



15 Trends For Leaders to Expect in 2019, Including a Surprise about Email

Dan Busby, President, ECFA

1. **The digital revolt will ramp up.** *It is a seeming contradiction!* Over 50% of people want you to communicate with them by email (direct mail is the next popular channel, coming in at only 20%).¹ And 38% would like emails to come even more frequently.² But 59% of people do not want to give you their email address.³ Email is the original social network, but users now expect a consent-based use of their data. The second email they receive without their consent is considered spam.
2. **There will be more staff meetings.** The “Rockefeller Habit #3: Meeting Rhythm” is getting traction—and it is about time.⁴ The daily huddle, the weekly meeting, the monthly management meeting, and the quarterly and annual planning meetings should be priorities—period! Otherwise, you are leaving productivity—an outcome of good stewardship—on the table.
3. **Communicating via mobile devices will continue its meteoric rise.** 47% of all email is opened on a mobile device—and this percentage is rising. Folks will Google your website on their mobile device, so your site needs to be mobile-friendly. By 2020, approximately 80% of the content consumed will be video, and it will be primarily viewed on mobile devices.
4. **The economy will probably slow down.** Up until the last few months, the U.S. stock market had a strong, 10-year run since the 2007 recession. Now, with some signs of the world economy cooling, political instability, and massive debt burdens on governments, organizations, and individuals, a slower economy in 2019 is likely. Good stewardship will require a proper focus on debt levels and cash reserves.
5. **Hiring new or replacement staff will be done with more care.** “The cost of a bad hire is 15x his or her annual salary, so it’s important to get the recruiting and selection process right.”⁵ When the economy struggles or declines, the importance of hiring quality people is multiplied.
6. **For many ministries, it is either grow or die or become trapped in malaise.** Many smaller ministries struggle to move beyond the status quo. They are caught in the “not big enough” syndrome. I often call it the \$2—\$3 million annual revenue glass ceiling.
7. **The office will continue to empty out.** Working at home has been increasing, but it may reach the “tipping point”⁶ in 2019. This will give people more quality time to work without the

¹ Adobe Email Survey 2018 US

² Constant Contact: 10 Eye-Opening Email Marketing Stats You Need to Know

³ digitalsummit/Dallas, December 4-5, 2018

⁴ Mastering the Rockefeller Habits: What You Must Do to Increase the Value of Your Growing Firm, Verne Harnish

⁵ According to Topgrading, as referenced in *Scaling Up* by Verne Harnish.

⁶ “The moment of critical mass, the threshold, the boiling point,” as defined by Malcolm Gladwell in *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*.

wear and tear of the daily commute to the office. The price we will pay is loss of community and weakening of the ministry's culture. And, "culture eats strategy for breakfast."⁷

8. **More ministries will embrace the importance of excellence in governance.** The partnership between the board and the organization's top leader, care in choosing board members, even more care in choosing the board chair, and the commitment to prayer and discernment are just a few of the 2019 emphases for ministries. And yes, I would say this even if ECFA were not conducting 10 Forums on Excellence in Governance in 2019. Stay informed about the Forums at ECFA.org/GovernanceForums.
9. **Boards are increasingly sensing the importance of self-assessment.** Peter Drucker said "Self-assessment is the first action requirement of leadership: the constant re-sharpening, refocusing, never really being satisfied."⁸ And the same is true of governing boards. New online self-assessment tools are coming from ECFA in 2019, making board self-assessment easier than ever: *ChurchBoardScore* and *NonprofitBoardScore*.
10. **Succession planning will finally get its due.** In 2019, boards will be even more faithful in addressing both emergency succession issues and long-term succession planning. They will pray for protection yet establish appropriate policies—and thus are prepared for a future transition. See ECFA's *Succession Planning* toolbox online at ECFA.org.
11. **Integrity in raising financial support will increase.** Givers see right through high pressure tactics and gimmicks—and they will increasingly reject them. Clear communication with givers about ministry impact will be important to raise needed funds.
12. **Givers will increasingly insist that their gifts for restricted purposes be honored.** Raising money for A and spending it for B has *always* been a no-no. And, ministries that operate in that gray area—confusing givers as to whether their gifts are restricted or not—will pay the high price of lost support.
13. **The fixation on overhead percentages will continue to dissipate.** Too often the question is asked: "What is the ministry's overhead percentage?" Instead, the question should be: "What is the ministry's impact?" Overhead percentages are often WAGs (wild ankle guesses). Excessive concern about overhead is unwise.
14. **Out-of-town travel will be scaled back.** Ministries will frequently trade getting on airplanes for cutting-edge technology. Travel is expensive and time-consuming. More board meetings will be held virtually at the cost of collegiality. More staff members will do their life-long learning online and skip flying to conferences. *Sometimes the best trip is not to travel at all.*
15. **Hearing from God will trump strategic planning.** Ministries are becoming more receptive to hearing from the Holy Spirit first and then using strategic planning to carry out God's plan. But, first, we must master the discipline of stillness, lower the RPMs, and be aware of the gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit.

⁷ This quote is often attributed to Peter Drucker and echoed by William Vanderbloemen in *Culture Wins: the Roadmap to an Irresistible Workplace*.

⁸ Peter F. Drucker, Frances Hesselbein, and Joan Snyder Kuhl, *Peter Drucker's Five Most Important Questions: Enduring Wisdom for Today's Leaders*.