

ITAnalysis - Apple iPad for enterprise?

By Rob Bamforth, Principal Analyst, Quocirca Ltd

At one time, the only enterprise users of Apple products would have pony tails or job titles with the word 'creative' somewhere. That's no longer the case. The mainstay business tools that reside on desktop PCs running Windows across most enterprises – Word, PowerPoint, Excel, and shortly Outlook – run just as nicely on the Mac today. Sure, there are Apple equivalents some would find more glitzy, but compatibility and uniformity with PC users is generally possible, although for native Windows-only applications this will mean the additional purchase of a virtualisation capability and a copy of Windows.

So whether it's at a desk or on the move, Apple has a desktop or laptop that will give a very businesslike experience, just with a few more shiny edges and generally a higher price. Still, upfront hardware cost is only one part of total cost of ownership, and past Quocirca research has shown that end users take more care of their mobile equipment if they like it rather than have it forced on them.

Loss of laptop and, more importantly, data through theft or user carelessness is one cost many businesses bear, along with the inevitable need to replace badly treated devices as they break. Apple laptops can be more commonly seen in traditional mobile business venues – coffee shops, airport lounges, railway carriages – so clearly more IT purchasers are buying the Macbook case.

On the communications front, the iPhone – initially slated by many analysts as 'just for consumers' – has become enormously important to many as their business mobile device. Largely it is down to the applications. While many see the BlackBerry as a fantastic, well integrated email device, perfect for the enterprise user, they also (wrongly) perceive it as email and personal information management only. It is not yet seen as a multi-application mobile platform like the iPhone, or for that matter, Google's Android.

The sheer volume of applications for the iPhone are huge – over a hundred thousand on the App Store and billions of downloads to date – and they range from free iTat (and there's plenty of that) up to some reasonably priced and rather useful tools. Few stretch up into the comprehensive business client applications, as it's difficult to sell at high end prices on what feels like a music and media like experience storefront, but there are some significant 'Pro' widgets making good revenues for serious ISVs.

The main problem with the iPhone has not been the 'i', but the rest of the name. It's not been the greatest of phones, with call drop out reminiscent of the early BlackBerry and a lack of staying power in the battery department. It's not just that the battery isn't replaceable; it's also difficult to rely on it having sufficient power at the end of a day away from a charging point. That's not good as so many in their personal as well as working life rely on being able to make mobile phone calls.

So where does this leave the newly baked Apple iPad?

It has the form factor and operation of a laptop, albeit with a virtual rather than real keyboard, and has the expected consumer appeal for media consumption. With iPhone underpinnings, and support for the existing App Store applications, its architecture suggests iPhone on steroids (lots of them). The iPhone is ideal for casual on the hoof access and consumption of small screen data, but the iPad will dictate a more laptop-like usage model with the need to use two hands and if typing, the need to sit down.

So where does it fit as a business device and what else will accompany it? If there is a need to carry a laptop as well, that's too much weight and corporate risk, but as it is unlikely anyone will clasp an iPad next to their head as a mobile superphone, surely business users will still need a mobile phone.

That then means two tariff – one for iPad, one for phone – but then many will have already succumbed to employee demands for 3G laptops as well as their mobile, so is that a problem? Well, it may be, especially with the consumer and media emphasis surrounding this latest iGadget, but excessive mobile costs – voice or data - are potential issues for anyone managing any fleet of mobile devices.

There is also the potential fragility of the large glass screen and slippery smooth aluminium back, and the desirable nature of the device from a theft perspective. However, these are problems laptop users and IT managers are getting pretty used to dealing with – according to Quocirca research, more so than looking after smartphones – and so the larger size of the iPad may work in its favour in this regard.

The high end version of the iPad will come with Wi-Fi, 3G and 64GB of storage, but at a price and with constraints on data capacity – no hard drive, CD or DVD capability – it will look expensive next to a standard laptop PC. As iPhone's big brother it also retains the feature of keeping multi-tasking out of the application runtime environment, restricting power users to only do one thing at a time, the only exceptions being internal and tightly controlled by Apple. Further restraint is applied to applications: by not providing direct support for Adobe's Flash, Apple is still attempting to prevent circumvention of the App Store by smart and direct developers.

However, one thing is pretty certain, given the hype generated by its launch, it will be a device to keep an IT management eye on, and may even surprise as a suitable business tool. The aftermarket of add-on hardware and software applications will be key to this, and definitely the area to watch.

About Quocirca

Quocirca is a primary research and analysis company specialising in the business impact of information technology and communications (ITC). With world-wide, native language reach, Quocirca provides in-depth insights into the views of buyers and influencers in large, mid-sized and small organisations. Its analyst team is made up of real-world practitioners with first hand experience of ITC delivery who continuously research and track the industry and its real usage in the markets.

Through researching perceptions, Quocirca uncovers the real hurdles to technology adoption – the personal and political aspects of an organisation's environment and the pressures of the need for demonstrable business value in any implementation. This capability to uncover and report back on the end-user perceptions in the market enables Quocirca to advise on the realities of technology adoption, not the promises.

Quocirca research is always pragmatic, business orientated and conducted in the context of the bigger picture. ITC has the ability to transform businesses and the processes that drive them, but often fails to do so. Quocirca's mission is to help organisations improve their success rate in process enablement through better levels of understanding and the adoption of the correct technologies at the correct time.

Quocirca has a pro-active primary research programme, regularly surveying users, purchasers and resellers of ITC products and services on emerging, evolving and maturing technologies. Over time, Quocirca has built a picture of long term investment trends, providing invaluable information for the whole of the ITC community.

Quocirca works with global and local providers of ITC products and services to help them deliver on the promise that ITC holds for business. Quocirca's clients include Oracle, Microsoft, IBM, O2, T-Mobile, HP, Xerox, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

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