



How the Media Covers Layoffs, and What It Means for Reputation

A cross-industry analysis of how the media covers major layoff announcements, built on Signal AI data across 23 companies in five industries.

23

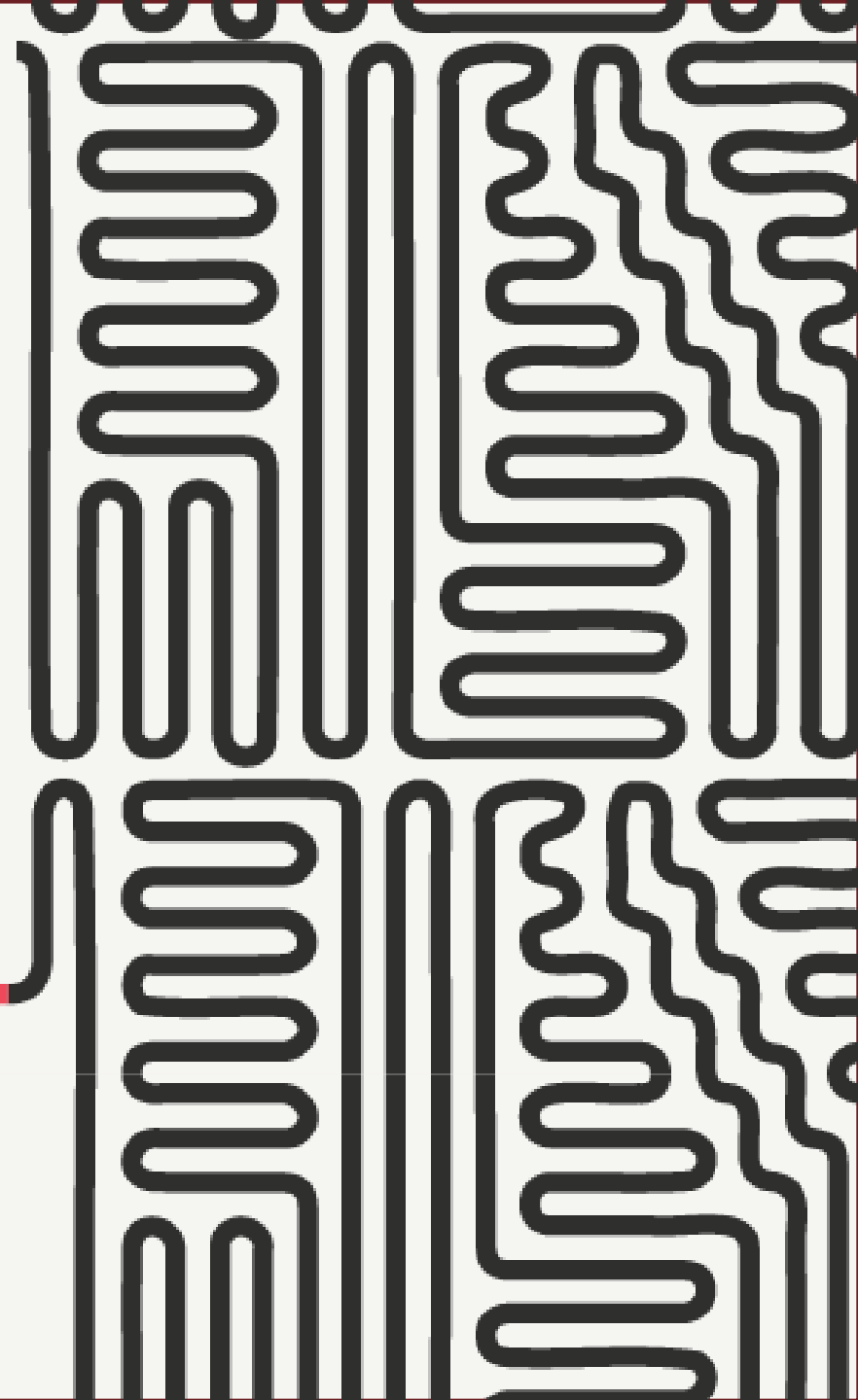
Companies, five industries

190,000+

Stories via Signal AI

31pt

Gap between tech and
finance layoff coverage



What's in this report.

00 **Front matter** 02 – 04

Executive summary	03
Methodology & how to read this report	04

02 **What moves layoff sentiment** 08 – 11

The channel shapes the verdict	09
The cause	10
The forces you can't control	11

01 **The year in layoffs** 05 – 07

A record year, and a new reason	06
How the coverage skews by industry	07

03 **What to do about it** 12 – 15

Five changes before the next announcement	13
What works, and what doesn't	14
About Signal AI	15

How a layoff gets covered depends less on the layoff than on who's cutting, and why.

This report analyzes how companies communicated layoffs between 2025 and 2026, and why some organizations managed to contain reputational damage while others amplified it. The findings point to a clear pattern: communication quality materially influences media outcomes. Companies that communicated early, visibly, and specifically generated stronger sentiment outcomes than those relying on vague language, delayed statements, or investor-first messaging.

01

Industry sets the starting point

The industry a company is in shapes the coverage from the outset. Tech layoffs are read against the wider story about AI and jobs, which makes for tougher coverage. Cuts at banks read as more routine, so they draw far less attention. Tech and finance effectively start in different places.

02

The reason you give matters

The stated reason for the cuts tracks closely with how they land. Layoffs attributed to AI drew the most negative coverage of any reason in the data. Cuts tied to a merger drew the least, since they tend to be seen as part of a deal rather than a standalone call.

03

The channel shapes the tone

The mix of media carrying the story affects its tone. Broadcast coverage tended to be the most balanced and the least negative, while print was the most critical. Broadcast also made up only a small share of the coverage overall.

04

Some forces sit outside your control

A few things sit largely beyond a company's messaging. Bigger companies and bigger cuts drew more negative coverage, individual layoffs were often folded into wider "wave of layoffs" round-ups, and coverage outside the US ran harder than at home.

How to read this report.

METRIC	WHAT IT MEASURES	HOW TO INTERPRET IT
Net sentiment	% positive minus % negative across brand coverage	Scale -100 to +100. Higher means more positive overall coverage.
Tier 1 penetration	% of layoff articles in publications with 10M+ monthly visitors	Quality indicator: are the cuts reaching publications that move investors, policymakers, and talent?
Salience	Signal AI score based on mention position, prominence, and article length	How central the company is to the article. High means the company is the subject, not a passing mention.
Media type	News, print, broadcast, or social	Each format carries a different sentiment profile. Broadcast tends to balance; print runs hardest.
Volume (stories)	Count of distinct news stories	The scale of media attention. High volume amplifies whatever the tone already is.
Sentiment split	Share of positive, neutral, and negative coverage	Shows whether coverage is polarized or flat, not just the net score.

HOW WE SCOPED THE COVERAGE

Twenty-three companies, five industries.

We pulled every article tagging one of 23 companies across five industries under Signal AI's downsizing and redundancy topics, then scored sentiment at the company-mention level. No manual coding: every figure is platform sentiment.

OUR DATA

AI-powered intelligence.

All figures cover 23 companies across five industries, April 2025 to April 2026: approximately 193,000 distinct news stories, scored with AI. Cause, pile-on, and geography cuts are keyword or segment approximations.

The year in layoffs

2025 was the heaviest year for job cuts since the pandemic, and 2026 is running faster still. First the scale of the wave, then how differently the media judges it from one industry to the next.

A record year for cuts, and a new reason for them.

US employers announced 1.2 million job cuts in 2025, up 58% on the year and the most since 2020. Tech set the tone, and AI became one of the most-cited reasons for the cuts.

The pace has only quickened: 2026 is running at roughly 1,115 tech-sector cuts every working day, nearly double 2025. The reason itself isn't new, but the context is. These cuts aren't a response to a downturn. They're profitable companies trimming staff to redirect budget into AI, and a layoff made from a position of strength reads very differently from one made under pressure.

For communications teams, that mix is the hard part: record volume plus a reason the public reads as a choice, not a necessity. It's what turns a routine cut into a reputation event, and it's why how you announce now matters as much as whether you cut.

Table 1. 2025–6 layoffs in numbers.

MEASURE	FIGURE	WHAT IT TELLS US
US job cuts (2025)	1.2M	Up 58% on 2024 and the highest total since 2020.
Tech-sector cuts (2025)	153,536	Up 17% year on year. Tech drove the narrative for the whole market.
AI-attributed cuts (2025)	54,836	54,836 AI-attributed cuts in 2025, more than half of all 99,470 AI-tied cuts since 2023.
Tech cuts per working day (2026)	~1,115	Nearly double the 2025 pace; Q1 2026 was the worst quarter in years.
AI capex at the big cutters	\$725B	Amazon, Microsoft, Meta and Alphabet are cutting staff while raising AI spend (Amazon's AWS grew 24%, capex up 77%).

Sources: Challenger, Gray & Christmas; company results; news coverage, 2025–26.

Tech layoffs are covered hardest. Bank layoffs barely register.

Grouped into five industries, the same kind of decision drew very different coverage. **Technology layoffs ran the most negative** (−30.9% NS) and generated about ten times the volume of any other sector, because the AI-and-jobs story has turned tech cuts into a running national narrative.

Financial-services layoffs came in close to neutral (−0.1% NS), and it isn't because banks have escaped AI. Their executives have been blunt about it: JPMorgan, Citi, and Goldman have all named AI as a reason headcount will fall. The difference is how the cutting happens. Tech announces in discrete, headline-grabbing events, a company, a date, a number, which gives the press a single moment to pile onto. Banks lower headcount quietly through attrition, redeployment, and smaller analyst classes, with no one announcement to cover. No event, no pile-on, so the coverage reads as routine cost discipline rather than a story.

Table 2. Net sentiment of layoff coverage by industry.

INDUSTRY	NET SENTIMENT	KEY STORIES
Technology	−30.9%	143,353 stories, about ten times any other sector. The AI-layoff narrative drives both the volume and the negativity.
Media & Entertainment	−24.7%	12,503 stories. Streaming-crisis and new-CEO cuts at Disney, Paramount, and Warner Bros.
Consumer & Retail	−24.6%	14,893 stories. Household-name cuts at Nestlé, Starbucks, and Nike land hard with the public.
Industrial & Manufacturing	−15.3%	8,088 stories. Restructuring and plant cuts read as structural, not dramatic (Boeing, GM, Dow).
Financial Services	−0.1%	14,186 stories, but near neutral. Bank job cuts barely move the needle (JPMorgan, Citi, Goldman, HSBC).

What moves layoff sentiment, and how much you control.

Our data points to five forces. Two are yours to shape: the channel you put forward and the reason you give. Three are mostly out of your hands: the scale of the cuts, the global pile-on, and which markets pick up the story. The split is the useful part. It shows where effort actually changes the coverage, and where the smarter move is to brace for it rather than try to prevent it.

SECTION 02 · THE CHANNEL SHAPES THE VERDICT

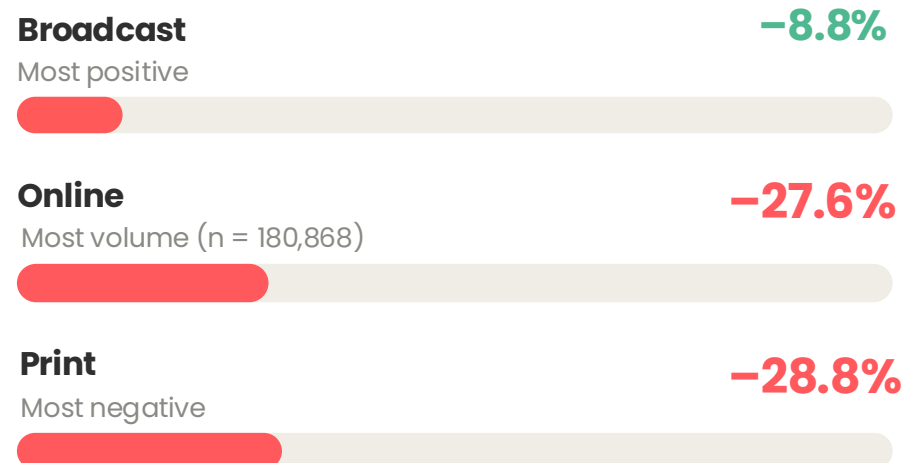
Broadcast coverage is consistently less negative, and most companies generate almost none of it.

Across 190,000+ layoff stories from 23 companies, broadcast coverage (−8.8% NS) scored well above online news (−27.6% NS) and print (−28.8% NS).

Broadcast formats tend toward balance: a spokesperson quote, an analyst comment, an employee perspective. Print runs hardest of all, because print reporters do the deepest investigation and the most employee sourcing.

The catch is volume. Broadcast is a sliver of layoff coverage, roughly 5,100 of 193,000 stories, so the least-hostile channel is the one most companies leave empty. **Putting a named spokesperson on air early is one of the cheapest moves in the data: it shifts coverage toward the one format that reliably gives a fair hearing.**

NET SENTIMENT BY MEDIA TYPE 23-COMPANY DATASET



SECTION 02 · THE CAUSE

Blaming AI is the most damaging reason to cut.

Layoff coverage reads very differently depending on the reason given. Across the 23 companies, cuts framed around AI or automation drew the most negative sentiment (−25.3% NS). Financial-performance (−21.9% NS) and cost-cutting (−21.1% NS) framing ran milder, and cuts tied to a merger were the least damaging (−15.6% NS), because the logic is structural and expected.

The mechanism is human: 'AI did it' reads as a company choosing efficiency over its own people, while a merger reads as circumstance. **The takeaway is blunt. If AI is the real driver, pair the announcement with visible proof of where the investment is going or expect the harshest reading of all.**

NET SENTIMENT BY LAYOFF DRIVERS

23-COMPANY DATASET

Merger or acquisition (least damaging)

−15.6%

n = 29,759 stories



Cost-cutting/efficiency

−21.1%

n = 75,517 stories



Financial Performance

−21.9%

n = 78,331 stories



AI or automation (most damaging)

−25.3%

n = 135,406 stories



Three forces no message can fully offset.

Some of what shapes layoff coverage is out of a company's hands.

Scale is one: the bigger the company and the cut, the more negative the coverage. The smallest cuts stay near neutral (Cloudflare +19.5% NS, Dow -0.6% NS) while the largest run to -33% NS and worse.

The pile-on is another: about one in six layoff stories is a multi-company 'wave of layoffs' roundup, and that coverage runs harsher (-34.2% NS) than a company's own (-27.1% NS). And geography: US coverage was the mildest (-21.1% NS), while everywhere else was tougher (-29.7% NS), with India the second-largest market after the United States.

None of this is cause for fatalism. It is a reason to plan: brief regional teams, expect to be bundled into the roundup, and judge the response against what a company in your position can realistically shift.

NET SENTIMENT BY SOURCE LOCATION

23-COMPANY DATASET

US coverage

n = 59,729 stories

-21.1%

Coverage everywhere else

n = 133,294 stories

-29.7%

1 in 6

layoff stories is a multi-company 'wave of layoffs' roundup, running harsher (-34.2% NS) than a company's own coverage.

SECTION 03

What comms teams should do differently before the next announcement.

The findings point to a short, repeatable checklist. None of it costs budget. All of it costs discipline, and it has to happen before the announcement, not after the first wave of coverage.

Five changes **before the next announcement.**

01

Decide where the story should land, and on which channel.

Broadcast coverage ran least negative (−8.8%) and most companies generate almost none of it. Line up a spokesperson for broadcast and an owned channel before the announcement, not after the first print story sets the tone (−28.8% NS).

02

Frame the decision, do not let AI frame it for you.

Coverage led by AI or automation language ran more negative (−25.3% NS) than cuts tied to a merger (−15.6% NS), or to cost and financial reasons (approx. −21% NS). If AI is the real reason, show the investment behind it. Cloudflare paired its cuts with visible AI spend and finished net positive (+19.5% NS).

03

Plan for the pile-on, not just your own statement.

About one in six layoff stories is a multi-company 'wave of layoffs' roundup, running harsher (−34.2% NS) than a company's own coverage, and the toughest coverage is international (−29.7% NS outside the US). Brief regional teams early and expect your cuts to be bundled with everyone else's.

04

Publish the public statement simultaneously with employee notification.

The gap between employee notification and public statement is the window the negative narrative fills. Comms and legal must run in parallel, not sequentially.

05

Set your net-sentiment baseline before the announcement and monitor daily.

Sentiment is decided in the first 72 hours. Track net sentiment daily from day one, so secondary narratives (pay contrast, selection method, support adequacy) do not set before you have a response ready.

**Learn what makes
Signal AI's sentiment
model unique** →

What works, and what doesn't.

✓ WHAT THE DATA SHOWS WORKS

Lead with the person, then the strategy

Journalists write from the first paragraph, so name the people affected before you explain the business logic.

A non-AI rationale

Cuts explained by cost or financial reasons (around -21% NS) drew less negative coverage than those blamed on AI (-25.3% NS).

Cuts with a visible rationale

Cloudflare and Cisco showed the investment behind their cuts and led the set, at +19.5% and -4.5% NS.

Broadcast over silence

Broadcast coverage ran far milder than print across the dataset, at -8.8% NS versus -28.8% NS.

✗ WHAT THE DATA SHOWS DOESN'T

No public statement

Saying nothing was the worst move in the data: one company drew 436 articles at -93.6% NS, a 30-day spiral with no floor.

Ceding the story to print

Letting print lead set the harshest tone of any channel, at -28.8% NS.

AI framing without visible proof

Blaming AI with nothing to back it up drew the most negative coverage of any stated reason, at -25.3% NS.

Being swept into the pile-on

Getting bundled into a multi-company roundup ran harsher than a company's own coverage, at -34.2% NS versus -27.1% NS.

NEXT STEPS

How will your next announcement score?

The comms leaders who outperform start measuring before the announcement, not after it. That head start is the whole advantage. Signal AI helps communications teams track sentiment, monitor narrative shifts, and benchmark announcement coverage in real time.

[Request a demo](#)

About Signal AI

Signal AI is a leading Risk and Reputation Intelligence company. We use AI to uncover reliable signals in the world's data so business leaders can navigate risk and strengthen reputation.

Our proprietary AIQ engine transforms external data from traditional and social media across 226 markets and 120+ languages, turning 2.6B+ documents a year into insights you can act on. You see reputational shifts as they form and track sentiment as it moves, so you decide with evidence instead of instinct.

Fortune 500 leaders and 800+ customers worldwide rely on Signal AI to spot the signals that matter in the outside noise. Founded in 2013, we've spent over a decade building the intelligence that helps executives see clearly, decide confidently, and act boldly.

[Learn more at signal-ai.com.](https://signal-ai.com)