

Managing expectations for summer communication

Camp as Reality Show?



To Begin....

An Exciting Announcement

New 24/7 Communication Package

- Redefines summertime communication between camps and parents.
- Created with the most demanding parents in mind.
- Designed in consultation with the American Camping Association.
- Numerous other outside agencies (all with 3 initials) contributed as well:



Transportation
Security
Administration



CENTRAL
INTELLIGENCE
AGENCY



ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES



U.S. SECURITIES AND
EXCHANGE COMMISSION



Federal
Communications
Commission

THE **FBI** FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY



CENTRAL SECURITY SERVICE

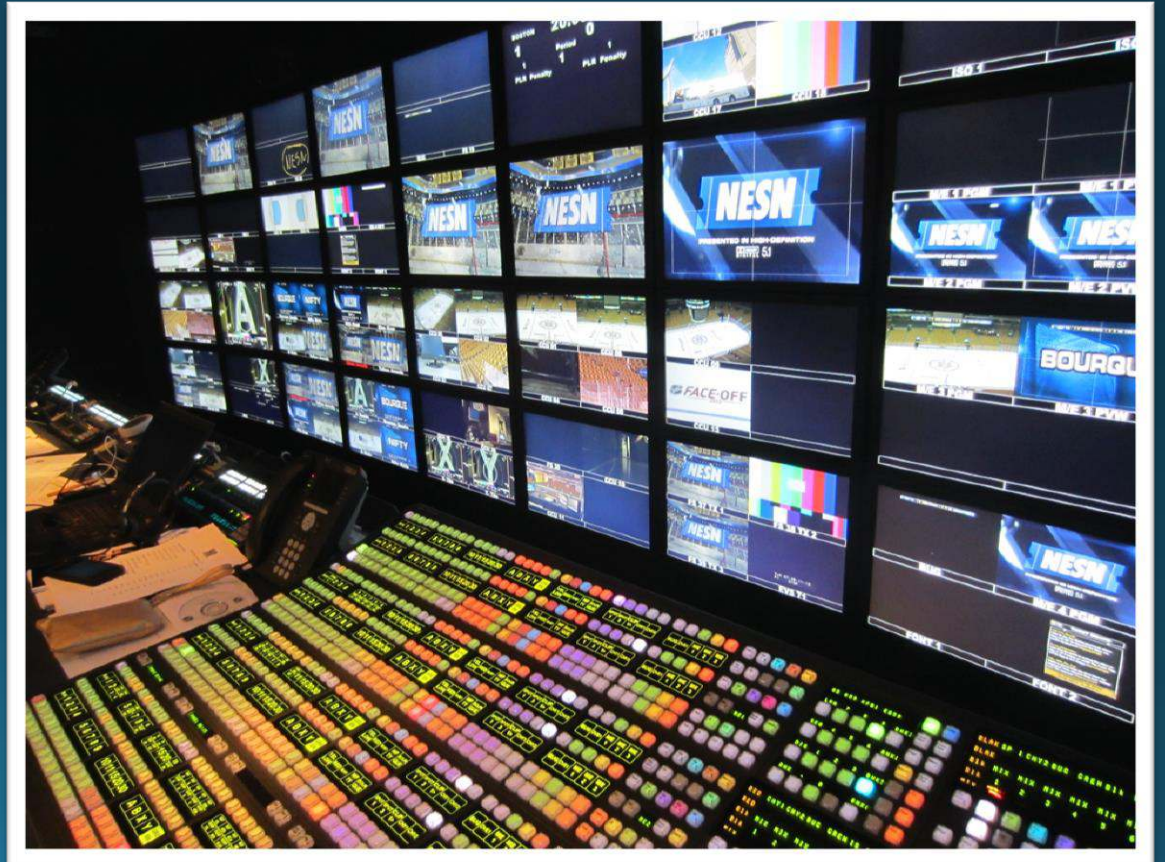
Defending Our Nation. Securing The Future.



The philosophy behind this new package: *No intrusion on the camp experience is too extreme*

- Multiple ceiling cameras in every cabin;
- Mattresses equipped with heart and respiratory monitors;
- Outdoor microphones throughout the camp, intended to capture those *private* conversations that help you to create **“vignette stories about each day”**, **“allow parents to rank each day on a 1-10 scale for happiness”**, and identify **“issues [he] was dealing with, struggles [he] overcame, highlights, quotes overheard, etc.”**;
- Underwater cameras and microphones in the pool and lake;
- Real-time satellite and drone HD imagery of camp grounds; and
- Automated hourly text messaging directly to parents.

A state-of-the-art tactical command center to manage the entire communication process



But seriously.....

Our Premise

For *some* parents, expectations for the frequency and level of detail of camp communication during the summer have reached (and by all indications, will remain at) unrealistic levels. Herein lies the question:

Should camps surrender to these unrealistic expectations or should they seize control of the conversation, literally and figuratively, and craft their communication strategy based on what best serves their *overall* parent and camper base as well as what is most realistic and practical for the camp?

Today's presentation will....

- (1) Provide perspective on the whole issue of communication while acknowledging the pressure you're feeling from some parents;
- (2) Suggest that camps do have a choice...our experience shows there is no single, best-practices, "one-size-fits-all" solution; and
- (3) Showcase approaches from camps who have developed reasonable strategies that take control of communication in ways that work sensibly and effectively, both for parents and themselves.

Keep in mind that we are not talking about communication as response to direct parental contact--a phone call, an email--but rather, about the depth and frequency of camp's efforts at sharing information during the summer about camp life in general and about each camper individually.

“Love all of the online pictures! But my child wasn’t smiling. Something must be wrong.”

Great Expectations

We Feel Your Pain

- We've seen comments in CSI related to communication almost double in the past 5 years.
- From an American Camping Association webinar (in 2013):

“All the camp directors, program directors, and health personnel in attendance reported that they were spending more time than ever before communicating with parents. They detailed making more efforts to anticipate parental concerns and to calm them by phone, blog, e-mail, and newsletters.”

What's Changed?

Again, from the ACA webinar:

- More fear... “Many parents are raising children with trauma theory in the back of their minds — feeling that preventing lifelong psychological harm to their kids from [things like] bullying or sexual abuse is their most important job.”
- Less unstructured play... “Over the last thirty years, we have witnessed the decline of neighborhood play, so parents do not get the chance to watch their youngsters engaged in the natural flow and inevitable conflicts of children participating in free, undirected play.”
- Less time apart... “Parents are increasing the amount of time they spend with their children; compared to twenty years ago, college-educated mothers have doubled the number of hours per week they spend with their children.”

Most parents are satisfied...and reasonable

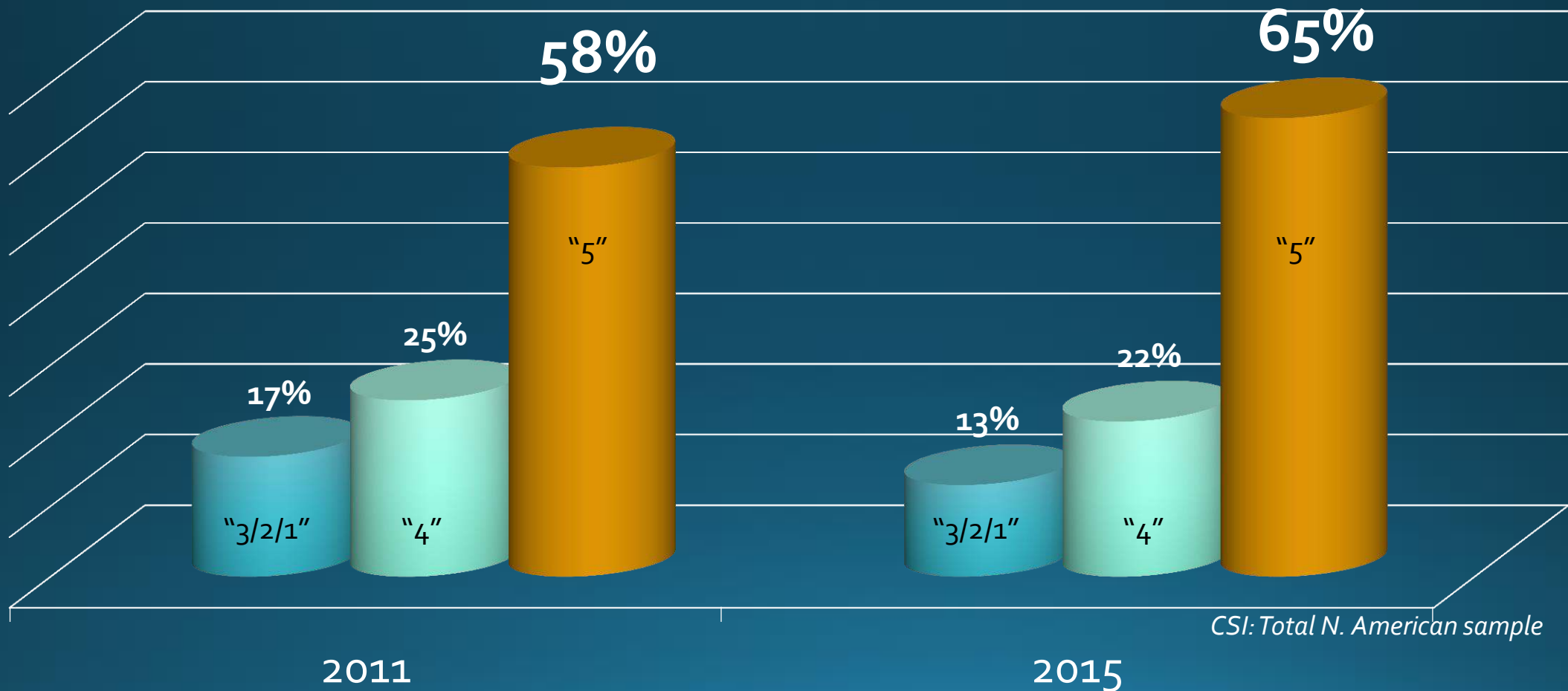
Some Perspective

Overall, CSI shows....

- Satisfaction with overall communication has improved over the past 5 years. The “5” rating now exceeds 60%. This rating is similar across all camper age groups and varies relatively little by region. (Highest in Midwest at 68%, lowest in Canada at 62%).
- 70% of parents want daily communication about their child; 30% want daily communication about the camp. But these are averages and the range of results is wide.
- Predictably, parents of younger campers want more frequent communication than parents of older campers.

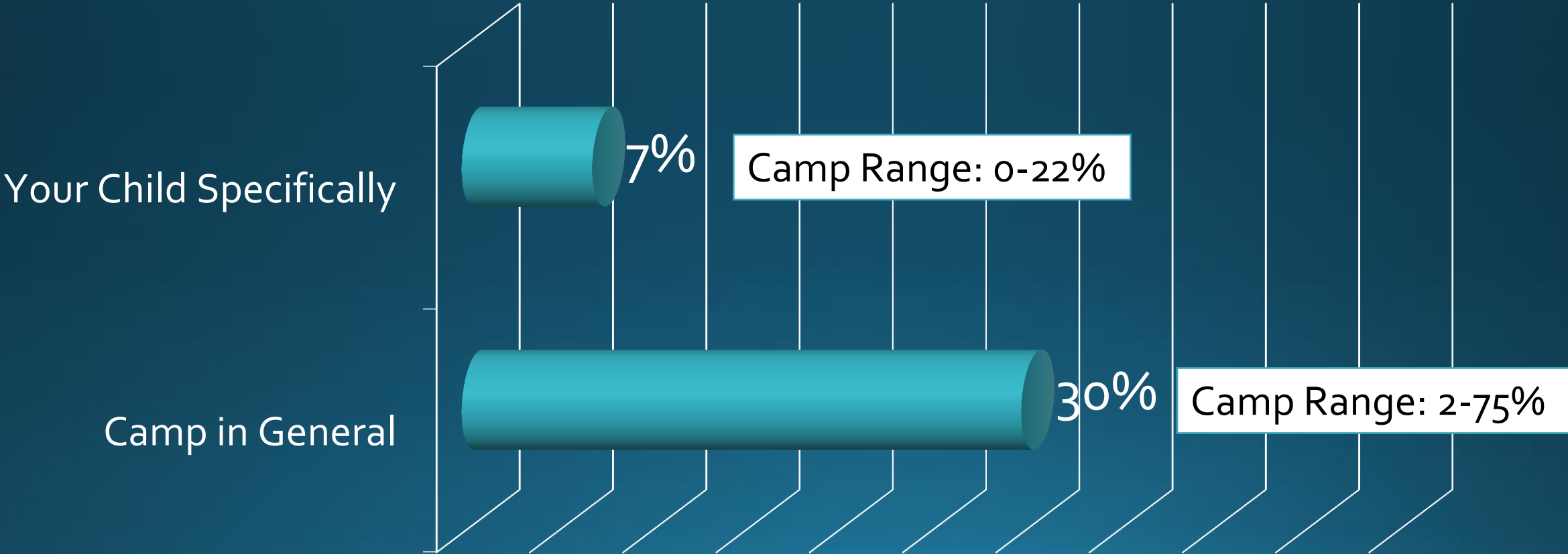
CSI Rating: Overall Communication

“Overall, the camp’s communication with parents during the summer (in terms of its content, clarity, and timeliness), directly and/or online.”



Communication *Every Day* of the Session

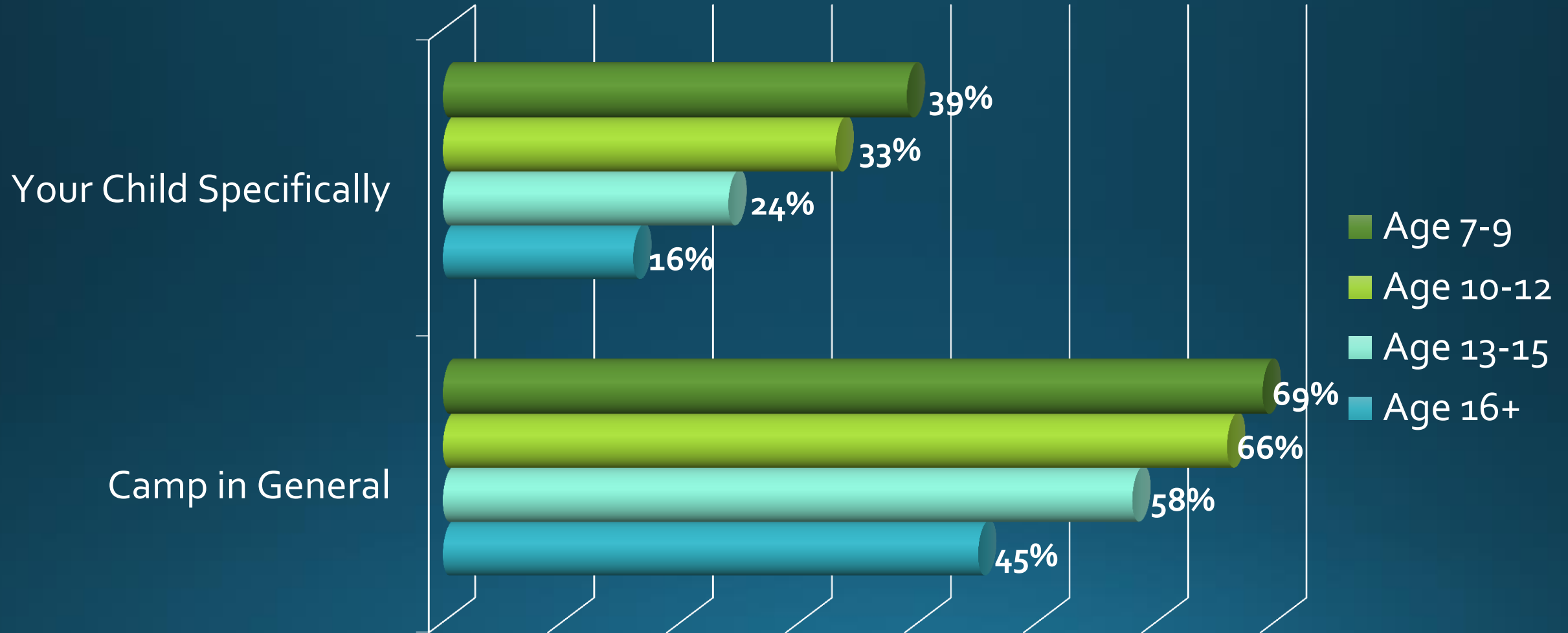
“Ideally, how often would you like the camp to be staying in touch and sharing information about your child’s camp experience?”



CSI 2015: Total N. American sample

Communication Every Day or Every 2-3 Days

By camper's age



CSI 2015: Total N. American sample

Realistic expectations of what you can accomplish

Finding Balance

More does not always equal better

- Despite your best efforts, for some, it will never be enough.

Again, from the ACA webinar, “despite adding many new layers of communication between camp and parents, and sometimes between children and parents, only a slim majority of camp personnel saw their efforts as resulting in lower levels of parental anxiety. Many others experienced parents as being as worried as ever or growing more anxious, even with all the increased attention.”

Great communication does not always equal high satisfaction

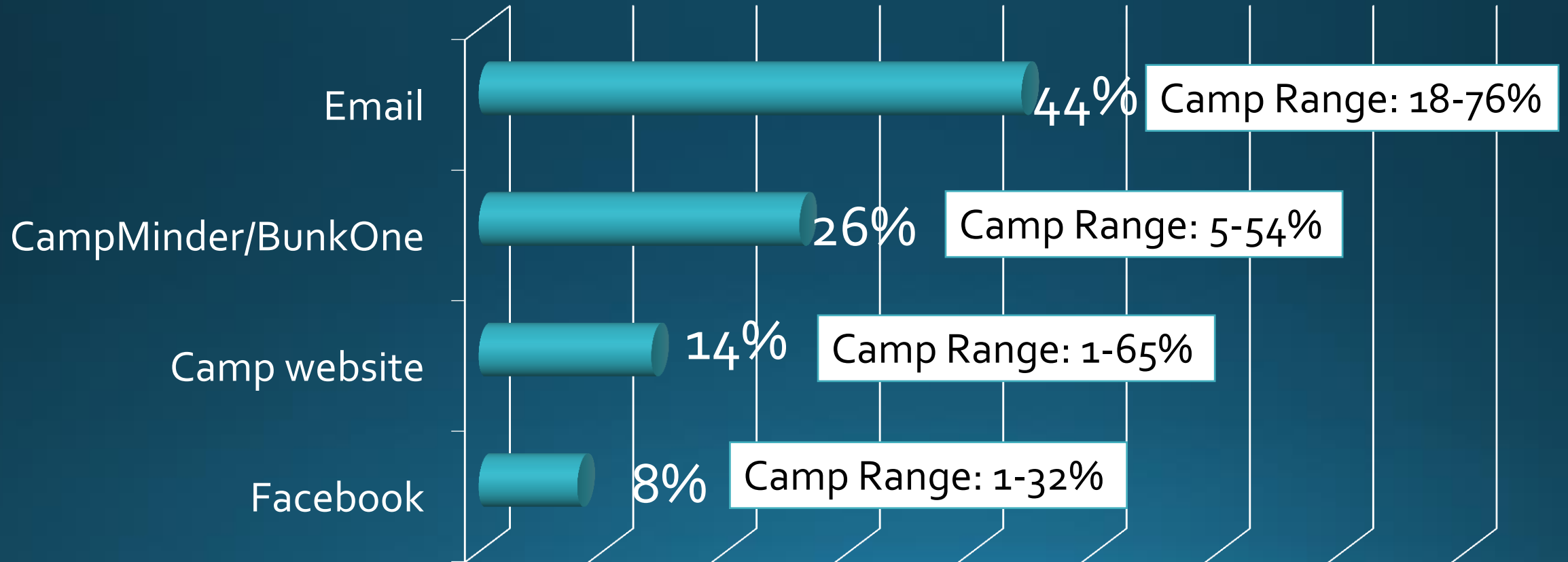
- In 2015, of the 10 camps receiving the best rating on overall communication, 5 were in the top-10 for overall satisfaction and likelihood-to-recommend, 5 were not.
- By contrast, the majority of camps receiving a top-10 rating on **overall leadership** were in the top 10 for overall satisfaction and likelihood-to-recommend.

In search of best practices

- Hard to find because of:
 - (1) the reality of differing resources available by camp, and
 - (2) varying parental expectations/demands by camp (remember the *range* of results we just reviewed)
- We haven't seen a one-size-fits-all communication plan for message content, schedule for sharing that content, or mix of communication vehicles to deliver that content.

In search of best practices

“...one most effective method used by camp to stay in touch and share information while your child was at camp”



CSI 2015: Total N. American sample

Should camps surrender to these unrealistic expectations or should they seize control of the conversation and craft their communication strategy based on what best serves their *overall* parent and camper base as well as what is most realistic and practical for the camp?

Revisiting Our Premise

Our recommendation

- Act boldly...yes, “seize control” ...consider your specific families and make deliberate, informed decisions as to where you want to be, then develop the appropriate strategies/tactics, and finally, work aggressively to establish and manage expectations.

Our recommendation

- In other words, develop and articulate a communication “philosophy” that finds the balance between what most parents say is needed and what your resources determine is possible. Then, make sure parents know where you are.
- Be “strategic and *purposeful*” in your communication—carefully consider and scrutinize the messages you’re sending.
- Consider what your pictures/blogs/emails/website postings/CampMinder messages are saying to parents about camp.
- *This* impacts overall satisfaction because it gives parents insight into all of the dimensions of summer camp--programming, leadership, social environment, Jewish life, and facilities--that they might not be aware of or fully appreciate just from conversations with their children.



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On-the-ground perspectives

Our Panelists