

ITAnalysis – Setting mobile strategy

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With all the talk of mobilising the enterprise, you might think that companies were taking a strategic view of how mobility might change and enhance their business, right?

Not really.

According to Quocirca research over recent years, (first noted in 2005), less than one in six companies seem to have sorted out some form of mobile strategy, and the majority are just working on ad hoc or 'retrofit' approaches.

So why, given that the apparent almost unanimous belief in the benefits of mobility, are so many companies not adopting a better planned approach? The answer probably lies in cost, or more accurately budget: and in particular, exactly which budget.

The problem is that many departments may benefit or be affected, but the oft-tactical approach falls on one - IT - and investment in new communications technology does not sit comfortably alongside current needs to drive down costs.

A flexible and mobile workforce needs laptops and smartphones equipped to connect over high-speed networks from anywhere on the planet.

Call minutes and data megabytes on the move are expensive, not to mention the upfront investment in the right technology, so surely a strategic top-down decision would be better.

Those at the top need to know the full extent of what they are letting themselves in for. But since wider values such as flexibility, productivity, resilience, reduction in travel costs and time, and environmental credibility are offered as benefits to offset the costs, this is more than simply an IT or communications department issue due to its effect on those corporate and line of business needs.

So what should a strategic approach look like? Rather than being technology led as is all too often the case, it should start with business process, look at the impact on people, and then make technology decisions.

First, the business drivers.

Are the current business processes that involve employees traveling somewhere to perform some of their work beyond their employer's premises documented, or at least well understood? If not, the first task is to find out what currently happens, and if time and effort is being wasted. This need not be onerous, but without understanding the current situation how can improvements be measured?

Next, assess the people impact by talking to those involved to get a proper insight into their day and how mobile technology might improve their effectiveness. Discuss working patterns and needs with each different group of workers as it is very unlikely that a single solution will fit the bill for all, despite the wishes of any control freaks in the IT department. It is good to be obsessed with keeping control, especially to manage security, but it will always work out better if the employees are onside, rather than resistant.

Finally, look at the technology options, paying particular attention to full lifecycle costs. This means taking into account training, security, asset management and communications costs as well as the lifetime cost of hardware and software. Be willing to be flexible, and if necessary consider the radical approach of allowing employees to provide their own devices.

There will need to be some limits with this method, after all, the business must protect its digital assets, and it might be that only the more popular choices can be contemplated. However, it might help to avoid the unseen creep of a more serious and risky 'shadow IT', which can easily occur with mobile devices.

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Altogether this might not seem like the official draft of a formal corporate mobile strategy, it is better than taking a knee-jerk reaction to allow some executives to adopt their favourite gadgets, or worse still being the 'blockage in the end office' and always saying 'no'.

IT managers can help themselves as well as the organisation by taking a positive and proactive view to the wave of mobile technologies that will inevitably hit them, and get mobile themselves and go out to talk to line of business managers about what might be possible and what might fit their needs.

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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