

# Limiting social networking's abuse of mobile bills

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Organisations need positive policies for appropriate management of mobile assets

November 2010

The numbers of employees using some form of mobile technology while working has soared. The benefits to the organisation are well documented; employees are more contactable, will probably extend their working days and should be more productive.

However, this is not a one way street; employees are avid consumers of all things mobile, as much for personal use as business use – be it phone calls, texting, music downloads, apps, web browsing or social networking – it all extends into the workplace, potentially adding huge costs to mobile contract bills. More significantly, perhaps, employees might be spending more time on their personal activities than they should, undermining the expected productivity gains.

Balancing employee requests for keeping mobile channels open, while getting the right level of work and commitment from them, should not be left to chance. All organisations need to fully understand their employees' mobile usage and behaviours to be able to put appropriate policies in place to ensure business requirements are met whilst acceptable personal use is still enabled.

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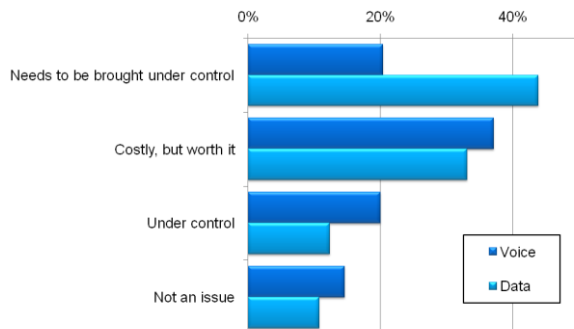
## 1. The cost and value of mobility

When mobile phones first appeared, it was difficult to predict how rapidly the suitcase-sized bricks, favoured by a few young urban professionals, would become so small, powerful and ubiquitous.

The mobile has become a basic tool for all businesses, and the smart mobile phone now delivers data as well as voice. In addition, mobile (3G) 'dongles' or modems are increasingly added to laptops and there are wirelessly-connected tablets and handheld computers which provide access to mobile data, and sometimes voice through IP telephony.

Whereas voice calls are billed by the easily understandable minute, data is measured by the megabyte and most users will be unaware of how their use of mobile email, web browsing or other applications translates into mobile data costs. However, as recessions bite and the need to control costs rises, their employers are aware (Figure 1).

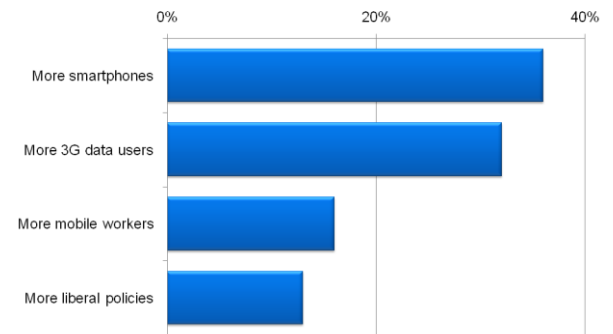
**Figure 1**  
The challenge of mobile costs?<sup>1</sup>



As well as the airtime costs, mobile devices have other financial impacts. There are risks from theft or loss of devices and the consequential loss or exposure of data. There are other costs, beyond security, to deal with, including management of the devices, the updating of software installed on them and the replacement and tracking of the devices allocated to individual users.

Most companies recognise that their total mobile costs are rising, despite some reductions seen in individual tariffs. Greater numbers of smartphones are increasing the demand for mobile data and the transition from predominantly 2G to predominantly 3G handsets exacerbates this (Figure 2).

**Figure 2**  
If you believe mobile data costs are going up, why?<sup>2</sup>



Many organisations are actively encouraging flexible working, so, unsurprisingly, there are more mobile workers. There is also the growing recognition that employers may have been too lax on managing employee mobile costs. While regular national mobile phone calls are not prohibitively expensive, international calling, roaming internationally and premium rate services are, and organisations need to better understand employee usage patterns and manage the costs appropriately.

Mobile data costs, especially while roaming, bring this issue into even sharper focus, but it is not simply the airtime and device management costs that are at stake.

Employees, as consumers, have rapidly adopted applications, media and social networking available on the internet and this, coupled with their intensive appetite for personal mobile communications, means a potential boom in the mobile use of these internet tools. The consequent costs for airtime voice and data may be huge, but the impact of lost productivity could be worse still.

Organisations can no longer ignore this issue or hope it is a fad that will pass. They need to tread a fine line to ensure that they still gain the benefits of employee mobility, contact-ability and responsiveness, but without letting costs run away. As well as the direct airtime costs, they will have to make sure employees are not frittering away potential mobile productivity with entertainment, personal and social activities in place of work.

## 2. Digital lifestyle

To understand how this will affect the organisation, it is helpful to understand the impact on the consumer.

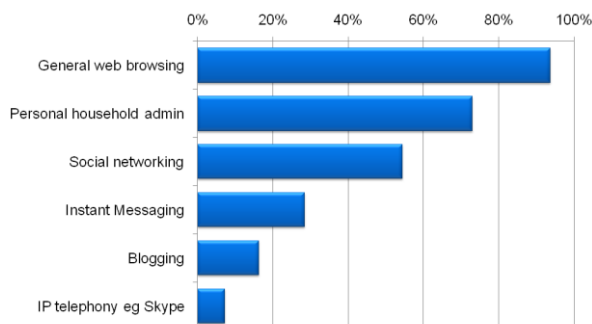
From its early adopter days in the mid 1990s the internet has become a mainstream service for all. There is such an expectation of internet connectivity that there are political tussles over 'digital inclusion' and even an attempt to have internet access described as a fundamental human right.

Consumers have an appetite for digital services, from shopping and entertainment to social connection, and all organisations are promoting online access to their services – whether it is banking, paying utility bills or accessing council services, the drive is for online.

The inclination, and sometimes necessity, for employees to deal with these issues during working hours is clear, and with the right opportunity – a good internet connection while at work – they will spend time doing domestic chores online; and why not, at the same time, do a little light browsing of ecommerce sites and chat with friends? (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

**What personal applications do employees use over the business internet connection?<sup>3</sup>**



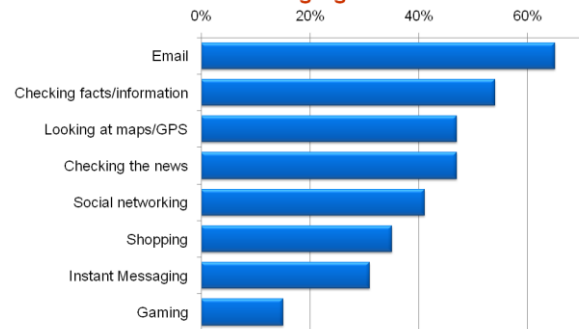
Many will see no great harm in this and, to a certain extent, it is similar to making the odd personal phone call from the office or a trip to the bank during lunch hour. The risk is employees spending too much work time, and company resources, on personal and sometimes simply entertainment activities.

Increasingly powerful mobile devices and capacity in wireless networks means that this online digital lifestyle is increasingly being used while on the move. However, perhaps reflecting the constraints of device, network and operating conditions, mobile applications tend to be ones where users 'snack' at digital services rather than 'gorge'.

Just as the tendency with mobile phones has been to make more frequent and shorter voice calls than with fixed line phones, so popular mobile applications tend to be used only for a few seconds, but used very frequently (Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

**What else do people do with their mobiles beyond voice calls and text messaging?<sup>4</sup>**



Younger 'digital natives', who have been weaned on this technology, will think nothing of constantly dipping into email or social networking services and accessing updates or information.

Other demographic groups have also been spurred on by easier to use touch screen user interfaces and all-you-can-eat consumer mobile data tariffs using either USB 'dongles' or smarter phones. Even for the operators, the reality of this situation has begun to bite and caps are being introduced to curb appetites.

Mobile technology has become readily accessible, easier to purchase (although with a confusing myriad of choices) and much easier to use for a variety of applications, especially for consumers.

The range of mobile applications and internet-enabled handsets, with entrants such as Apple and now Android, coupled with a resurgence in vendor focus from Microsoft with its renewed vigour in Windows Mobile and HP through its acquisition of Palm, continues to grow.

### 3. Consumer meets enterprise

The combination of internet familiarity and mobile availability means that, for this new generation of smartphone users, there is a significant impact on work and home life.

The personal digital lifestyle is infiltrating working hours, and smarter mobile devices are extending the reach of work into home life, even while on holiday (Figure 5).

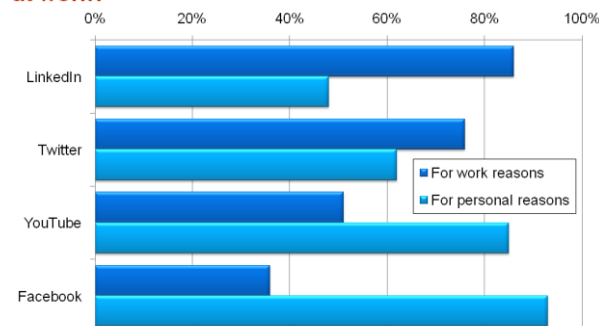
**Figure 5**  
**What do you use your mobile phone/smartphone for while at work versus while on holiday?<sup>5</sup>**



Whether these mobile phones are provided by the employer or chosen by the employee no longer seems to matter. There is an expectation by the employee that they can access any of their personal services while at work, which is effectively treated as 'compensation' for being contactable outside of working hours.

This blurring of access goes a step further as many of the more 'socially' oriented applications are now being used for business purposes. There is no longer a hard division between applications that are only for business, and those for personal use (Figure 6).

**Figure 6**  
**What social networking applications are used while at work?<sup>6</sup>**



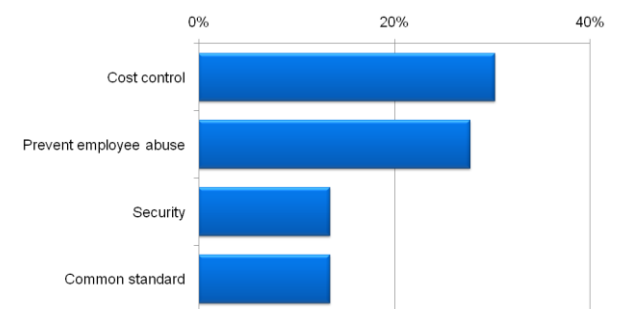
However, there are some differences with some social applications tending more towards entertainment and others being applicable for general communication and information. Organisations will therefore find it impossible to have a binary switch or cut off, banning the use of these applications. They will instead have to set central policies around appropriate use, which they should then support and enforce with suitable tools.

### 4. Retaining control

With an increasingly mobile workforce and smarter, smaller mobile devices, these policies have to be pushed right to the edge of the network and apply across a wide range of devices.

Mobile devices pose particular problems when combined with the social media applications. These consume mobile data network resources which are typically capped by the carrier and then billed by the additional megabyte. This can be very expensive, especially while roaming, and happen for an employee at a time when they are typically outside of direct visual management scrutiny. No wonder then that cost control and employee time wasting are major reasons for needing to put policies in place (Figure 7).

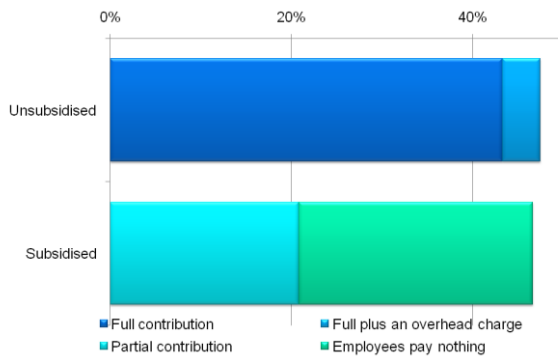
**Figure 7**  
**What is the aim of policies for the business use of mobile phones?<sup>7</sup>**



Historically, these cost concerns have been muted. After all, the mobile phone has enabled individuals to work more effectively, and many companies have tolerated the rise of mobile voice tariffs (except perhaps for international and roaming calls) because of the business benefits of increased communication and the relatively low visibility of total cost. Many even tolerate significant levels of personal use by employees, without expecting the employees to cover those costs (Figure 8).

Figure 8

### How much do employees pay for personal use of business mobile phones?<sup>7</sup>



This is now changing rapidly. The currently depressed economic climate means that organisations are significantly more cost conscious when budgets are tight. Mobile use has grown rapidly, now encompassing many more types of employees with different motivations and behavioural responsibility, and network-hungry smart devices and applications. Also the line between personal and business has blurred.

Organisations need to set boundaries to retain control of employee mobile activities. This is not for trivial penny-pinching reasons or to punish bad employee behaviour, but to ensure they can understand the value and manage their exposure in what is becoming a significant part of their IT investment.

## 5. Conclusion

Organisations can no longer adopt an overly casual attitude to their mobile adoption or turn a blind eye to profligate mobile use. What was once simply about making phone calls has become a significant element of the IT function and should be better understood and managed more effectively.

There are several simple steps that can be taken and organisations can move quickly to implement a simple mobile cost value analysis:

- **Measurement.** This needs to encompass all mobile billing. It should be sufficiently fine grained to identify the usage patterns of individual employees, but also capable of being rolled up to allow for departmental and organisational level analysis.

- **Strategy definition.** Smart mobile devices are not only a significant investment in hardware, software, services and tariffs, but they can also change employee behaviour. The overall strategy will set the tone for deployment and policy decisions.
- **Policy formation.** Having measured behaviour and set strategy, employees need to be consulted so that suitable policies can be put in place to provide a compromise between the commitment required by the organisation and the personal expectations of the individual employees.
- **Enforcement.** Once set, policies need to be adhered to, through ongoing measurement of management activities and, where possible, through the use of automated filters and tools.

Taking a more strategic approach will bring benefits by reducing unnecessary tariff costs as well as protecting the productivity gains promised by mobile. Done correctly this should not adversely affect the value and flexibility gained by the employee, nor should it undermine their 'social connection', although it should make it easier to fit it into context.

Individuals treasure their personal social connections, but they have to understand there is a cost and duty to be responsible when this impacts their working life. The work/life balance tips both ways.

#### References:

- 1 – Quocirca "Loud and Clear", April 2008
- 2 – iPass "Enterprise cost survey" report, April 2010
- 3 – Quocirca "Soaring across the regions", April 2008
- 4 – Volantis "Mobile internet attitudes" report, April 2010
- 5 – iPass "Mobile workforce" report, August 2010
- 6 – Facetime 5<sup>th</sup> annual collaborative survey, March 2010
- 7 – Quocirca "Telecoms expense management", April 2008

## Taking the social networking sting out of communications bills

**Unearth employee attitudes to social media** – It is a well promoted feature of the digital age but, depending on the mix of ages, backgrounds and roles, there may be very different attitudes to social networking among the workforce, in particular to the need or desire to 'keep up' during working hours. Canvas employee groups to get an overall view.

**Measure and understand actual usage** – The reality of social media use at work may be different to that portrayed by employees, many of whom may not realise the extent of its reach into their time. Tools and services exist to allow businesses to measure real usage and, with services accessed while mobile over cellular networks, usage can be directly linked to individual devices and, therefore, employees.

**Define the organisation's strategy** – The organisation's use of technology - mobile devices are no exception - have been deployed for a purpose; for example to boost employee productivity, to save travel or facilities costs or to improve communications or responsiveness. The importance and value of these reasons sets the tone for the mobile strategy and helps decide where to deploy devices or services, and what the aims or expected results should be.

**Set out enforceable policies** – Given the aims of the organisation and the reality of usage patterns, policies can be set to encourage behaviours that support the strategy and curb those that undermine it, such as excessive personal use, being overly lax with secure information etc. While technology can apply some constraints, employees need to be bought into the process too, in order for policies to be both enforceable and effective.

**Gather precise detail at the base level** – Ongoing measurement and analysis needs to be capable of collecting fine grained details to understand the patterns of use by individuals and then be intelligently combined to provide sufficient 'big picture' understanding at a number of levels. These might be organisational such as by cost centre, department and regional unit, or functionally by type of usage, application or device. Each provides important insight for further analysis for both the internal management of employee costs as well as the external management of suppliers. Internally, this information can be used to enforce policies or ensure that employees meet the costs of their personal use.

**Communicate all issues surrounding 'social networking'** – Many employees will recognise that they enjoy the benefits of social networking, but may not fully understand all the consequences of overindulging during work hours. There are risks of inadvertent disclosure of private data, creating a bad impression of their employer, its products or services as well as the use and sometimes abuse of company resources – hardware, software and especially communications services – and time that should have been spent working. Even in organisations where certain individuals can achieve their goals and still have time to spare on personal entertainment such as social networking, this can still have negative effects on other less able or less motivated employees, and can have a serious impact if noticed by external stakeholders. Organisations must clearly communicate what is, and is not, acceptable.

**Showcase good corporate use of social networking** – Social media are already being used by many businesses, and where they are, it is important to make employees aware of how the organisation is making use of them. This is part of demonstrating that the organisation does not think there are problems with the use of social media per se, but that there are distinctions between personal and professional use.

**Bring social networking addicts into formal channels** – If there are individuals with significant talent or aptitude to using social tools, see if this can be nurtured as part of the organisation's official use. There has to be a clear separation between personal and professional use and, apart from a few exceptional roles, it is far better if the professional use does not identify a particular individual by name.

**Integrate corporate social media into business processes** – Where social networking is already being formally used, ensure that it is fully integrated into the mainstream business processes, and not regarded as an adjunct. This further demonstrates that the organisation takes communications advances seriously, but that their use in business hours is integral to mainstream processes.

## **About ttMobiles**

ttMobiles is the UK's leading provider of mobile phone management services to companies in the public and private sector. It is independent of the mobile networks and its services work in conjunction with any chosen operator. Its solutions cover mobile phones, datacards, BlackBerrys, home broadband for corporate mobile fleets from 200 – 50,000 devices and were developed to help companies manage the complexities of a rapidly growing community of mobile users and their associated spiralling costs. By implementing its services, its clients are able to gain control of their mobile assets, ensure compliance with internal policies and external tax legislation and deliver cost savings through implementing best practice in mobile management.

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