

## IT Analysis – iPhone, YouTube, we manage

By Rob Bamforth, Principal Analyst, Quocirca Ltd

Information technology now plays such a large part in our lives that its emotional impact in the workplace has drifted through a feeling of imposition and indifference and arrived at one of desire. Recently thousands queued to be the first to receive a new Apple iPhone, with Apple claiming over a million sales in the first three days. As well as device appeal creating populist swings in favour and fashion, a similar effect is occurring with online content and services. Traffic on the internet is becoming dominated by the extensive use of mass media and video download sites and services such as YouTube and the BBC iPlayer - technology not only 'on demand', but in demand.

Mobile phones, internet access, compute power and storage capacity have become accessible to all, cheap, and easier to use. Commoditisation and open standards have led to further improvements in design, service and integration, although some products are better than others. For consumers this is great news, and in theory it should be true for businesses, but the reality is more complex. While standardisation has driven down per item costs and made interconnection simpler, the variety of available technology still makes the overall system more complicated, especially when different options are expected to co-exist – a particular problem when users are given a free choice.

Within the confines of office and workplace based IT equipment this is less of an issue. While termed the personal computer, in reality there is little individual attachment to the deskbound PC. Uniform deployments are commonplace and sometimes virtualised into a thin or slimmer client, with some exceptions for the engineering departments hanging on to high-powered workstations and creative departments with their Macs.

But outside the premises, individuality returns. Asking someone if you can borrow or use their desktop PC is unlikely to raise any objections, asking the same question about a laptop, or even more pointedly a mobile phone, will probably raise hackles as well as barriers. Where once employees would have been

indifferent to the laptop they carry - as long as it is functional - or the mobile phone they use - as long as it makes calls - they now link personal attributes such as style, status and individuality to these devices. After all, in their personal lives they now browse, choose and buy IT and communications products just like any other form of consumer electronics goods - tv and hi-fi intertwined with pc and wi-fi.

So for their working IT and communications tools, it is no surprise if employees like to make their own choice of mobile tools to reflect their own personalities. But how does that fit with the needs of the business?

Many companies have tried the prescriptive approach - the corporate standard issue - and applied restrictive consistency to remote software tools, laptops and mobile phones. That may work fine if the technology is issued and paid for by the company. But not every company can afford to operate that way, and with an increasingly technology savvy set of consumers as employees, the corporate issued and controlled devices will often disappoint.

In theory standardisation of technologies helps, but in practice standardisation in one aspect creates opportunities for divergence elsewhere. There are several open mobile phone operating platforms - Windows Mobile, Symbian, Linux - and many popular closed platforms. They mostly share and support standard Java platforms, email protocols and web standards, but the complete package delivers many variations. For example, companies offering trans-coding solutions to make web pages work across all mobile phones manage dozens of different attributes across the thousands of uniquely different models of mobile devices in circulation.

Past Quocirca research has indicated that not allowing employees some flexibility in selecting mobile devices means they will care less about security, as user buy-in stimulates personal responsibility. There is also the issue of productivity. While many vendors will enthuse about how mobile technology offers productivity

gains, the only really concrete examples involve those workers who have to follow well understood, often largely repetitive, processes. For example, field service engineers, delivery and logistics control.

The remaining examples are dressed up in terms like customer responsiveness, faster decision making, instant access to information etc. For these workers the technology does not make the process more efficient, it allows the worker to be more efficient should they desire it.

The employees' attitude to the technology at their disposal will have a significant impact on how quickly they adopt it, get the most effective use from it, and ultimately how much it increases their productivity. Something that does not fit with the individual's personal mode of working, and differs from what they have chosen for personal use, just adds to the challenge.

If someone has spent hours queuing for an iPhone, how will they view being compelled to carry and use some other less desirable device, especially if they find it harder to use?

At one time, many employees would have seen technology at their place of work and thought it might be great to have that at home. Now the reverse is more likely to be true, partly for some to extend their personal life into work time, but for many to get access to what they think are the best tools for the job.

Embracing the technology choices of employees may make the life of the IT department harder, but for the benefit of the business overall, companies have to work out a way to allow user preferences to become a welcome yet managed part of the corporate infrastructure.

## 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

<http://www.quocirca.com>