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Randy Johnston • Sep. 05, 2014

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Is this the year of the Tablet? Has the mobile Internet finally arrived? What business purposes are served by using mobile Internet devices, and how can they help us serve clients better?

Whether you are working with products from Apple, Motorola, BlackBerry, HTC, Samsung or a myriad of other providers, access to the Internet, and applications or

“Apps” drive the mobile world. Today, you can use apps that give you access to

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from Internet sources including office, home and public repositories. There are limitations, but most users now agree that the limitations are so few that a new age of mobility has arrived.

Devices that enable the mobile Internet, whether phones or tablets, are used for consumption of content. They may not be the most efficient data-entry devices, but they are probably sufficient for light duty entry. Sitting in your home, during a commute, at a client's office or in a meeting with access to items you consider critical or convenient can be very enabling or distracting.

What is your plan?

You must first define your need. This is a fundamental rule for all good information technology systems. We each have responsibilities and tasks to complete. What would you like to be able to do when you are not at your desk and what do you have to do?

Next, you need to define the purpose of your mobile device. When cell phones first arrived, many were resistant to the idea of carrying a phone all of the time, and being too accessible. Cost, size, background noise and clarity of calls were all issues. Today, don't we consider the cell phone a vital business tool that aides in convenience, safety, as well family and client communication and service?

Carrying only one mobile device would be preferred, but the limitations of screen size, speed and convenient keyboard entry make this particular goal questionable. Products like the Motorola Atrix are trying to overcome these objections by providing a docking station that is both a larger screen and a keyboard, while having dual processors in the phone itself. Others, like Steve Jobs from Apple, have backed larger screen sizes saying a 7-inch screen would be “too small to express the software.”

He said 10 inches was the minimum for a tablet screen. Maybe it is age or maybe it is

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Choices, options and opinions

The Consumer Electronics Show (CES) is often used to launch new products, and tablets were dominant at this year's show, as were supporting products for the iPad. The same has been true for cell phones in the past. You can find many opinions, summaries and marketing hype online from this show and other sources. Two mainstream efforts exist for mobile devices: Apple with its iPhone, iPad and IOS and the open source market supported by the Google Android operating system, often simply called Droid, supported by hardware players like Motorola, Samsung and HTC.

Other mobile strategies have been advanced by Microsoft, BlackBerry and Hewlett Packard, with Windows Mobile, the popular and addictive RIM "crackberry" devices that have been so productive and enabling, and Palm OS-based devices that HP acquired in 2010. All five strategies could be successful in their own right if the others did not exist. For clarity, the rest of this article will be written thinking around the Apple methodology because of the success of the iPad tablet and iPhone. With the arrival of iPhone 5 and iPad 2 in 2011, Apple will revise and refine an already successful strategy. A strategy using any of the five approaches available at the time of this writing can be successful if the device and the apps meet your needs. The Android shows more promise and increasing speed of adoption, and the BlackBerry approach shows more focus on business needs. Look online for a comparison chart of features, needs and products (www.cpata.com/go/XXXX).

Generically, solving for the business problems of email, web access, document access and note taking can be accomplished by all five strategies named above. The simplicity and elegance of approach is a debatable point, which many have expressed in passionate arguments. Solving business problems efficiently can be done in all approaches. Running a few apps and integrating to well-known systems like

Microsoft Exchange or Gmail for email can be solved, sometimes elegantly, on all

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Running over the typical base limit of 1GB to 5GB of data transfer per month can rack up additional charges of \$10/GB or more, depending on the plan. Unlimited data plans cost even more or may be unavailable. However, most smartphones and tablets today detect if 802.11 wireless is available and automatically default to use 802.11 wireless. 802.11 wireless is faster, and this conserves cellular data for when access via cellular is the only option.

After initial configuration, the benefit of adding a cellular plan to a smartphone or tablet is that the device can be used for Internet access with no additional setup beyond turning the device on. Depending on 802.11 wireless prevents the device from being used during most commutes, on airplanes, in offices or in public places where no wireless Internet access is available. If your primary places of use are the office and home, and you have 802.11 wireless in both places, a cellular plan is completely unnecessary. Alternatively, some carriers like Verizon have made iPad devices available with only 802.11 wireless, supplying a portable cellular wireless access point or MiFi unit. Over time, we expect all cell phones to act as MiFi units. Using a separate or cell phone-based MiFi unit today is acceptable, but not quite as convenient as built-in cellular data access. An additional advantage for the MiFi approach is that the unit can be shared on up to five connections including your personal computer and with other users.

Apps are what really drive these devices, and most apps have to be written specifically for the hardware and operating platform chosen. This means that Windows applications do not run on most of the five options above without the addition of more technology. Vendors have responded to the demand of remote Windows applications on the iPad by updating the popular Citrix and VMware environments with the Citrix Receiver for iPad and VMware TeamViewer.

These software products connect the iPad back to servers running the Windows

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Native apps enable key functions like note taking, email or web browsing. Other apps can or have to be downloaded to your device through the app marketplace for your platform. For example, on the iPhone or iPad, the Apple App Store has more than 350,000 apps at the time of this writing. The Android Market has approximately 88,000 apps, and the BlackBerry App World has just over 100,000.

A good rule of thumb is that an app will show up in the Apple App Store first, and if it is popular, it will be rewritten for the Android Market and then rewritten for BlackBerry's App World. Utilities like Rover middleware, Enterprise2Mobile (E2M), and Red Foundry can help with building or enabling apps to mobile devices from proprietary or enterprise systems. Vendors can use these tools to quickly mobilize their apps across multiple mobile platforms without having to write a specific app. If an app is good, it is likely to be available on all five approaches over time.

Apps are available for most business functions today. Some are crude, and some are elegant. All represent a new way of doing business and most are single "point" solutions to a particular problem. Apps fall into many different categories such as travel, news, utilities, personal, game and business. New apps and categories are being invented every day. Each app marketplace lists its own categories and top apps. As examples, top favorite apps include: DropBox, PDFExpert, Air Display, PogoPlug, Dragon, Docs to Go, Penultimate, OpenTable, GateGuru, and Flipboard (the reading product that consolidates feeds into a single personal digital reader). Magazine and news favorite apps include The Economist, WSJ, USA Today, The Daily, NPR, Time Mobile, FT Mobile (Financial Times) and ABC News, with its innovative interface and approach. Most apps cost \$10 or less, and some of the very best apps are free.

Document review and access while out of the office is a key function that most will conclude that they need. From the apps listed above, no one app does everything needed to make all documents available with easy editing. However, with a

combination of free and paid apps, you can enable convenient document sharing,

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You need to be able to do this from your conference room, while riding in a car, or while watching an event at home on television. For less than \$25 in purchased apps, with an iPad that has cellular data access, and an optional Boxwave stylus to use like a pencil on the screen rather than your finger, you can solve this problem. How?

First, you need to be able to act digitally 100 percent of the time. At this point, virtually all of you should have access to a scanner that allows you to take paper documents and scan them to PDF format. When you read a magazine or receive a paper document, scan the original into PDF format and drop the document into storage. Use your DropBox account if you are comfortable with using convenient cloud-based storage, or into your PogoPlug folder if you prefer private, disk-based storage. Both DropBox and PogoPlug have apps for all popular smartphones and tablets. These apps will give you access to all converted hard copy documents as well as files of all kinds from anywhere.

Second, open the documents either from your account at DropBox or PogoPlug or open the documents that have been sent to you via email. If the documents are PDFs that need markup, use PDFExpert for handwritten review of the documents. If the documents are in Microsoft Office format, Docs to Go will enable you see and edit all Microsoft documents on your mobile devices.

Finally, if you want to be able to hand sketch a concept or idea like you would on a traditional yellow pad, open your Penultimate application and sketch away. If you need to type a few notes for a memo, the notepad application on your mobile device can handle this problem as well as the Docs to Go application if you'd prefer the final work product to be in Microsoft Word format.

Depending on your location, the result can be sent via cellular data or 802.11 wireless email or simply dropped off in your DropBox or PogoPlug folder or account for further action by others. Each app can be opened separately and suspended while

you are doing another activity such as web browsing to check your facts or

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As a response to this, some organizations are trying strategies to help people focus on doing the right thing. Current attempts include Email free Fridays, and technology checked at the door during important meetings to minimize distractions. We have all sat in meetings where attendees were inattentive, impolite or just completely rude handling email, or doing something else on a computer rather than being engaged in the activity at hand. Mobile technology is about balance and enablement. All tools can be used for good and bad, and on the whole, smartphones and tablets can greatly assist productivity with fewer distractions than noisier and sight-blocking laptops, cable-prone messiness, and darkened room projection or attention-distracting HD TV displays. A key limitation of the iPad is the ability to project all applications. The Samsung Galaxy Android-based tablets can project the entire experience of using the tablet.

Inability to do more than one thing at a time increases with age. However regardless of age, real focus and innovation often requires one's full attention to the problem at hand. Issues can be resolved more quickly and in most cases better, by giving one's full attention for a focused period of time.

Looking up critical facts to keep a discussion moving in the right direction or to keep a potential solution from being based on completely wrong assumptions can be highly effective. "Facts" that are looked up on the fly can also be wrong or based on incorrect assumptions, and can direct a meeting or discussion to a wrong conclusion. However, in most cases, light fact checking during a meeting is not a distraction, but rather an enabler. Taking notes, particularly projected or on a large monitor, can keep everyone on the same page. Agreed upon action items can help after a meeting to make sure everything is completed.

Rude distractions, such as taking calls during meetings or showing unrelated or inappropriate content simply because it is convenient is not so much a technical

problem as it is a discipline or management problem. Enable your team with the

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time. Protection and control of the data, losing a device, terminating an employee or theft can all be risks to firm and client confidential data. Encryption of the device or at a minimum pin codes or swipe patterns should be enabled to protect the data. Security breach laws apply to these mobile devices, and you should check your state regulations to help set and comply with your firm's strategy in this area.

Screen size, as Steve Jobs points out, is the key limiting factor. Smartphones have become small enough they conveniently fit in a pocket or a handbag. Today's tablets are often too heavy or too large to be conveniently carried, but are typically smaller and lighter than most portable computers. Vendors introducing five- and seven-inch models argue that the screens are large enough and the units are lighter and more portable. Netbooks may get close to tablets in size and weight if external keyboards are added to a tablet. However, no netbook today can get close to the battery life or instant-on capability of a tablet, and touch screens are still a notable differentiation. Sensitivity to touch, whether too sensitive or not sensitive enough, is an additional consideration.

Smartphones and tablets are best visualized as content consumption devices and are not very good for data input. Entering data is possible, but you will be much more time efficient on a laptop or desktop than on a tablet. However, laptops may not be portable or accessible enough for all situations. The touch input for typing may be too slow to be effective. The small screen size and "thumbing" of messages on smartphones may be too cumbersome or time consuming. The weight of a tablet may be too heavy for people with hand problems or arthritis. However, on the whole, the portability and accessibility of smartphones and tablets make them useful tools.

A bright future

Imagination and creativity are the key limiting factors in your application of smartphones and tablets. If you can conceive it, it can be built. The new, portable

Internet is making business and personal applications possible that were not

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