

Predicting the Future of Email

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Is email dead or dying?

I think we're past this silly debate now, and we can all agree that email will still exist in our lives in the mid- to long-term at least. This doesn't mean that email won't change in shape or usage. Quite the contrary: what makes email still relevant is its ability to evolve with the changing needs of an ever-growing Internet, so it's only logical to assume that this evolution will continue. Here are a few predictions on what's going to happen to email in the near future:

- Lighter (messaging like)
- Smarter (AI-assisted)
- More connected (platform)
- Multiplayer

Email will be lighter

My first prediction is that formalism in email will slowly die. If everyone is sending 50 or more emails a day, then a good way to save time is to cut down on things that don't really matter, like spending minutes finding a good Subject line. It's already happening: the Subject line is slowly getting pushed away from the [Inbox](#) interface. The messages will be shorter (to the point that a regular year 2020 email will look like a rude year 2000 email), will include more emojis and maybe even gifs (to the point that a professional 2020 email will look like a casual 2000 email), until the email and messaging (SMS, Whatsapp, Messenger etc.) experiences eventually converge.

In pursuit of the same goal — helping people spend less time on unimportant email-related tasks — sending and receiving emails will take less clicks or touches, with the mobile experience growing further away from the desktop versions of email clients.

Email will be more connected

This additional connectivity will work both ways:

Pushing data into your email client to get more context will become easier. **LinkedIn** might have

prevented Rapportive from fully achieving this vision, but the idea of a contextual inbox is more relevant than ever.

Conversely, pulling data out of email and making it available to third parties is clumsy and hard today. Whether it's silently pushing events to your calendar, syncing people with your contact list, adding tasks to a to-do list, or updating a CRM entry, email is crying for better integrations.

IFTTT, Zapier and the likes are maybe too "broad usage" services to go back to the specific problem of building the email platform of the future, but it only means that there's an opportunity for other companies!

Email will be smarter

One of the earliest essays of pg's, from 2002, was [about spam](#) and its threat to email. The challenge then was to automatically identify and filter out "unsolicited, undesirable" emails before they reached your inbox. A lot of people and money has been invested in trying to solve the email spam problem, and those efforts were successful: it can be considered one of the most successful uses of artificial intelligence to date. However, since then intelligence in email has been lagging behind.

The next step after contextualization (the email platform mentioned earlier) is AI-assisted emails. Google is the player most likely to come up with a virtual assistant who has not only learnt from your behavior, but also from the collective behavior of millions of other email users. Inbox, the Gmail successor, is going in this direction with "auto-labelled" messages and selective notifications. The next step is to suggest the next best action: add to calendar (at a convenient time and place), suggest an answer, snooze until one week before, etc. Of course the last step will be to act on your behalf, with auto-replies. Much like the Out of Office messages of today, except for everything else. When this finally happens, we'll probably be spending most of our time on holidays anyway :)

Email will be multiplayer

The email protocol was flexible enough to survive up until today, but inherent weaknesses are putting some heavy pressure on its long-term relevance. For instance, any 3-way (or larger) conversation quickly turns into a nightmare. Quoted text adds up to clutter and slow down even the best clients around. The CC and BCC features are just copy-pasted from an offline era: in **digital** form they're just awkward and error-prone.

What Google Docs did to Word documents, is likely to happen within email in the next few years: on top of the efforts towards a lighter email experience, collaboration features will arise, especially for internal email communication:

- CCs and BCCs should disappear and give way to a "share" feature.
- Forwarding a mail will be replaced by a "comment" function.
- Reply-all will give way to subscribe/follow mechanisms.

That's it. Of course, as for all predictions, I could be wrong — but even if these don't pan out exactly as I described them, the issues mentioned above will eventually have to be resolved, one way or another.

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