

# Why Email Is Still King

KnowledgeMill Email Trends Report 2026

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This report examines how organisations are using email in 2026, and how modern communication and collaboration tools are reshaping user behaviour.

The insights presented here are drawn from a range of industry and vendor sources, providing a comprehensive view of email's role today, and its trajectory into the future. A full list of sources is included at the end of this report.



# Executive Summary

Email remains the dominant force in business communication in 2026, despite years of disruption from collaboration and messaging platforms. While tools such as chat, video, and project management platforms have transformed how teams interact, they have not replaced email. Instead, they have reshaped its role. Today, email serves as the universal, system-integrated, and legally reliable layer of communication across organisations.

## Key trends define this shift:

- **Email still accounts for the majority of business communication**, with approximately 60% of interactions taking place via email, particularly for external engagement.
- **Mission-critical functions rely heavily on email**, with up to 85% of high-stakes communication occurring within departments such as IT, HR, Legal, Finance, and Customer Success.
- **Modern tools have fragmented communication**, increasing the need for a single, authoritative channel to document decisions and maintain accountability.
- **Email volume continues to rise**, with professionals receiving an average of 117 emails per day, contributing to ongoing challenges around prioritization and productivity.
- **Email has become a primary source of corporate data**, contributing to >80% of unstructured organisational data and creating significant implications for storage, compliance, and governance.

As a result, email is no longer just a messaging tool it has evolved into the system of record for business communication. Organisations are increasingly formalizing this role through communication policies, positioning email as the default channel for:

- External communication
- Formal decisions and approvals
- Legal and financial documentation
- Audit and compliance tracking

Rather than declining, email is becoming more critical shifting from conversation to documentation, accountability, and control.



### Key takeaway:

The organisations that recognise and optimise this shift will be better positioned to manage risk, improve operational clarity, and unlock the full value of their communication data.

# Is Email Losing Its Importance?

With the rapid growth of collaboration platforms, it would be reasonable to assume that email is in decline. For several years, this has appeared to be the direction of travel. However, the reality is more nuanced.

Despite increasing competition, email has retained, and in some areas strengthened, its role within organisations. Several key factors explain why.

## Universal Communication

Collaboration tools have seen widespread adoption across teams, departments, and entire organisations. Ironically, their success has also become a limitation.

There is no single platform that has achieved universal, cross-organisational adoption. Different companies, and even different teams within the same company, use different tools. Email remains the only truly universal communication channel.

Every business can send, receive, and rely on email. This universality ensures its continued dominance, particularly for external communication with customers, suppliers, and partners.

Even in 2026, studies indicate that up to 60% of business communication still takes place via email.

A bar chart with two bars. The first bar is dark blue and reaches a height of 60%. The second bar is light blue and is shorter, reaching approximately 40%. The text "60%" is written in large, bold, blue font above the first bar.

60%

Of business communication still takes place via email.

## Integration with Business Systems

Email is no longer just a communication tool, it is embedded deeply within organisational infrastructure.

Core business systems such as CRM, compliance platforms, finance systems, and IT service management (ITSM) tools are all designed to integrate with email workflows.

This makes email a critical data layer within the enterprise. It is not simply how people communicate, it is how systems operate, trigger actions, and maintain records.

Replacing email would therefore require replacing or redesigning large portions of the enterprise technology stack, something few organisations are willing or able to do.



# The Rise (and Limits) of Modern Communication Tools

Platforms such as Slack, Microsoft Teams, and WhatsApp have transformed internal communication. Their real-time nature provides speed, convenience, and a sense of immediacy that email often lacks.

As a result, a significant portion of informal and team-based communication has shifted away from the inbox.

However, this shift has introduced new challenges:







- Fragmentation across multiple tools
- Limited visibility and oversight
- Uncertainty around data ownership and compliance
- Difficulty tracking decisions and accountability

In response, many organisations are introducing communication governance frameworks, defining which tools should be used for specific types of communication.

Within these frameworks, email has re-emerged as the primary channel for formal, traceable communication.

## A Layered Communication Ecosystem

Rather than replacing email, modern tools have created a layered communication model:

Type of Communication	Dominant Channel
Quick internal discussions	Chat Platforms 
Meetings	Video Platforms 
Project tracking	Project management tools 
Formal decisions	Email 
External communication	Email 
Legal/financial documentation	Email 

In practice, email is evolving into the “digital paper trail” of the organisation. Its role is shifting, from a conversational tool, to a system of record for decisions, approvals, and accountability.

# The Default for High-Stakes Communication

As email's role has evolved, so has its importance. It is now widely regarded as the default channel for communication that must be:

- Auditable
- Traceable
- Compliant
- Defensible

This is particularly evident in functions such as:

- IT
- HR
- Legal
- Customer Success
- Finance

In these areas, studies suggest that up to 85% of mission-critical communication takes place via email.

These teams operate under higher levels of operational risk, regulatory scrutiny, and reputational exposure, making reliable record-keeping essential.

Email provides a consistent and trusted way to document decisions, maintain visibility, and ensure accountability.

A bar chart with two bars. The first bar is dark blue and reaches the 85% mark on the y-axis. The second bar is a lighter shade of blue and is shorter, reaching approximately the 15% mark. The text "85%" is written in large, bold, blue font above the first bar.

# 85%

Of mission-critical communication takes place via email.

## The Volume Problem

Despite the rise of alternative tools, email volume continues to grow. The average professional now receives around 117 emails per day, with a noticeable increase in large distribution threads. Emails sent to 20+ recipients have risen significantly year-on-year.

The result is a familiar challenge: information overload.

Inbox management remains a daily struggle, with many users beginning their day as early as 6am to regain control over an ever-expanding flow of communication.

The number of emails received by an average professional daily.

117

Increase in the volume of email with 20+ recipients.

7%

# The Unstructured Data Challenge

**Behind every inbox lies a much larger issue: data.**

Each email, attachment, reply, and CC contributes to a rapidly expanding pool of unstructured data. Research from IDC and IBM consistently shows that >80% of unstructured corporate data originates from email, attachments and communication data such as chat logs and collaboration content.

**This creates several challenges:**

- Storage demands and infrastructure strain
- Rising data management costs
- Difficulty in classification and retrieval
- Increased compliance and security risk

What was once a communication tool has become one of the largest and least controlled data sources within the enterprise.

For organisations, this represents both a critical dependency and a growing operational burden.



> 80%

A bar chart with two bars. The right bar is significantly taller than the left bar. The right bar is blue and contains the text '> 80%'. The left bar is a lighter shade of blue and is mostly obscured by the right bar.

Of unstructured corporate data originates from email and attachments.

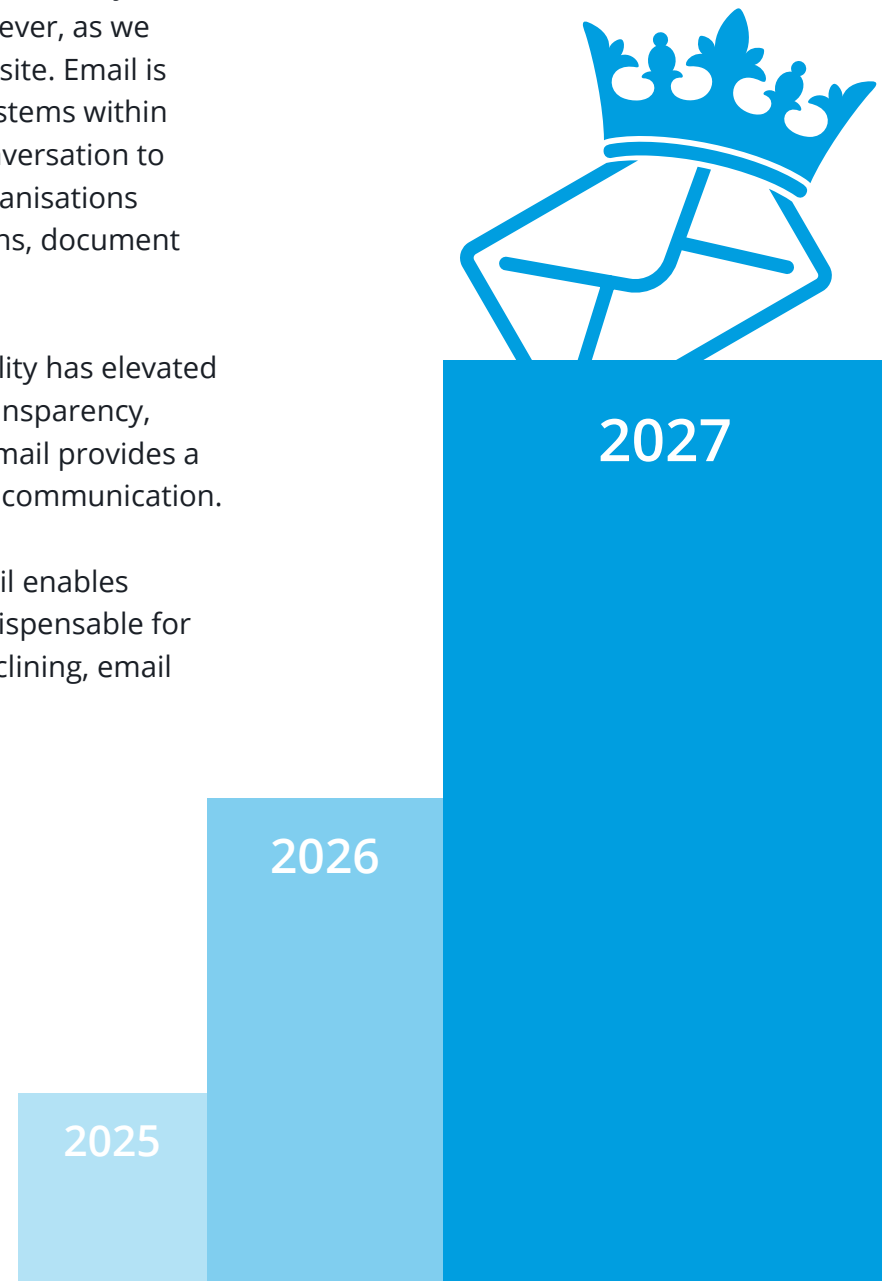
# The Future for Email

For years, email has been framed as a declining tool, overshadowed by the rapid rise of messaging and collaboration platforms. However, as we have found in this report, the reality in 2026 is quite the opposite. Email is not disappearing, it is evolving into one of the most critical systems within the modern enterprise. Its role has shifted from everyday conversation to something far more valuable: a trusted system of record. Organisations increasingly rely on email to confirm decisions, approve actions, document agreements, and manage external communication.

At the same time, the importance of compliance and auditability has elevated email's strategic value. Businesses must now demonstrate transparency, accountability, and traceability across their operations, and email provides a consistent, time-stamped, and universally accepted record of communication.

Unlike fragmented exchanges across multiple platforms, email enables organisations to track who said what and when, making it indispensable for audits, legal discovery, and risk management. Rather than declining, email usage is becoming more intentional and more critical.

As its importance continues to grow, so too does the need for organisations to actively manage, control, and optimise email as a critical business asset rather than simply a communication tool.



## Sources

**Microsoft** – O365 Work Trend Index Report 2026

**Exclaimer** – Email trends 2026

**Indectron** – Email usage and data trends

**IBM** – Unstructured data in the modern enterprise

## About Knowledgemill

Knowledgemill automates the complex process of organising, sharing, and retrieving emails and documents from anywhere at any time – without leaving Outlook. We turn unmanaged email data into a centralised, searchable and AI-ready knowledge asset. Using Knowledgemill Mail Manager boosts productivity, ensures legal compliance, and significantly enhances digital transformation initiatives. Learn more at [www.knowledgemill.com](http://www.knowledgemill.com)

