

The BYOD Generation - Opportunity or Challenge for the Channel

Peter Hannah at distributor Avnet Technology Solutions, UK, says that the growth in smartphones and tablets will stretch IT departments and that the channel needs to step up to the challenge and opportunity.



The increasing use of smartphones and tablets for everything from keeping in touch with friends, reading a book on the way home from work to accessing corporate data is creating the need to securely integrate personal devices into the enterprise communication infrastructure.

The recent Worldwide Tablet Computer Market Forecast from Infinite Research claims that over the next five years, total shipments of tablet computers to enterprises around the world are expected to increase at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 48% with shipments rising from 13.6 million units in 2011 to 96.3 million units in 2016.

On these figures alone the channel cannot afford to ignore what is happening in terms of BYOD (bring-your-own-device). More people expect to take their own mobile devices to work and this is driving demand for secure, wireless networking infrastructures to facilitate smartphone and tablet connectivity across the enterprise network.

For example Avaya is making the Avaya Flare Communicator a download from the Apple App Store. The new app for iPad tablets is enabled by the Avaya Aura unified communications architecture, which delivers integrated applications to a broad range of fixed and mobile devices. Additional consumer devices and operating systems will be supported later in the year.

So how can IT departments extend telephony or unified communications capabilities from one or a variety of vendors across a mixture of smartphone platforms without having to manage and support multiple applications? Where should they go for help?

Neither of these are easy questions to answer but certainly business partners have been solving tricky problems such as these for many years. With the support of a strong solutions distribution partner now is a great time for resellers to build on core competencies and introduce new solutions to help customers adapt to the demands of flexible working and implement new BYOD standards to reduce complexity.

Aberdeen Group in its recent report - That's the Way You Need It: A Guide to Mobile Unified Communications found that organisations that successfully manage their communication environments were using multi-vendor solutions. According to the research, the three traits of an enterprise-grade mobile solution are:

- Improved productivity
- Secure
- Easy-to-manage

Add to this, agreed standards for support provided by a trusted partner and the future looks rosy for the BYOD generation and the channel.

Mobile Device Management

Another area of growth is in the Mobile Device Management (MDM) sector. As BYOD drives the proliferation of mobile devices and applications, mobile monitoring is growing in importance. The ability for organisations to secure, monitor, manage and support mobile devices with access to the enterprise communication infrastructure is growing in importance. Some analysts predict that revenue in the MDM space will grow 15% to 20% in the next three years.

MDM software allows corporate IT departments to manage multiple devices using Over-the-air programming (OTA). Management can include configuring a single or multiple devices including software and operating updates. The ability to lock and wipe devices is essential in the event of loss or theft. The benefits of MDM software in terms of reducing support costs and business risk are there to be seen. The opportunity for the channel lies in implementation which typically includes both server and client components – definitely one to watch.

Another one to watch with the advent of BYOD is Microsoft Lync. While still less than two years old Microsoft Lync was designed to combine instant messaging, VoIP calling, live meetings and video conferencing. While currently used to extend traditional IP PBX systems there is a belief it could ultimately replace traditional systems. Microsoft has recently released an app for Lync and the future will see support for additional consumer products such as Skype, continuing the removal of barriers between consumer products people use at home and what they use at work.

Business partners should also consider the potential boom in real-time conferencing and the use of video in the next five years. None of these technologies are new but deploying them across mobile devices in line with the BYOD initiative is both an opportunity and a challenge for the channel.

While most people agree that BYOD will help organisations attract the best people and ultimately reduce costs by allowing flexible working, these individuals will demand the latest communication services via their own familiar devices from any location (e.g. home, office, hotspots) and on any network (voice over Wi-Fi, voice over 3G/4G or cellular).

It is fair to say the phenomenal spread of smartphones and tablets could stretch existing IT departments who will look to the channel for support providing both a challenge and an outstanding opportunity. Which one will you take up?