3 Reasons You Should Stop Neglecting BYOD

Even though consumer devices are not going to replace purpose-built business devices any time soon, they are being incorporated into your customers' environments and the risks are real.

By Gary E. Barnett, senior VP and GM, Collaboration Platforms, Avaya

Why should IT pay attention to the 'Bring Your Own Device', or BYOD, phenomenon?

Clearly, there's this trend toward more people saying, "Look, with the technology tools I use in my personal life I'm ahead of where I am in my work life." Usually it's the opposite. They see tools at work and wonder when they're ever going to be able to get them at home. This is one of the few times when it's the other way around.

There's only one other time that I can remember seeing that in the communications space, and that was in the early stages of IM. Everybody had AOL, and they started to feel hindered because they didn't have it at work. So they started downloading AOL instant messaging at work because they had found a tool in their personal lives they thought would be applicable to business. That, to a large extent, was what started consumer driven, BYOD-type trends in the workplace.

Instant Messaging affected IT the same way BOYD is affecting IT today. There were messages going unencrypted all the way up to AOL and then back out on the network, and IT staff felt as if they had lost control. IT divisions now feel the same way about smartphones and touchpads. There's proprietary information on these devices, and if they get lost, there's often no password protection, and no way IT can remotely wipe it out.

So, that's **the first reason** IT staff should pay attention. They're going to have to go from very tight-knit, controlled environments, to looser environments with more fluid boundaries.

The second reason is that BYOD changes some of the requirements on things like accessibility and security. If I issue you a laptop, I can ensure that the VPN is on it, everything stored on it is encrypted, etc. But if you bring your own device, or I give you a device I don't control, then all of a sudden I have to put extra security measures in place.

A third driver is that users are finding applications that

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are highly useful, and they want them integrated. It could be anyone from a manager wanting to use a smart device to take notes, to a member of a sales force out in the field and wanting to use a smartphone as a GPS to locate customers. Workers want to bring these applications into the fold to be more productive. But is the application secure or not secure? If the salesperson clicks a customer's contact info to get GPS directions, does that contact information get out into the public domain?

So, with powerful forces like this driving BYOD into the workplace, IT needs to pay attention.

If personal devices are that useful, and workers want them so much, is it possible that they could someday replace company-owned purpose-built devices?

No. I think you have to think of it as more of an augmentation rather than a replacement. I don't think desktop conference phones will go away, and everybody will just put their iPhones in speaker mode. Almost never do I sit at my desk and use my iPhone when I have better and purpose-built devices to do that. On the other hand, while I'm walking down the hall, the purpose-built device is not accessible to me, and the iPhone expands my communications channels in a useful way.

I want a purpose-built device when handling important calls or conferences. I need a very high-quality speakerphone that gives me the flexibility I need, and using my personal device makes no sense. I would feel like I had a weaker tool in my hand, and I would feel less productive. I can't tell you how many times you get people on conference calls using mobile devices and they can be very disruptive. They don't intend to be. They just need to be mobile at the moment, so they use their personal device. But it doesn't have the quality of audio signature you want associated with a company, and the penalty you pay is you may not have the quality branding you really want. ●