Closing the discoverability gap

Session sponsors **Edison** and **Euroland IR** explain why companies who are not optimising their communications for artificial intelligence are missing out on a growing number of retail investors.

The investor landscape is changing. Retail investors now account for 38% of all directly held US equities, placing them, collectively, among the largest active ownership blocs in the market. As passive funds have absorbed much of what was once active institutional capital, retail investors have increasingly filled that void – and the trajectory is structural, not cyclical.

The picture for IR teams shows a notable gap. A Euroland study conducted over the past year had researchers pose as retail investors, sending simulated but realistic queries to IR managers across the UK, Nordics, Middle East and Asia Pacific. The UK response rate was 8% – and the picture was broadly the same in every region surveyed. At the Society conference, 17% of IR professionals said retail engagement was a strategic priority, though a further 43% said it was a growing focus.

Retail investors have arrived, but IR programmes have not kept pace.

The barriers are real – and solvable

The obstacles are familiar. Conference attendees were asked about the biggest blocker to doing more with retail investors, 36% cited not enough time or team capacity; 24% said difficulty proving ROI; and only 8% named compliance or regulatory risk.

These are not reasons to avoid retail engagement; they are problems that technology has now made solvable.

The discoverability gap

Where retail investors first discover a company has changed dramatically. 27% of attendees said retail investors first find their company through ChatGPT or other AI tools – narrowly ahead of their own IR website at 24% and Google at 26%.

This matters because much of what listed companies produce – annual reports, investor presentations, strategy updates – is effectively invisible to AI systems. Content buried in PDFs is not indexed, not searchable and not surfaced. IR teams create more content than ever, but much of it never reaches the investor asking for it. The answer is practical and cultural: make official IR content discoverable by AI, create a channel on your own website where investors can query it directly, and start treating investor questions as intelligence rather than inbox noise.

This also applies to third-party research. Without open-access, independent coverage, retail investors are left to rely on whatever they can find – which may be incomplete or simply wrong. The information gap doesn't just disadvantage investors; it disadvantages the companies that aren't being talked about.

What is possible: the bp case study

In 2025, bp partnered with Edison to reach US retail investors through a digital campaign, drawing on independent analyst research, targeted digital distribution, and investor sentiment measurement.

The first wave, focused on two demographically distinct US markets over six weeks, demonstrated what is achievable. The campaign reached 11.6m unique investors and delivered 41.8m impressions, with more than 650,000 landing page visits. Average engagement sessions ran from 28 seconds to over a minute – genuine attention, not passive scrolling.

The sentiment data were equally compelling. Recognition of bp as a 'long-term stable operator' increased by 8.5% among exposed investors, compared with those who were not; 'financial discipline perception' improved by 6.6%; and stated 'likelihood to invest' improved by 19.6%.

BREAKOUT SESSION 3

MAXIMISING ENGAGEMENT WITH RETAIL INVESTORS THROUGH LEVERAGING AI AND DIGITAL MARKETING

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The question is not whether, but how

Most IR teams know retail engagement matters, but many lack a clear path to getting started. The tools now exist to reach large numbers of investors efficiently, measure what is working, and build a retail shareholder base that holds through volatility. Companies that start now will find the advantage compound. Those that wait may find themselves playing catch-up – and nowhere is that more consequential than when an activist arrives on the register. ■

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