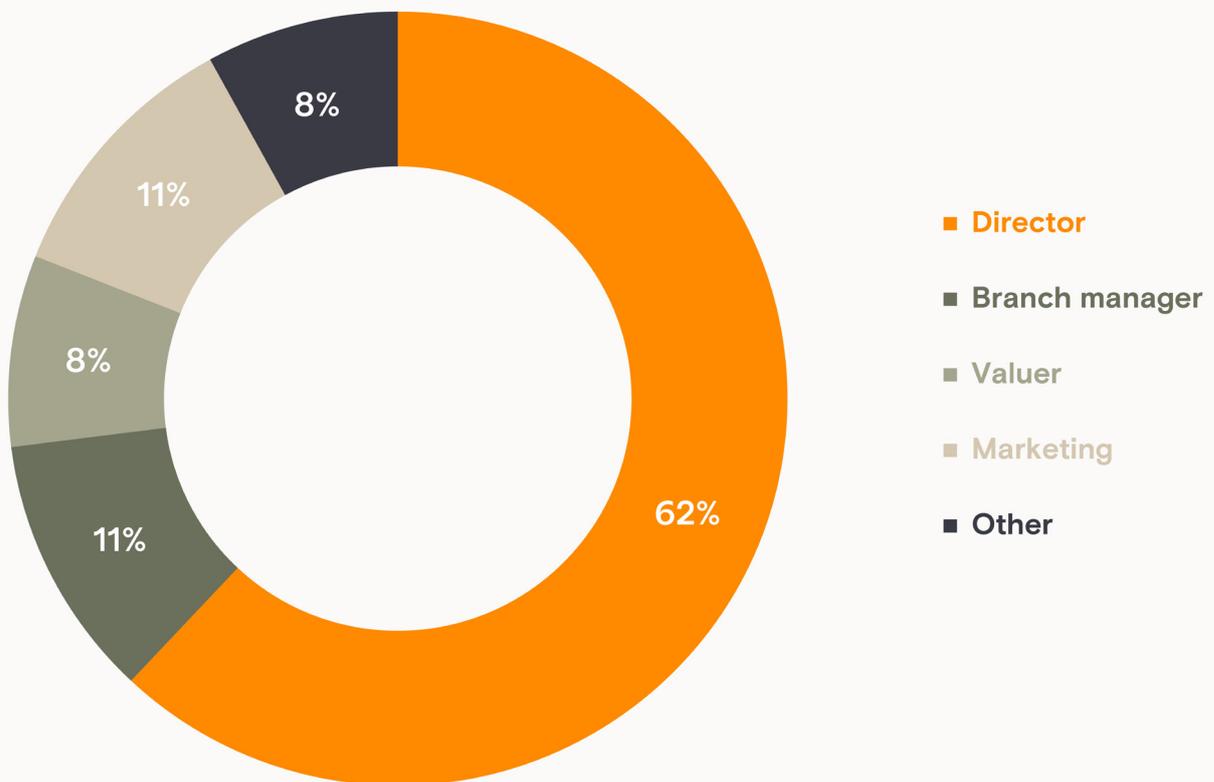
We spoke to a panel of estate agents working across the UK to establish how things have changed since the start of the pandemic. We covered what they've been doing to maintain collaboration in difficult times.

The results, shown in this report, will help other agents to identify opportunities to collaborate and potentially see the benefits of remote and hybrid working as a viable long-term option.

Who we surveyed

“ We spoke to agents working at a variety of levels within the branch. A significant proportion were the directors of their business, who had to radically rework the way their teams operated.

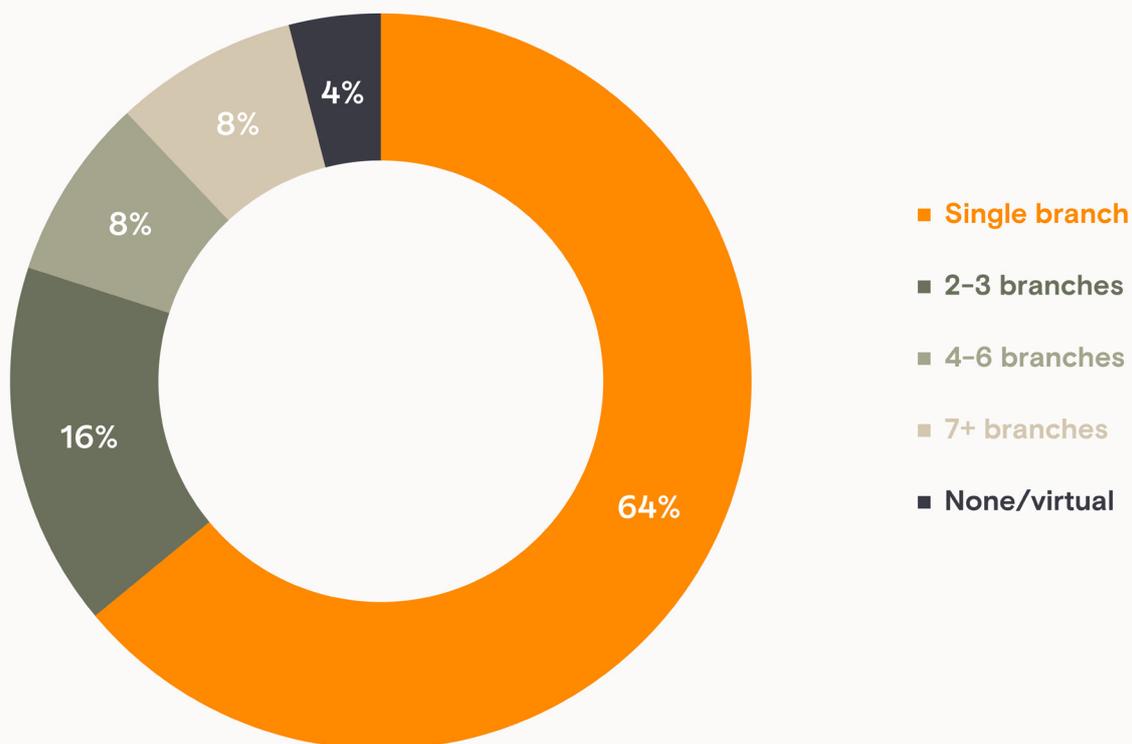
What is your role within your agency?



The size of agencies

“ The majority of agents we spoke to sat in the single branch space. This presented its own challenges during the pandemic - including a previous reliance on physical branch space and less experience of connecting different working sites.

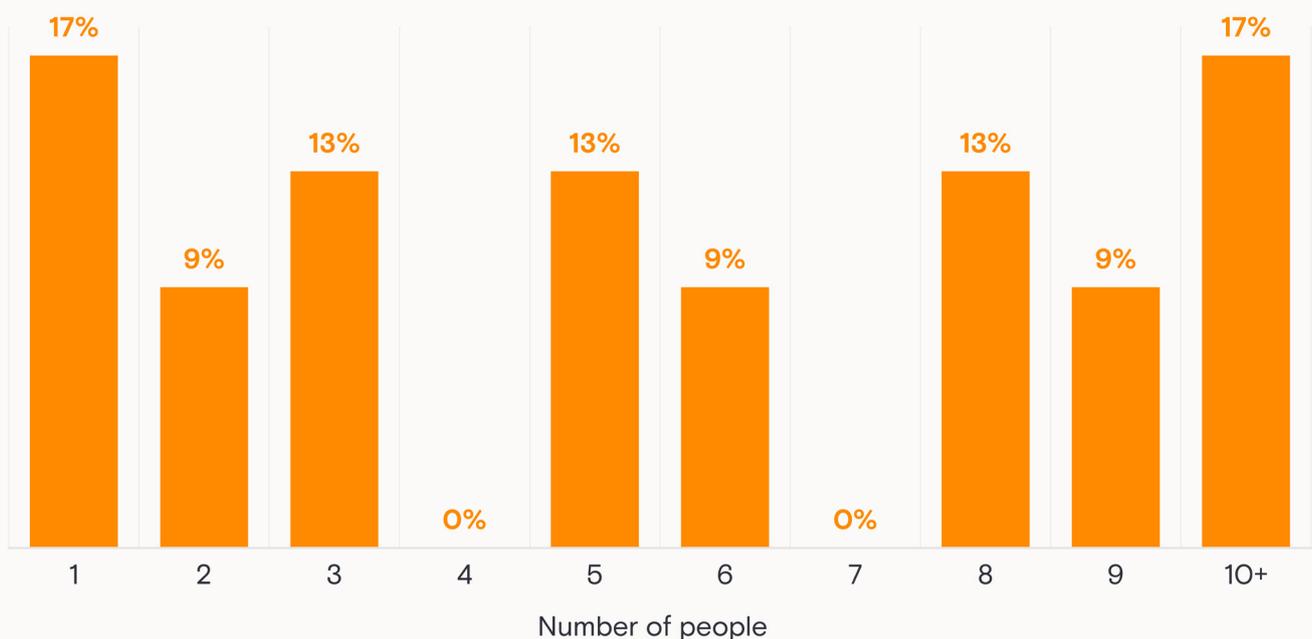
Which of the following best describes your estate or lettings agency?



Number of staff

“ In terms of size of teams, we spoke to a mix - from single staff members through to much bigger operations. Even at the smaller end, collaboration was a challenge, but in different ways. It came through in areas such as connecting with peers and the local community, and avoiding isolation and burnout.

In total, how many people work in your estate or letting agent branch?



Changing team dynamics

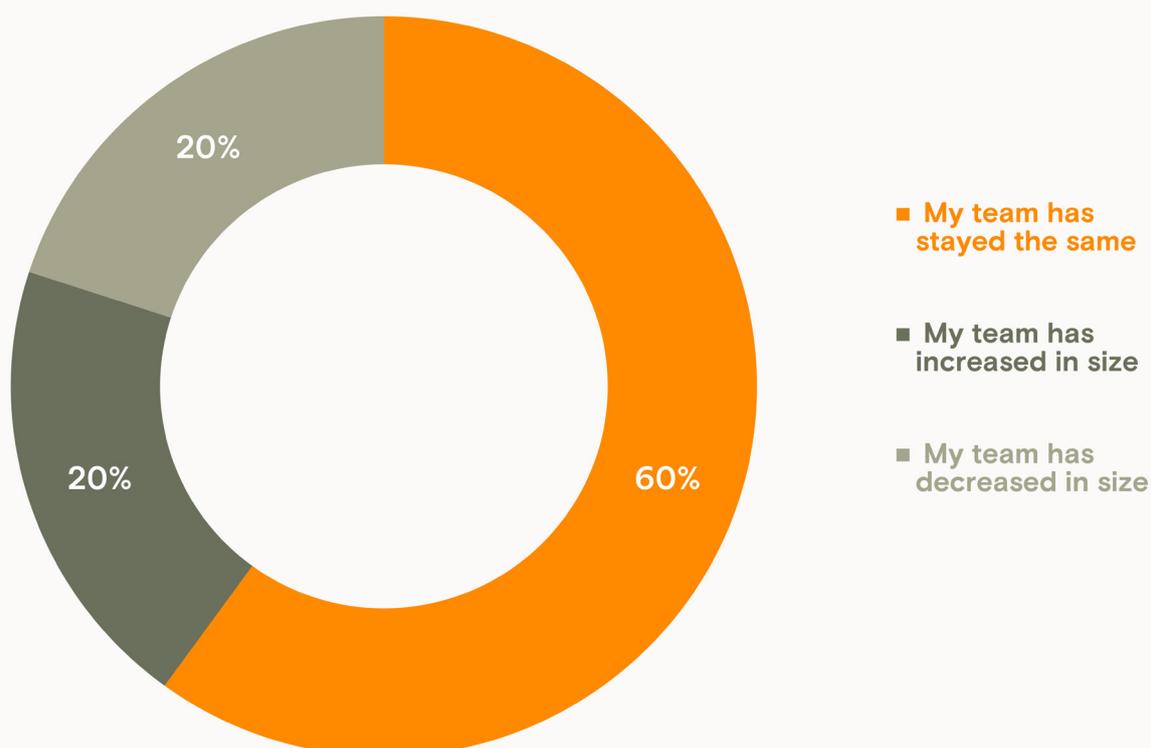
Much has been written about the impact of COVID-19 on peoples' jobs. The most recent unemployment figures from ONS show that the unemployment rate (percentage of economically active people over 16 who are unemployed) was 4.9% between December 2020 and February 2021.

This is higher than before COVID-19 and there are some fears over what impact the end of the furlough scheme will have on unemployment rates.

Although jobs have been lost, the property market has not been one of the industries hit hardest, largely because estate agents have been allowed to trade throughout COVID-19 restrictions unlike retail and hospitality.

It is fair to say there has been a mixed reaction to the challenge of COVID-19 and our research reflects that; some firms have been forced to cut costs and reduce their headcount, but others have seen the opportunity to recruit new talent.

How has the number of people who work in your branch changed over the past 12 months?



New ways of communicating

One of the most obvious ways in which COVID-19 has changed the business world has been the shift to wholly online communication.

Teams meetings and Zoom calls have largely replaced face-to-face internal meetings and it will be fascinating to see the long-term impact this has on collaboration across business sectors.

The property industry is unique, of course, in needing face-to-face visits at specific milestones, including valuation and key handover.

Many estate agents are still keen to offer the option of face-to-face meetings with

purchasers and indeed the guidelines set by the Government has allowed them to do so throughout most of the COVID-19 restrictions.

However, it is clear from our research that the shift in communication has impacted our industry too.

Almost three quarters (73%) of our respondents said that they have introduced new ways to get their team communicating more, either with colleagues or customers.

These include virtual tours and viewings, Zoom/Teams calls, WhatsApp group and screen-sharing software such as Screenleap.



Identifying the challenges to collaboration

We asked our panel to tell us about the biggest challenges they face to successful collaboration across their businesses. Here are the four key challenges that they told us about.

Speed of communication

Of course, it is easier to ask a question across the branch if colleagues are sat opposite you.

However, with the continued development of software solutions like Alto, quick and effective communication is still possible, wherever you are based.

Alto includes PropertyFile integration for instant communication with applicants and vendors, email integration for real-time updates and synchronisation of diaries to enable better team planning.

With the addition of team messenger/chat platforms, there's no reason why speed of communication needs to be hampered.

Team morale and isolation

Remote working has inevitably brought new challenges around team morale.

Many companies we spoke to have introduced systems to check in on their employees and there have been some fantastic wellbeing initiatives.

The key is in keeping people involved - 96% of our respondents said that members of staff in their branch have worked from home since the outbreak of COVID-19 and 45% of those spent more than half of their time at home.

Identifying the challenges to collaboration

Team growth

Even without the added pressures of COVID-19, team growth is always a challenge to collaboration for successful estate agencies.

Getting new team members on board with processes and systems is vital.

Alto software supports this by automating processes on one cloud-based platform, with a series of 'how-to' guides and online videos to support new starters too.

There was a broad split among our respondents in terms of where their team sizes are headed. Some are physically expanding their teams in response to the booming market, and those leaning on technology to do the heavy-lifting traditionally reserved for extra manpower.

Social distancing

Social distancing has been another challenge in the last 12 months, and a number of respondents highlighted the impact it has had on their business.

The need to maintain distance in branches has often been the catalyst for some staff working remotely, particularly where space is at a premium.

The hope is that social distancing will become a thing of the past as the vaccine programme progresses.

But for now it remains an important consideration for the agents we surveyed – especially if the behaviour continues after restrictions fully lift.

Looking forwards

Nobody can truly predict what the post-COVID era will look like, but our research suggests that there will be a permanent change to the way in which estate agents work. Four in ten respondents said that they expect staff to still work from home once all COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

However, whatever the future looks like, teams no longer need to be in the same office to work seamlessly. Cloud-based software

like Alto's solution provide the platform to work collaboratively, with integrated diaries, synchronised emails and real-time communication wherever colleagues are based.

More than half of respondents in our survey use cloud-based software and 12% invested in a cloud-based system since the outbreak of COVID-19 to support collaboration.

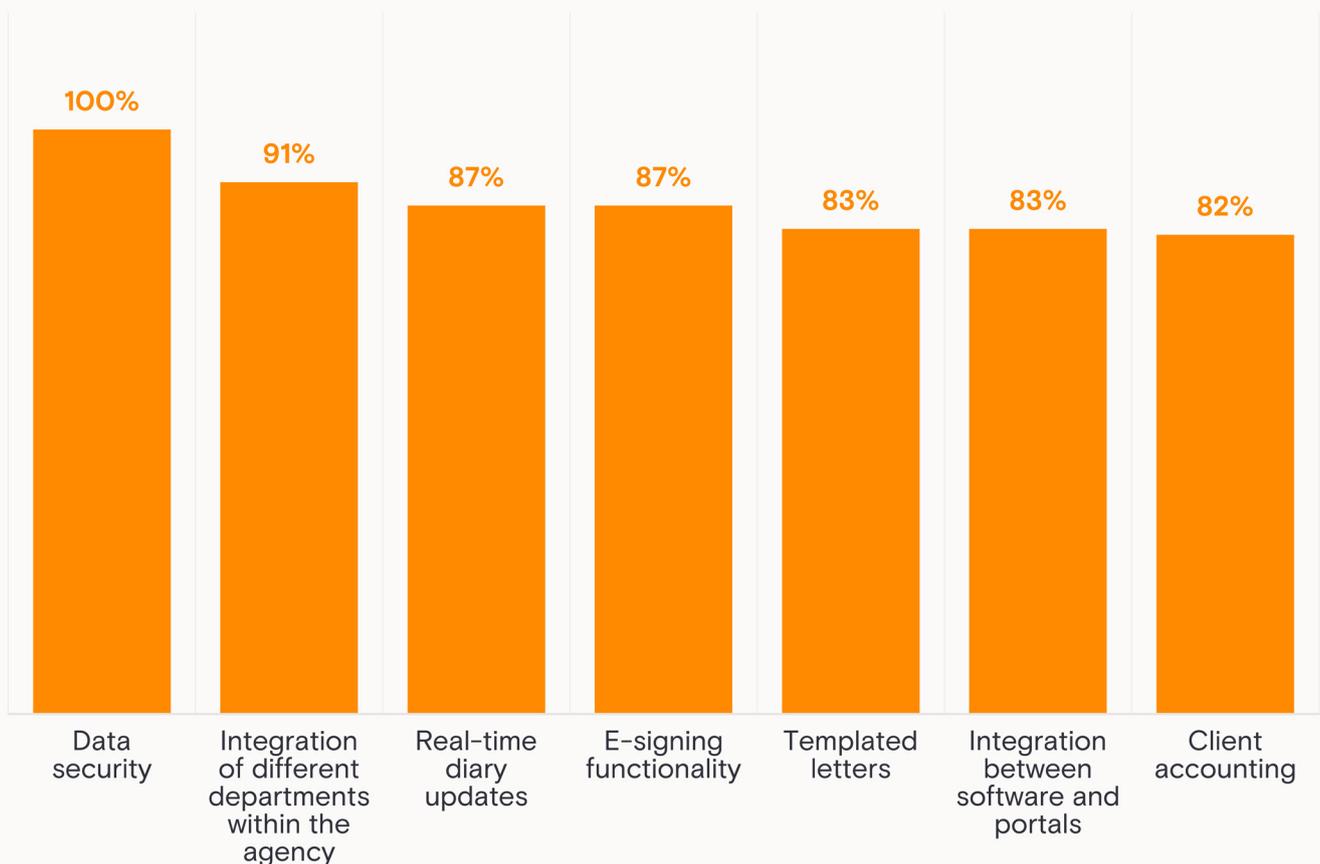


Software needs



When asked about software and team collaboration, our agents were fairly united on their priorities. Maintaining data security remotely scored really highly. The remaining priorities were split across integrations with departments and portals, and tools to free up admin teams.

When thinking about software, which features are the most important for you in terms of team collaboration?



Cloud-based teams

“ Our respondents spoke about how cloud-based software has helped their teams over the past year.

“Remote access has proved invaluable.”

“We’ve relied on access to information from any location, at any time.”

“The option for e-signatures has been a big plus for us.”

“Everyone has access to live information.”

“It’s made working from home and on the road easy and seamless.”

The **Altogether** Team Collaboration Report

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