Spring
Professional Leadership Series

BYOD (Bring Your Own Device): bringing business benefits or delivering disaster?

Contents

BYOD – a core challenge for the modern business

Bring Your Own Device – BYOD – is a core challenge for today's organisations. As the digital economy grows ever stronger, and our professional and personal lives become evermore integrated, organisations simply cannot afford to bury their heads in the sand when it comes to allowing individuals to access the tools that enable them to do their jobs effectively through their own phones, tablets and laptops.

The benefits of BYOD appear strong to IT Directors and HR Directors alike. It can generate cost savings, appear attractive to new generations, and enable greater productivity. But it can also be a double-edged sword, with inevitable downsides. Is it actually affordable to enable corporate systems to work across the ever-changing smartdevice scene? Could security be compromised by opening the IT doors? And is there a downside for employees too, with exposure to a constant stream of business communication increasing the risk of burnout and high stress levels?

To further explore the pros and cons of BYOD – and in particular, its place in blue chip and SME organisations - we conducted our own research on the subject by asking hiring managers and IT professionals for their own views on the matter. The feedback so far suggests a strong demographic split in attitudes. But the aim of this paper is to open that debate a little further – creating an opportunity for you to participate in a discussion about an issue that will effect more and more businesses as smart technology becomes the rule rather than the exception, and the boundaries between our working lives blur even further.

BYOD (Bring Your Own Device): bringing business benefits or delivering disaster?

4

BYOD – reflecting a changing business world

There's a question over whether BYOD is a natural outcome of the changing workplace, or whether it's actually driving a change in the way that we work and think about work. In the past few years, we've seen a clear transition from the 9-5 office routine to flexible working patterns; but what's becoming apparent is that old style flexible working is simply not flexible enough. The smartest businesses are going beyond flexible working to truly 'agile working'. As practised by large organisations such as Unilever, that means creating the right environment for people to deliver excellence - everyday, everywhere. It relies less on fixed office space, and more on the ability to connect to the tools and systems that people need to get the job done - whenever and wherever that may be. Agile working has already changed office environments - making smaller, more flexible, hotdesked locations the norm, where teams meet to get the job done, and then go their separate ways. This new way of working is changing corporate mentalities too; putting the emphasis on outcomes rather than attendance, and demanding greater levels of trust from both managers and their employees, to ensure that team members remain on track but still have the freedom to achieve.

What has made the biggest difference is the rapid advance of personal devices that have changed the way that people communicate and interact. Employees are no longer tied to the office PC, and there seems little sense in having separate devices for a person's work and personal life. Social media is already a way of life for most people under the age of 30, and the 'Twitterisation' of the world is rapidly spreading to both Generation X and the Baby Boomers, who continue to be powerful in the workforce. As tablets and smart phones rapidly become accessible to everyone, many commentators now recognise that both organisations and employers can greatly benefit from making it easier to access business tools and systems on the same device that workers use to text, IM, and update their social media status.

BYOD (Bring Your Own Device): bringing business benefits or delivering disaster?

5

The Evidence

We asked over 1,000 people for their views on BYOD[1]. Firstly, we asked if they should be allowed to bring their own technical device to work. Surprisingly, just 40.8% of respondents agreed; but that figure rose to 63.6% amongst 16-24 year olds, and to almost 50% amongst 25-34 year olds.

The latter respondents represent the emerging workforce, which means that these figures are only set to rise as older, less technology-reliant workers retire, and digital natives move up to fill their places.

There was a noticeable trend for more senior level employees and business owners to expect to be able to bring their own devices to work – and to have the systems in place to enable this – while more junior employees and unskilled workers didn't share their enthusiasm. This may be a reflection of a lesser need for technology in their roles, or perhaps issues surrounding the cost of purchasing their own equipment.

We also asked what would prevent people from bringing in and using their own smart phones, tablets and laptops. Compromising office confidentiality was their biggest concern, with over 83% of respondents worried about this potential threat - a figure that rose to 87% for older workers.

There was also a concern shared by four in five respondents that BYOD technology could cause viruses on office systems. This resonated among older workers in particular, with both clerical workers and directors worried by the potential risk.
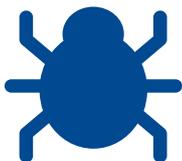
Interfering with intellectual property and causing system delays were also seen as significant barriers to adopting BYOD.

63.6%
of Generation Y workers expect to be allowed to bring their own devices to work

BYOD appeals strongly to senior employees and business owners

The fear of compromising confidentiality and introducing viruses to corporate systems are barriers to BYOD

[1]Survey of 1,077 office workers

BYOD (Bring Your Own Device): bringing business benefits or delivering disaster?

6

BYOD in the changing workplace

These risks will need to be balanced against the realities of a workplace revolution that has seen the UK move from a manufacturing giant to an ideas-led economy over the past 40 years. Employers are struggling to keep up with the rapid pace of technology-driven business evolution, and it is becoming ever harder for organisations to engage, motivate and retain their best employees.

Workers are commuting further than anyone would have thought possible 40 years ago, but can manage this only through an ever-greater reliance on new technology. The idea of a job for life has all but disappeared, and being loyal to one organisation is too often regarded as a mark of the unambitious. While we have more graduates than ever before, too few are regarded as being work-ready, or sufficiently skilled in the sectors where growth is needed - particularly where STEM skills are concerned.

In order to deal with this, employers must embrace the Facebook generation. In 2011, the FT reported that Facebook had more than 30 million uses in the UK alone, while eMarketer expects 85% of the population to be active mobile phone users within the next three years. Given that devices are becoming ever more affordable and feature-rich, it's no surprise that one in five employers plan to relax their attitudes around the use of social media in the workplace.

BYOD is a little different, with an emphasis on encouraging employees to use their own devices, but enabling them to access work-related tools and content. For us, it appears a natural next step in the technology revolution.

In 2011, the Aberdeen Group carried out a survey[2] in which 72% of responding companies allowed BYOD. Then in May 2012, the CISCO ISBG Horizons Study claimed that 95% of the businesses they surveyed allowed BYOD.

Allowing BYOD in companies

72%
2011

95%
2012
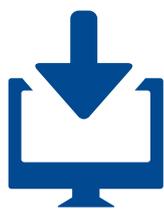
85% of the population will be active mobile phone users within the next three years

[2] The Aberdeen Group and CISCO ISBG Horizons Study

BYOD (Bring Your Own Device): bringing business benefits or delivering disaster?

7

The Benefits

BYOD holds clear business benefits for organisations, which at a high level can be classified as:

For the organisation

- Reduced spend on IT equipment
- Savings on use of building space
- Greater productivity from employees
- Attraction of professionals for whom agile working is key

For employees

- Ability to work when and where they choose
- Control over which device to purchase and upgrade
- Familiarity with technology tools – and no need to carry home/work duplicates

As Digital Economy expert Ade McCormack told us:

"BYOD is an important weapon in Human Recources Directors' (HRDs) armoury. Every business needs to attract and retain highly-skilled employees who will fuel innovation in products, services, and the way we work. Enabling people to use the tools they choose rather than being rigid and restrictive may well give you an advantage now, and will be a minimum requirement from tomorrow's workforce. Therefore, HRDs need to ensure they have a better understanding of what aspirations new workforce entrants and emerging leaders have – it may well change the way they put together remuneration packages."

"CIOs have to embrace BYOD. It's not going to go away and they have to face up to the challenges that it presents. The benefits to organisations in reducing costs and becoming far more nimble are exponential."

BYOD (Bring Your Own Device): bringing business benefits or delivering disaster?

8

Challenges

For every upside, BYOD nay-sayers will point to challenges that threaten to outweigh the benefits. Some of the most prevalent concerns include:

For the organisation

- Security breaches
- Loss of organisational 'privacy'
- Cost of supporting multiple devices across multiple platforms
- Cost of regularly updating protocols/ systems to deal with continual emergence of new devices
- Increasing costs of support across multiple platforms

For employees

- Cost of purchasing and maintaining devices
- Cost of data plans to support business tools
- Inability to 'disconnect' from work
- Risk of personal data leak to employer

And for both

- Managing departures and the devices and information they could be taking to a new employer

"The risks to organisations are acceptable if they manage BYOD properly – and a lot of this is common sense. For IT teams, there are technologies around enabling organisations to partition user devices into personal and corporate compartments. And there's no need to fret about support. Anyone with an iPhone, or who uses Microsoft products for instance, is used to self-service support; and perhaps one of the biggest changes we'll see with BYOD is the changing role of the traditional service desk. Theoretically, it could all but disappear."

"As we move forward, employees won't be focused on the cost of their iPhone or tablet, but on the absolute necessity of having the right tools to play their part in an increasingly digital world. As the generational balance changes too, the work/life question will become more blurred, though this will evolve. But what we can't afford to do is impose the mindset of Generation X on Generation Y."

"All in all, organisations of all sizes must embrace BYOD if they want to attract and engage those people who will deliver the kind of innovation that will enable Britain's businesses to compete globally."

BYOD (Bring Your Own Device): bringing business benefits or delivering disaster?

9

The talent management challenge

Perhaps the key to the BYOD talent management challenge is to create 'adult-adult' relationships within the organisation. According to TechRepublic's Patrick Gray, too many overzealous IT-HR combinations gang up on employees with draconian adult-child BYOD policies:

''These are generally the companies with policy declarations that contain more 'thou shalt nots' than even the most repressive religionists or moral tomes. IT treats employees as children, and more often than not those employees do childish things to skirt policy, or wilfully ignore policies out of sheer disgust. At even the largest corporations, where confidential customer data are routinely handled on mobile devices, I've seen highly successful BYOD programmes that treat users as adults. Most are fairly liberal with which devices can connect to a limited number of services on their network, in return for following some basic security-related policies. Policies that explain the necessary 'tickets to ride' and provide the appropriate software, are generally more successful than multi-layer approvals and draconian prohibitions.''

In today's economy, command and control is not appropriate; and with a growing shortage of real talent, those in demand will increasingly look to define the terms of their own employment. If you're seen as a 20th century throwback – and BYOD is a small but important aspect of that – the talent you need will soon talk (and walk) elsewhere.

And the challenge of recruiting, developing and enabling the right IT people to deal with the vagaries of the BYOD world mustn't be neglected. People with the skills to anticipate change, dovetail IT capability with business demand, and make device management a competitive advantage for your business are in high demand; but what kind of working environment can you offer them? Are you building a workplace that allows them to thrive, or one that frustrates them to the point that they leave for pastures new? Treated well, these people can be the IT leaders of the not too distant future, helping to build truly digital workplaces.

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BYOD (Bring Your Own Device): bringing business benefits or delivering disaster?

10
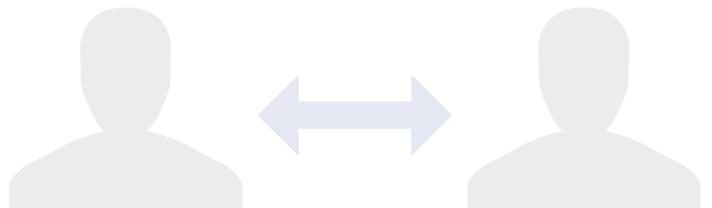
Embracing BYOD

The lesson we've learned at Spring Professional is that BYOD is not a simple yes/no decision, and that you can take small steps into this brave new world without having to leap into the abyss:

Start small – with email

For all the social media evangelism, we still live in an email-dominated business environment; and when employees make demands for BYOD, the loudest clamour is for access to business emails. What's great is that email is one of the easiest demands to accommodate. It's relatively simply to deal with delivery and security issues, and you can quite easily couple email access with access to files on shared servers. We've found it a great way to test the water before moving to full enterprise-wide BYOD solutions.

Build the rules – but make them easy to comply with

By nature, people will try and break or avoid the 'rules' and will indulge in all sorts of BYOD work-rounds. So you need to create the rules, protocols, and ways of working that enable employees to access the right tools and systems easily across devices, without compromising security or putting your IT complex at risk. Be sensible, but not too draconian – and never take your eye off the ball.
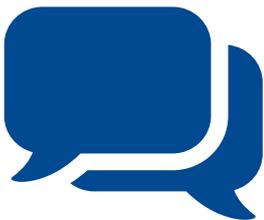
Build the rules – but make them easy to comply with

BYOD is a business decision, not an IT ivory tower. Keep the conversation going within the business so that everyone's clear on what devices are supported, what the rules are, and how BYOD is evolving to benefit the business. Today's digital experts don't all reside in IT, and it's vital that everyone can get their voice heard in evolving the way that business is conducted.

BYOD (Bring Your Own Device): bringing business benefits or delivering disaster?

11

The future is here, now

BYOD is a reality in big business today, and is becoming increasingly common in companies of all sizes.

Organisations simply cannot afford to be held back by 'one size fits all' technology, and BYOD opens the latest digital expertise to many more people across the enterprise. The genie is well and truly out of the bottle – but only those organisations that embrace usage, coupled with sensible security and data management issues will thrive.

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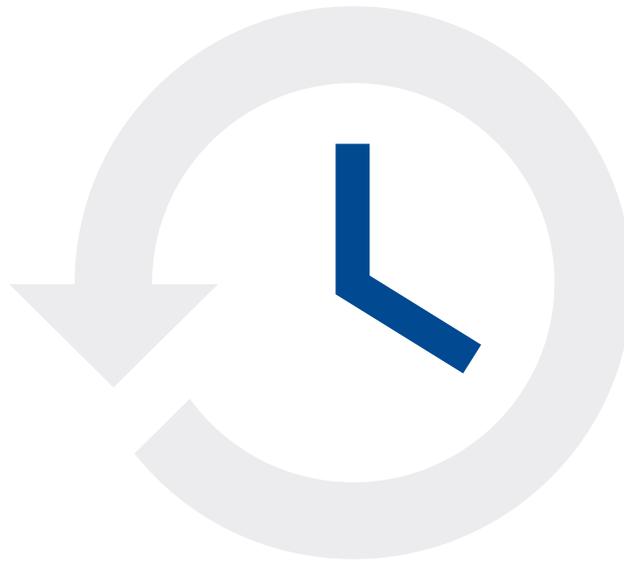
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