

Have you taken your tablet today?

Richard Gibbons, IT consultant at Next Generation IT, looks at how businesses can best make use of products such as the iPhone, iPad, devices running Google Android or the new Windows 8 operating system



In a world where the demand for information on the move has never been greater, the integration of mobile technology with applications, file repositories and email makes it easier than ever for businesses to collaborate effectively. Lawyers and accountants, trust administrators and fund managers are all accessing their corporate email and files on the move.

The tablet revolution

Securely connecting to the corporate network can be a challenge, and in the past mobile devices have been used solely to access emails, calendars and contacts. This in itself is very useful, but the latest technologies from Citrix, VMware and Microsoft enable secure access to so much more, from files and folders stored on corporate file servers and intranets, to business applications and collaboration tools such as audio and video conferencing.

Staff can now access emails, files and applications from Apple or Android devices, and also from any of the plethora of new Windows 8-based ultrabooks and tablets. Tablet devices are much more convenient to carry around than laptops, easier to use while travelling and much quicker to switch on. Their popularity in the home, and relative low cost, means that many more staff want to connect them to their corporate network.

Keeping corporate data secure

The corporate infrastructure is traditionally designed for accessing data and applications from a corporate PC or laptop on the strictly-controlled corporate network. Tablets are very different animals, and their popularity is being driven through their success in the home. They are not designed to be intrinsically secure, but instead to be open for developers to create and sell apps. In addition, they are not built around a common operating system, with Mac OS and Android options significantly increasing the complexity of the issue. Organisations tightly control the applications installed on office PCs, but in contrast tablet devices can have a massive variety of apps over which organisations have no control, and which can accidentally (or intentionally) cause interoperability issues and security threats.

Leaders in remote access technology, such as Citrix, VMware and Microsoft, offer corporate solutions that address these issues by providing a secure gateway from the 'open' mobile

network into the secure corporate network. They provide central management and control of all these devices 'in the wild'.

It is also imperative that the security of corporate networks is not compromised to provide access for these mobile devices, and so systems must be put in place to securely connect the devices, providing encryption of corporate data transmitted to the devices over the internet, mobile network or public wireless networks.

Of course, security threats are not just in the virtual world. Mobile devices are so easily lost or stolen, so central administration of access, and the ability to remotely wipe all corporate device when it is lost or stolen is critical. Fundamentals such as enforcing password management should also be addressed to ensure data stored on the devices is protected from any potential threats.

No such thing as a free lunch

With all offerings, full due diligence should be carried out on all software, but in particular for the lower-cost or free ones. Dropbox, for example, is a popular and free cloud-based service, great for home use. But there are numerous privacy and security concerns with online file sharing sites, reaffirming the need to understand how the product works before transmitting any sensitive business data.

Cloud computing

Developers are working hard to create a new generation of cloud-based applications which will work directly on mobile devices, with no need for specialist software for connection to the corporate network. This will give even more choice and ease of use in the future. The practical application of this emergent technology is still in its infancy, and businesses should think carefully before putting sensitive corporate data into the public cloud. In particular, local organisations should be sure of the physical location of their data in the cloud and how it is being secured. Cloud-based providers may store and replicate data in many different jurisdictions, each subject to their own data protection laws.

Mobile technology is providing people with even more choice for easy and convenient access to corporate resources from anywhere in the world using a variety of devices, allowing you to remain productive and informed. Mobile technology can lead to new ways of working, enhancing efficiency, creativity, and the overall service you provide to your clients.