BYOD Divides Opinion

A survey by Insight UK has revealed fears around hidden costs of BYOD deployment, class divides and evidence of managers using BYOD to pacify staff. Some IT managers ask: is it worth surrendering control just to raise staff morale?

It appears opinion is still divided when it comes to implementing Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) strategies within businesses today, with many at the top suggesting that such deployments create more problems than they solve. Yet, despite this feeling, many believe executives will still continue to BYOD and be allowed to do so.

That's according to a recent poll from Insight UK which surveyed over 232 IT managers and directors based in the UK. The research took in firms with an average annual IT spend of £50,000 to £100m+ and with up to 10,000+ employees.

Companies from a diverse portfolio of industries including Education, Financial & Banking, Manufacturing and Retail were asked to consider how mobility and the advent of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) strategies had affected the way they were going about their business.

Surprisingly, while 79% revealed that they were not in the process of implementing a BYOD strategy or it had yet to affect their planning, for the 21% that had, 82% of those surveyed said they had seen visible improvements in staff morale as a result.

Having said this more than 71% of those questioned believed that BYOD would have no negative effects upon productivity, which suggests something else is holding them back. Respondents were asked if they thought BYOD would place additional bandwidth strains upon the network or bring further security issues surrounding the deployment of 'foreign' devices within a company.

While one in five of those surveyed (20%) said that they didn't envisage BYOD having an impact on company networks, almost half (48%) of those surveyed thought it would come at a cost.

BYOD will be more expensive to run and may not boost productivity

Furthermore, results suggested that rather than helping to reduce the IT spend for CIOs and IT directors (only 18% said they thought it would), many believed (28%) that that the hidden costs associated with such strategies would make it unattractive to those at the top as they struggled with managing different operating systems and licensing issues.

"The hidden costs will be in trying to support iOS & Android and Windows 7 & 8 and Macs when we currently only have one operating system," said one.

"We are a 24/7 business and have desktops that are used by multiple users," said another. "BYOD may mean more desktops and therefore more licenses required," he added.

Indeed, 59% of those surveyed said they could even envisage a scenario where some firms might revert to a desktop computing strategy because of fears and costs associated with BYOD and the change it brings.

Could there be a backlash against BYOD and a return to Desktops?

"I don't see this reducing cost for the foreseeable future. Costs will only rise, as once BYOD is in place, it will then swiftly turn to business demand on IT purchasing these devices and providing them to staff, which brings a whole raft of new issues, such as

justification, grade specific only, support of devices etc.," one worried.

"We suspect that the cost impact may be neutral or perhaps even increase costs. We are likely to have to give the employee a contribution towards his machine or pay for it outright, and then pay for the infrastructure needed to run the system and give adequate protection. On the flipside it may reduce duty charges when we export machines and enable staff to become productive, faster when their machines fail. I am sure there will be hidden costs particularly around support and other infrastructure costs," added another.

Strange then that a sizeable majority of those questioned (67%) believe that executives are still likely to BYOD and it appears that decisions around this continue to divide the workforce.

"There is a tendency to allow BYOD at upper levels of the business to 'keep them quiet,'" revealed one concerned respondent.

Are some IT managers buying user silence but creating a rod for their own back?

"Interestingly, this has been a recent experience where the executive team have just been issued with laptops, iPads and iPhones. At a time when we have to be frugal with the purse strings some employees were not amused and felt that this was not a good use of company funds," revealed one.

Commented another: "I've seen managers accused of creating problems for themselves, by appeasing end users through BYOD. But having crossed this line, where will end user demands stop?"

Those surveyed were still not clear as to whether BYOD strategies would help things like cloud computing gain traction (48% said yes & 52% said no), although some of those questioned felt that certain sectors had much to gain from such thinking.

One respondent said: "We see a big potential benefit in the case of mobile staff, especially those overseas who need devices for which they can obtain local support and in their own language. Supplying machines with Chinese operating systems is difficult."

Another IT director thought image would have its part to play. "In marketing sectors, where image is important, BYOD allows users to carry a device which matches their image and persona. They can update and change according to fashions and trends without limitations enforced by information systems," he said.

Ashley Gatehouse, EMEA Vice President Marketing, Insight UK, added: "I think the survey clearly demonstrates that opinions are still divided when it comes to BYOD within the enterprise. Obviously staff welcome the flexibility such strategies bring, but the results also indicate apprehension from many in IT. It's clear that this is an area where businesses are still looking for guidance around implementation and cost, and perhaps one where IT managers might have to come to some kind of arrangement with the needs of an ever-demanding workforce. As such, Insight is ideally placed to help our clients face these challenges and find new ways to assist them in their IT investments."