

## Straight Talking – The spread of email reliance

By Rob Bamforth, Principal Analyst, Quocirca Ltd

The old joke about the office worker who says to their partner when they get home at the end of the day – “the computers went down and we all had to think for ourselves” is getting too close for comfort.

As the mobile industry started its grand annual event in Barcelona - Mobile World Congress - a breakdown in the BlackBerry email service meant that many thumb weary executives had a break from their mobile email habit. The device is often known informally as the ‘CrackBerry’, but the reliance on frequent hits of email and the subsequent cold turkey of withdrawal are very serious for many. This latest breakdown impacting North America, the second in less than 12 months to be caused apparently by the same problem – a system upgrade in the network operations centre in Canada - lasted for almost 3 hours. As the number of mobile email users has grown rapidly in recent years alongside their increasing dependency, the impact of any loss of service is greatly magnified, and felt in several quarters.

Take the hard-pressed IT manager for a start. The almost continuous operation of IT systems is taken as a given in many organisations.

When IT applications decentralised onto the PC, there was a time when the office desktop was mostly autonomous and independent in operation from the network, and intermittent service may not even have been noticed. Open standards and universal connectivity have now rendered the network critical and visible to almost any application.

This is especially the case with email, and in particular mobile email. Many an executive has assessed IT departmental efficiency based on whether or not they are receiving emails on their BlackBerry. Faults like this recent one are outside of an IT manager’s control, but no doubt they will still be the focus of blame from users.

Then there’s the recipient of those emails that the BlackBerry wielder has shot from the hip – literally and figuratively – with insufficient screen real estate for broad viewing, time for

consideration, or a “real” keyboard for a response that might be misinterpreted. The only caveat is the sender’s apologetic (or boastful?) signature line of “sent from my BlackBerry”. These ‘stationary’ (as opposed to mobile) recipients put up with the constant drip of terse one liners from users who are unconcerned that their idle moments might not correspond with their colleagues’, thus distracting or interrupting the working pattern of the recipient. One can only imagine the flood of pent up message/reply demand after a service outage is fixed.

Finally there is the impact of the outage on the BlackBerry user. Many complain about not being able to switch it off and the expectation from others that they are always contactable. It’s becoming quite common to take a BlackBerry on vacation, and some no doubt to bed. Of course the user would argue they are more responsive, with decisions being made in real time and customers or other external parties more involved in the process.

The question is, are those quick responses the right ones or best ones in all situations? Are CrackBerry addicts running the risk of losing the ability to discern the difference between “Important” and “Urgent”? These abilities are tested to the limit when the user is deprived of a service they have come to heavily rely on.

The answer lies not in faults with the core technology, or, save the odd system wide crash or other, in the implementation. It lies primarily in the ways in which people are managed – mobile users and their more ‘stationary’ peers – and what expectations are set. Getting these right is not only going to benefit the BlackBerry-wielding executives, but also the wider workforce as they all become increasingly mobile.

As more applications become network accessible and relied upon by mobile workers and their use becomes embedded in critical business processes, it will become even more vital to understand how the technology use intersects with the working practices and business processes of both individuals and the organisation.

Technology, in particular personal communications technology, should support, improve and extend established working processes, rather than trying to invent brand new ones. That's not to say it is impossible to create new processes, but it does require a wider more strategic business process re-engineering assessment to take place, and most mobile deployments are tactically driven.

Quocirca research has shown that around a quarter of large European companies will retro-fit a strategy after making mobile deployments, a figure that has remained consistent for several years.

As part of the supporting, improving and extending of established processes, those using the technology need sufficient guidance to make the best use of what it can offer, without being sucked into bad habits or behaviour their colleagues may regard as anti-social – in short, good mobile netiquette.

In the days of LOL and L33T (text, chat or hacker-speak in these cases for 'laughing out loud' and 'elite') it might seem somewhat quaint to think about etiquette and the art of effective communication, but from a business perspective it is critical. Not only so that mobile workers and their colleagues do not feel as if they are being unnecessarily overloaded, but also to deliver on the main business benefit of mobility – productivity.

Individual responsiveness is all well and good, but the final measure of productivity is on the corporate bottom line, which takes into account everybody – mobile user, stationary colleagues and IT manager.

## 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, Dell, T-Mobile, Vodafone, EMC, Symantec and Cisco, along with other large and medium sized vendors, service providers and more specialist firms.

Details of Quocirca's work and the services it offers can be found at

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