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Market brief

The Shifting Role of IT: Balancing Corporate Needs and Employee Expectations over a new security layer, Biometrics!

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Abstract: In a command-and-control world where IT could simply impose technology choices, usability and adoption were considered afterthoughts. Consumerization is now driving usability and adoption to the top tier of application evaluation criteria based upon Biometrics.

Overview

Hard to believe it, but smartphones have been on the market since 1992 with IBM's Simon, though back then there was little commercial success. Blackberry phones, first introduced in 2003, were pretty common in the enterprise by the mid to late 2000s. IT welcomed the Blackberry because it was within the enterprise IT domain, since corporate data access and permissions were governed by IT using Blackberry Enterprise Server. But when Apple introduced the iPhone in 2007 and the iPad in 2010, few people realized just how broad the impact of these devices, which were originally built for consumers, would be to business practices and processes. Now, thanks to companies like Apple and Samsung, the way we get work done has fundamentally changed in the last five years.

The biggest change is that it is really no longer a command-and-control world for IT, where IT could dictate the tools used for business. It is a new BYOD world in which users pick the devices they want to use for business purposes. But it isn't just a BYOD challenge because it is not just about devices. Rather, it is about the overall user experience—a combination of new devices and new types of applications. When Apple introduced the iPad, it revolutionized the consumer experience and changed how we think about interacting with applications. It gave us applications that are clean, simple, intuitive, and touch-based, and it set new criteria for how we want applications to work. Now it is driving a change in how we want to interact with business applications. Tech-savvy knowledge workers and recent college grads who are coming into the workforce with multiple mobile devices expect to have a consumer-like experience on these devices.

The Issue Is Applications, Not Devices

While BYOD can be problematic as IT works to implement measures to secure sensitive corporate information on all these devices, it is the bring-your-own-application (BYOA) trend that is really causing headaches. Because now that users choose their preferred device to use for business, it is a short leap to choosing their own application to use for business. They choose applications that meet business needs and that are as easy to use as the apps they use at home because it makes them more productive. But it is risky for the business when employees use unmanaged applications to store, access, and share business data. And that is just what is happening in the online file sharing and collaboration space (OFS). OFS allows users to access, share and collaborate on files from all of their assorted endpoint devices over the Internet, helping to increase productivity and take friction out of business processes. But users are often just signing up for free online file sharing accounts and using them for corporate data. This introduces risk: At that point, IT has lost control over corporate data. It is important that IT avoids a knee-jerk "lock it all down" reaction and start to forbid use.

Behold the birth of BASiL (Biometric Authentication Security interface Layer) which simply guarantees an all-round win situation, it ensures control over corporate data, scalable to all BOYD types and makes,

ensures "who assesses what" and eliminates the risk of rogue OFS (Online File Shares) accounts to store corporate data.

Biometrics: a conciliator for a safer internet

There are different buying criteria for online file sharing than for conventional, IT-housed applications. And it is not limited to OFS—OFS is a leading indicator of a broader shift in enterprise technology driven by mobility and the cloud, with companies like Apple or Dropbox leading the charge. IT must perform a balancing act between control for IT and usability for end-users. Old criteria, like price, service, support, and technical specs absolutely still come into play, but new criteria such as breadth of mobile device support and ease of use on mobile devices plays a new role. Why? Because no matter what solution IT provides, if employees don't use it, IT runs a huge security risk. And that is indeed what is happening today in the OFS space. For companies that have deployed corporate OFS accounts, almost one in four report that users are continuing to use their own solutions, and just over one in four is challenged with training users on new tools and processes (see Figure 1). 2 Here, adoption and security go hand in hand because there is no security if users don't adopt.

Evaluating usability can also help IT drive efficiency by reducing the training burden and speeding time to value. It is pretty simple and should go without saying, but applications that are easy and intuitive to use are simple to learn, reducing the overall cost and time associated with training. That means the solution goes into production sooner—and for online file sharing, the sooner the better, since OFS helps accelerate business process by facilitating file sharing and collaboration. Given that, in today's BYOD and BYOA world, IT needs to balance whether employees will use the solution with how much security the solution offers. Essentially, if employees won't use it, there is more risk introduced into the environment because of the potential for data leakage in personal accounts. In the old IT command-and-control world,
IT dictated what applications (and devices) the entire company used. Now, with BYOD, BYOA is much too easy. This fact alone elevates employee usability to the top echelon of buying criteria.

IT's New Role

IT has an opportunity for transformation, driven by multiple vectors. BYOD and BYOA play a role, but so do legacy command-and-control IT factors. When ESG surveyed marketing professionals (as a proxy for a broader knowledge worker environment), we found that more than one in five (22%) look at IT as a business inhibitor. In fact, 29% of marketing managers say they have made technology purchase decisions in the past 12 months without even having IT involvement or approval. Outside of web development, most spending is on cloud apps and services. This is not surprising, given how fast-moving the technology environment has become, and how bogged down IT is in (much needed) legacy infrastructure and process. The more a company has invested in its IT technology and processes, the harder it is to change. But change is what is needed to adapt to today's world and forward-thinking IT organizations are adapting. One way they are adapting is by making employees a part of the technology evaluation and acquisition process. Making employees a part of the evaluation process reverses the trend, helping get buy-in and support not just for the solution but for IT as a whole. This trend of departments making their own technology decisions is not likely to go away soon. This democratization of IT decisions is likely to accelerate as more business tools become available via fast and easy SaaS offerings. If IT has responsibility for data governance, then IT must work hand in hand with employees and departments to ensure the corporate solution meets both user and corporate needs. IT must transform its role from a solution provider role to encompass education and advisory practices around corporate data governance. And it must transform its application evaluation process to using a user-first buying criteria. One that considers the user experience hand in hand with security and management to reduce risk of data leakage exposure from departments making their own decisions or employees using personal consumer solutions for corporate data.

Putting the User First

Putting the user first means two things: having users in the evaluation process, and evaluating usability as a top-tier solution selection criteria, hand in hand with other requirements. Once you determine that employees will actually use the solution, then you can have confidence that you can secure corporate data and you can move on to criteria that are required for your business, like end-to-end encryption, antivirus, and integration with existing applications and tools. Benefits of a user-first buying criteria: • Reducing training costs. If the solution provides an intuitive, easy-to-use interface and a consumer-like experience, training time and costs are reduced. • Speeding time to value. Because users are involved in the buying process and usability is a key criterion, the solution is put to work quickly and efficiently. • Viral adoption. When users are a part of the evaluation process, they are much more likely to promote the solution and its benefits to their peers, helping drive adoption. • Increased productivity. OFS solutions themselves increase productivity by taking friction out of file access, sharing, and collaboration. The more widely a solution is used, the more that productivity is increased. • Reducing risk of continued use of personal solutions. This is the biggest benefit. If users will not use the corporate-provided solution and keep using their personal solutions, the company remains at risk. Putting in place a user-first evaluation process reduces risk.

The Bigger Truth

With all the change brought about by consumerization, BYOD, and now BYOA, it would be easy for IT to just put the hammer down and lock down the corporate environment. But it is critical that IT avoids the knee-jerk, "lock it all down" reaction. Rogue usage continues to plague environments even after companies adopt a corporate solution because users are looking for fast, friendly, and easy-to-use applications. They are looking for a consumer-like experience for corporate applications. The best way to get users on board is to make them a part of the solution. It means that many IT organizations may have to step outside of their comfort zone and hire people with new skill sets to deal with the new world. The new world is not going away. Change is accelerating with every new device and shiny new toy on sale at Best Buy. Forward-thinking IT teams are focusing on usability, putting users first and transforming their roles into those of data conservatorship advisors to the broader organizations.