What you need to know for the new business technology trend

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Good morning, good afternoon, or good evening. As I can't tell with any certainty what time of day you are reading this article, I wanted to make sure that I covered the most likely options. I would, however, be willing to put better than even odds on the fact that right now you are reading this not on printed paper, but with the effervescent glow of a screen illuminating the general area around you.

As of the end of October 2013, there have been roughly 170 million iPads sold to date. Add to that the number of Android tablets sold and by the end of 2013 the estimated number of tablets in use approaches 225 million. Now, let's factor in the smartphone market and suddenly we've hit an astronomical number of devices in existence that travel with their owners everywhere on a daily basis. All that and we haven't even hit those seemingly archaic laptops that you'll still find dispersed intermittently on the tables of every coffee shop you walk into.

Why is it important to realize how many devices are out there? Because these devices are how we communicate and interact with one another in both our professional and personal environments. Think about it in this respect: you've hired a new employee and the first thing you do is give them their company computer and possibly a phone so that they have access to the stored company documents and so you can reach them. Once the device is in the hands of the employee, their first action is to set up their device the way that is comfortable to them with file organization and putting up their own preferred desktop background. With the move to Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), there is no longer a need for this customization as the device is theirs to begin with. The comfort level with the technology is already there because this is the same piece of hardware they use at home everyday. This allows for the potential of greater productivity because the employees always have these devices in hand making them as well as their work accessible nearly any time of day, and all that with seemingly no added cost to the company.

So if this ease of use and access is so beneficial, why hasn't there been broader acceptance of this new way of using personal devices at work? The short answer is security. Your employees are dealing with both your company's and your client's confidential information. These are documents that need to remain private. When you don't control the devices that are on your network keeping the information secure becomes the responsibility of the company. This entails a network infrastructure for the employees to interact and work with documents while maintaining a high level of security. There is not currently a single universally adopted answer as to how to accomplish this yet because it has to do with how your company network is configured so we'll explore a few options.

Your company already has an existing network infrastructure where you have invested time and money to ensure it will perform to meet the needs of your operations. Having IT professionals overhaul the network and create separate levels of interaction based on the devices would be the most ideal way to handle an environment where both corporate hardware and BYOD hardware would both be used by your employees. One way that companies are getting around the need to completely rebuild the network is by creating a separate network where the employees using their BYOD devices can log in providing them with access to company documents. This would be similar to the way some companies have 2 wireless networks running, one for employees and one for guests. By having a separate network for the BYOD employee devices you are able to keep the network and information secure because you have the control over what information is allowed to live on this separate network.

As opposed to building a brand new network to run side by side with your existing one, there is a way to use the existing network. By setting up a partitioned network called a VLAN (Virtual Local Area Network) within your existing network system, again you would be able to isolate what information is accessible. The key to determining if this is the best methodology for your company is getting your company to research how their existing network operates. The odds are strong that you already have existing VLANs set up, if you are a larger company, in order to allow for more streamlined workgroup operation. There's also a good chance that your video conferencing connections are also set up on

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their own VLAN. If they're not, they should be, why let a large video conference bog down and even crash your entire network? If you start partitioning the network with VLAN you're essentially taking your existing network and telling it that devices in group A have access to information A, while devices in group B could have access to information A & B. So, which method is best for you?

It could be that your infrastructure is set up to allow employees to log into your existing network the same way they would as though you had provided them a company laptop without issue.

It could be the configuration of a secondary network to run separately, but side by side, with the existing network allowing the BYOD users to log in but keep separation between company devices and BYOD devices would suit your needs better.

It could be possible to set up several VLAN partitions on your existing network to allow for the BYOD traffic to operate across a separate network without having to put in any new hardware.

Or you could decide that this a trend that suits your company culture and completely restructure the whole network to function in similar fashion to cloud computing where all data is stored in a centralized location and can only be manipulated but never moved.

In the end it will be entirely dependent on how your company wants to invest resources to participate with the BYOD movement.

The most important thing when considering how to incorporate BYOD into your organization is understanding how the BYOD trend can benefit as well as how it can change your company. By providing the infrastructure to allow for these devices to be used, you will be building a corporate environment at the forefront of technology. This, in turn, could make it friendlier not only for the younger professionals entering the job market to join the company due to your forward thinking nature, but also allow for the more senior professionals to transition in with greater ease allowing your company to move to or stay ahead of the competition.