

BYOD in the Workplace

A Webanywhere Free Guide



What is BYOD?

BYOD is an acronym for "Bring your own device". This refers to when staff bring personally owned hardware to work. This can be anything but most commonly comprises handheld devices such as smartphones or tablets.

One of the main reasons that a lot of businesses need to consider their positions on this issue is for security and data integrity. Having company data on uncontrolled devices can be a big risk, there are frequent stories in the press of laptops and data being lost, this is even more likely if the device is a "personal" one. There is also a risk if someone leaves the company, the business will have no control over that device or any data that the former employee has on it.

In addition to this, if a business allows personal devices to connect to their corporate network they can be more at risk of viruses and trojans, as users may not have enterprise level antivirus that is kept up to date (or in the case of phones - often none at all).

A third strand that often isn't considered is insurance. If an employee is using a personal device to conduct business for the company and it is lost or stolen, they may have an expectation that the company will meet the cost of the device. Depending on the company's insurance provider this may not be covered, which could leave the business out of pocket.

After hearing the risks a lot of companies may be tempted to ban personal devices. However they may then miss out on some of the benefits that **BYOD** can bring.



Firstly cost is a key saving, a lot of companies would love to be able to purchase all their staff iPads or iPhones but may not be able to afford this. With employees bringing their own devices businesses can get the benefits of being able to use tablets or company phones but without the capital expense.

Connected to this is the ability to follow trends in technology development. Every business wants to be seen to be at the forefront of new developments, but keeping up with the trends can be expensive. Having a relaxed **BYOD** policy will mean that the business can benefit from these innovations without needing to own the devices, if a trend moves on the business isn't left with devices it no longer needs or wants.

This flexibility is also a key asset. Working in any sector that needs their products to be compatible with a range of platforms requires hardware to be tested on. Purchasing a few of the most popular can be a good investment, but only the largest firms will be able to afford a large selection of makes and models. If staff bring their own devices in, this can offer the business a platform for testing your product.

Another benefit of this flexibility is the concept of device suitability. When a corporation is looking at mass purchasing of devices selecting the right ones to choose can be a challenge. Lots of users have preferences, for instance whether they prefer iOS or Android, or whether they find touchscreens useful or difficult to use. If the business has to select only one device, it is pretty much guaranteed that some users will be unhappy with their choice. If they purchase lots of different devices they can cause a headache for internal IT teams in terms of management and support. Having a permissive **BYOD** policy means that users can select a device they're happy with, without the additional support requirements this would bring.

Self selection also has another benefit, that of familiarity. One of the hardest parts of a new job is learning all of the new systems and how they all function. Although users are typically familiar with the most common desktop operating systems, mobile devices can vary wildly, and this can be a real struggle for a new member of staff. Being able to use the device they are already familiar with eliminates that learning curve, and lets them focus on the job that the business needs them to do.

One often missed benefit is connected to learning in the workplace. If a corporation has a mobile compatible LMS (like Moodle or Totara) they often find staff will be happier looking up new information on breaks or in their own time on their personal devices. Allowing this access can encourage learning in the organization which can benefit business development.

On balance Webanywhere's advice would be to allow staff to use their own devices. It would however be foolish to allow these without attempting to mitigate the risks. Webanywhere are happy to allow staff members to use their own devices as they have put plans in place to help them minimize any risks. Below are some suggestions to mitigate each of the risks that have been identified.

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Data security or Leaving the company

The most important step here is having clear policies in place, it should be clear what data a user is allowed to store on their personal devices, and there should be regular checks on this. This should ensure that if a device goes missing or someone leaves the company it is known what data is on their device. Companies can also mitigate the risk by ensuring no business critical data is stored on personal devices.



Viruses and Trojans

The best way of mitigating this risk is to give staff advice on antivirus on protection for their devices. As Windows 8 becomes more common a lot of desktop antivirus solutions are also creating mobile versions.



Insurance

Insurance can be a complicated subject, the first step should be to check the business's current insurance policy to see if there are any specifics in there. Generally, using a personal device in the office is at the staff members own risk, but the business may want to make exceptions for specific circumstances (for instance if it was stolen from a company vehicle, or if the staff member was explicitly asked to take the device with them for a work purpose - e.g. presenting at a conference). Although it is best to have a clearly defined policy, some flexibility may be needed in unusual circumstances.



General Advice

The most important thread through this advice is clearly defined guidance. This should be agreed at a senior management level, and cascaded out to staff via HR. Generally it should be incorporated into staff terms and conditions or an employee policy document. Once everyone is clear on what the policy is, it is a lot less likely that the business will encounter issues or difficult situations.

This advice is based on Webanywhere's own experiences deploying a **BYOD** policy. If you are concerned about potential liability it is best to seek legal counsel, and none of the above should be considered legal advice.

The future of Online Learning

Webanywhere specialises in learning technologies that enable the concepts described in this paper, and stretch the learning potential of an organisation's most important asset - its people. To discuss social learning, multi tenancy or the effective implementation of a learning management system in your organisation, contact our workplace learning team on 01535 604026, or email workplace@webanywhere.co.uk.

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