Mobility is the new driver of IT strategy

By William Hardie   12 Apr 2012

The hype around cloud computing has often tended to obscure an equally important development for enterprise technology strategy: The rise of mobility and the increasing consumerisation of IT.

The two are related: It's precisely because of cloud architectures that consumer devices such as smartphones and tablets have become so powerful, and so rapidly ubiquitous. The average iPad user knows little and cares less about where his applications are served from, and where the data is stored. All that counts, is that it works.

Enterprise users have reacted with enthusiasm to the fact that there's now an app for almost everything, as evidenced by the staggering growth in mobile data usage. The 500MB per month data bundle that sufficed even two years ago now barely lasts a few days. By 2015, Cisco predicts that the average smartphone will generate 1.3GB of traffic a month.

All this is fabulous for users, but a nightmare for the corporate IT managers charged with protecting the integrity of company systems and data.

Is your mobile device secure?

To take just one example: As devices get smaller and easier to carry around, they also get easier to lose. Moreover, when a director leaves his iPad with its copy of the latest board pack on a plane, the data might as well as be posted directly on the company's web site. A recent study found that 96% of people who picked up "lost" smartphones tried to access personal or business data, and 45% tried to access corporate email clients.

Mobile data security and device management need to be front and centre of corporate IT strategies right now. The first challenge is to integrate the wide variety of mobile operating systems - from iOS and Android through to Blackberry and Windows Mobile - into corporate environments, despite the fact that all are proprietary and very different. There's no feasible way to do this oneself, so a platform that handles the interface for you is essential.

Authentication policies need to establish trusted devices and trusted users, and clear guidelines need to be established and enforced around what a user can do with company resources. Downloading email using corporate bandwidth is fine, but most companies will want to make employees pay their own way when it comes to online games and the latest viral video.

Establish clear boundaries

Establishing clear boundaries between private and corporate information, and protecting the company turf, is just the start. It should also be possible to remotely access and wipe the device if it is lost or stolen.

It's not all bad news, though. If you have a platform that understands all the mobile operating systems in the market, you can also develop applications for all of them. This is something that more and more organisations are looking to as a source of revenue, a new contact point with their customers or simply a way to streamline their operations.

Mobility, in short, introduces some pain - but there are solutions to the headache. In addition, once those are in place, there is exciting potential to make the entire organisation more productive and profitable.

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