

PROBRAND

MAGAZINE

GROUP



Issue 2

Crown
Commercial
Service
Supplier

INTELLIGENT THINGS

What will
*future
technology
products*
look like?

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**INNOVATION
THROUGH
OUTSOURCING**

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**INTRODUCING
DIGITAL
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**CCS TALKS
TECHNOLOGY
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Peter Robbins

Managing Director, Probrand Group



With issue one of our Group Magazine generating positive feedback from private and public sector organisations and all corners of the IT supply chain, I'm pleased to introduce issue two. Our aim with this magazine is to tackle contemporary issues relevant to commercial, procurement and IT teams, and this time we've added extra pages of great content from the best IT writers to help us do it.

We're particularly pleased to provide an exclusive interview with Crown Commercial Service commercial director of technology, Sarah Hurrell, on the new ways government will buy IT (p27). We also hear from Spend Matters editor, Peter Smith, on the Digital Marketplace (p28).

Technology is transforming the way we work and exist, creating one connected and seamless communication experience which is delivering unprecedented opportunity for all - and this is a major theme we build on.

We discuss the emerging trend of web and mobile apps being created by non-technical users (p20, 32), and the next wave of IT innovation.

Applications need infrastructure, end user facing technology products and great people to complete the picture, however.

So we've dedicated a section (p6) to the intelligent new products delivering smarter ways of working. We also explore technology device trends and developments (p11, 12), the changing landscape of ICT infrastructure (p44) and the associated security challenges (p34).

When it comes to buying this technology, we appreciate that many struggle to validate best value on every purchase amid a highly volatile IT market, where price and stock fluctuate

daily. That's why we have dedicated sections to the supply chain (p22) and procurement (p27), exploring strategic issues and how to secure relevant technology at the best price.

Whatever way you are looking to innovate it is potentially going to need some form of external support to help you realise your goals and make that technology work harder for you. With that in mind, Danny Bradbury investigates innovation through outsourcing (p30), we also explore integrated mobile strategies (p15) and examine the increasing opportunities and risks presented by Bring Your Own Device (p34).

Indeed, the constant pace of rapid technology change is seeing innovation become the necessary norm - analysts believe this current period of tech evolution could go on for at least another decade.

These innovations are seeing us adopt new ways of working, with quicker, more powerful technology. It is important, therefore, that businesses are able to replace and refresh existing tech and drive from the front with the automation of business processes. The big question is, how do you intend to seize the moment and innovate in your organisation, what are your key business and technology priorities? We're keen to hear your story.

Peter Robbins
Managing Director, Probrand Group



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1. Sir Albert Bore, Birmingham City Council Leader, addresses employees during his visit, 2. Apprentice Mike McQuaid, Lord Mayor of Birmingham and Peter Robbins, 3. Public sector innovators meet KnowledgeKube at Government ICT 2.0, 4. Peter Robbins accepts The Queen's Award from HRH The Duke of Kent, 5. Apprentice Loren Garbett demonstrates the power of KnowledgeKube, 6. Commercial Director, Chris Griesbach, champions the Government's Building Britain campaign.



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Probrand Group Magazine provides news, views, analysis and information on pivotal subjects relevant to IT, procurement and business leaders looking to thrive with technology.

Please get in touch and share your views on any of the subjects tackled or any you would like to read about.

Technology research in brief

Flexible working could help UK save £11.5bn

Allowing people in the UK to 'work anywhere, at any time' could cut half a billion hours in wasted travel time, according to research by Citrix and Gebr.

The study, which claimed this would lead to cost savings of £11.5bn, also found that 96% would take up the option to work flexibly if it was offered. Jacqueline de Rojas, area vice president for Citrix, said: "Those that choose not to enable workplace mobility will lose out in the war for talent and could arguably suffer from lower employee productivity."

Connected devices to double this decade

The number of wireless connected devices in use globally will more than double before the end of the decade, an ABI Research study has claimed.

The analyst claimed wireless device growth, which will rise above 40bn by 2020, is being driven by machine to machine communications. Aapo Markkanen, principal analyst at ABI Research, said: "The driving force behind the surge in connections is that usual buzzword suspect, the Internet of Things (IoT)."

Wi-Fi to be default connection for all devices

Wi-Fi is increasingly becoming the default means of connection for both mobile and non-mobile devices, according to Gartner.

The analyst attributed the shift to tablets and smartphones, which it said were fast becoming the go-to device for all communication and content consumption. It predicts that more than 50% of users will use these devices first for all online activity by 2018.

Cloud computing adoption to double by 2020

The number of small businesses fully adopting cloud computing will double by 2020, a study by Emergent Research has claimed.

Steve King of Emergent Research. "In this new landscape, many people are using the power of the cloud to re-imagine the idea of small business and create new, innovative models that work for their needs." A separate report by IBM has found that 40% of decision makers believe cloud computing has already delivered major improvements in organisational efficiency and provided competitive advantage.

Big Data changing the competitive landscape

Almost nine in ten large enterprises believe Big Data analytics will redefine the competitive landscape of their industry over the next three years.

The study by General Electric found that 73% of enterprises are currently investing more than a fifth of their technology budget on Big Data. A separate IDC study has forecast that the storage element of this market alone is expected to experience annual compound growth of 30.5% during the same time period.



Intelligent things

the future of technology



by Danny Bradbury

The future is coming, but what is it going to look like? Danny Bradbury spoke to two market leaders to find out.

For most people, the future is somewhere off in the distance, shimmering mirage-like, just above the horizon. For Chris Shaw, it's already here, just around the corner, in a deserted office.

Intel's director of IT sales and marketing for EMEA and Asia downplays the 007 gadgetry. He says that Intel employees don't get to see new technologies much ahead of anyone else. But some of the stories he tells suggest that he gets to visit what most of us consider the future on a daily basis.

Here's an example: Intel has several smart meeting rooms in offices around the world. "Any employee can go into the room, swipe their badge against a screen, and bring up their calendar of appointments," he says.

If that employee is talking to someone else in a virtual meeting, the system will automatically connect them via video conference to the appropriate meeting room or other location.

"We are orchestrating that using a bunch of technologies," says Shaw. These include

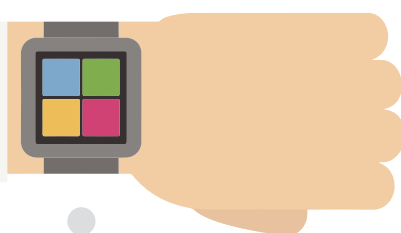
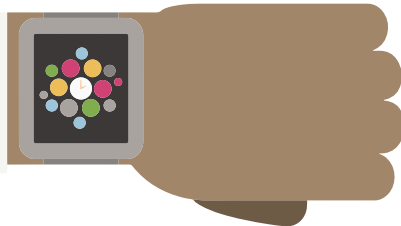
Internet of Things (IoT) technologies and software APIs, developed both internally and with third party vendors.

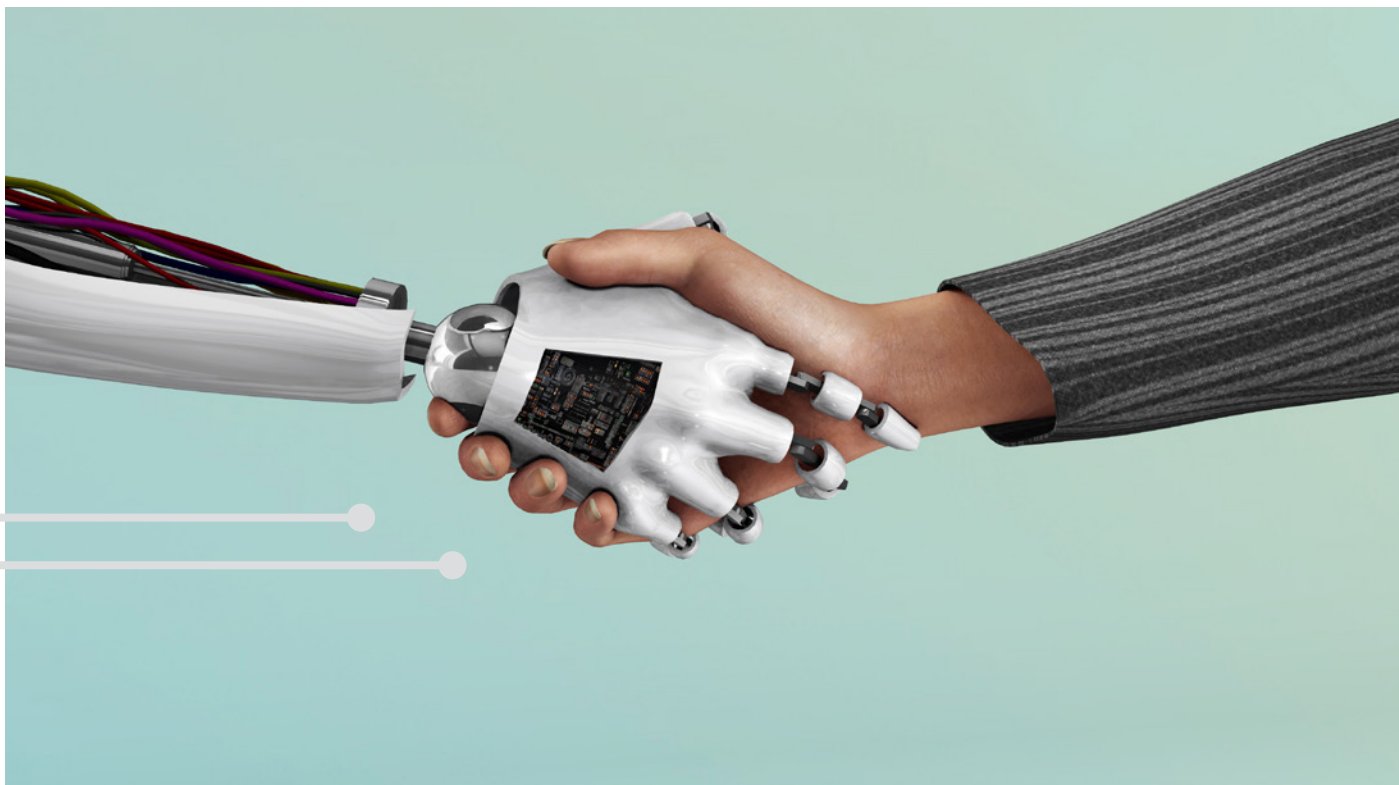
This is one example of how evolving technologies will change the future for tomorrow's businesses. The future of technology is perhaps one of the most exciting places to visit. Both Shaw and Mark Deakin, partner technology strategist for small and medium business at Microsoft, see a lot of potential in IoT, which includes not just industrial controllers and household appliances, but wearables, too.

The Internet of Things

"If I have near field communications (NFC) or a Bluetooth tag, then the house will know that I entered it," says Deakin. In the future, he also sees intelligent systems within buildings that talk to each other, and even to external services. How about a building that automatically turns the heating up when it snows?

This vast array of connected devices, ranging from wristwatches to cars, will revolutionise the business and consumer worlds alike in the next few years, says





Intel's Shaw. In the future, the company hopes to implement other showcase technologies, including one where employees can use meeting rooms that are booked, but not in use.

"One technology that we're implementing with our IoT sensors is smart sensing for activity and traffic in meeting rooms," he explains. If machines detect that a meeting room has no one in it, it becomes free. It's one of the most requested features among Intel employees.

"We are taking our technology and history, the great quality and results from the PC business and reusing the same technologies and techniques," he says.

These devices will transform the way that we interact with everyday objects, experts suggest. Imagine a car not as a single, self-contained entity, but as a collection of services, connected to a universe of others.

"We could create incentives for people on a long journey," he says. "Their vehicle may know that they're 20 miles away from a petrol station, and that the level of fuel they have in their vehicle won't take them much past that. You could send them an event-driven alert that provides an offer for money-off fuel if you stop at a fuel station in the next city."

Super-brains for everyone

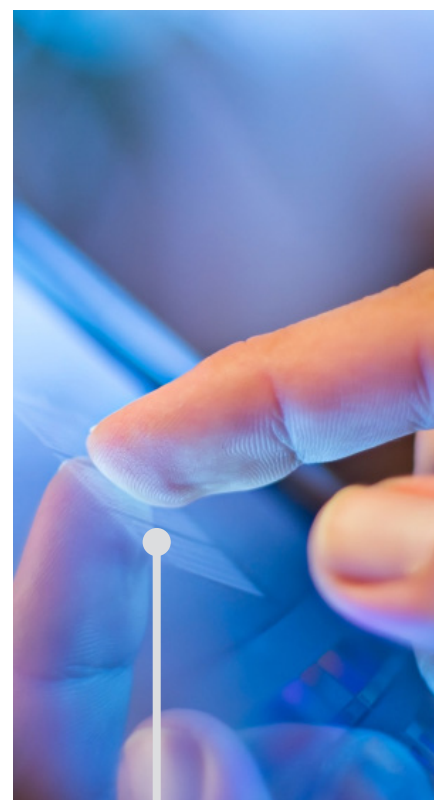
A key part of this is the cloud, says Deakin, which will provide a back-end processing platform for this constellation of objects – and the people that use them.

"Having the computing power to process things in the background is a significant development," he says. "Things like cloud computing enable the smallest of organisations to pay for that."

In time, the combination of cloud computing and big data analytics will provide new decision-making capabilities for even the smallest businesses, Deakin hopes.

His local pub complains to him that it can't easily predict which days are going to be busy or quiet. This leaves the manager guessing how many staff to put on that day, which in turn affects the pub's ability to make revenue.

"Cloud computing will be able to take lots of data that's publicly available, such as traffic and weather information, and combine that with their existing revenue data," he predicts. "It may find out that if it's May and between 20-25 degrees,



Continued >



Continued >

everyone is going to come out to the pub, but if there's traffic on the M4, even though it's sunny, those things combined mean that people won't." Chalk one up for the little guy.

Machines that learn

The next stage in this development will be machine learning, Deakin suggests. If the cloud is good at anything, it's using elastic computing power to process large amounts of data in new and innovative ways. This is happening at a microscopic level where machines are able to learn patterns. Google's machine learning algorithms, for example, scanned millions of YouTube videos and learned how to decide what a cat looked like – all without human help. That's a form of artificial intelligence that we have never seen before.

Things will also move beyond that as computers begin to draw inferences from larger, more disparate patterns, such as travel and meeting data, for example. "We could use things like image recognition as people walk in to an establishment, so that a business could recognise clients that they saw before," he says. That publican wouldn't even have to ask Bob if he wanted the usual.

"Machine learning will be able to make decisions for people," he says. We are already seeing this with systems such as Google Now, and Microsoft's own

Cortana, which will notify people if traffic is bad and adjust travel times for upcoming appointments.

In the future, this kind of machine learning technology will become more fine-grained, and able to infer far more than it does today. Imagine, for example, a digital assistant that tracks the kind of information that will probably be needed in a business meeting, including not only past interactions with an attendee, but also information about nearby Asian restaurants, given their like of Korean food.

This kind of intelligence will also transform business processes such as customer service, Deakin says. It could help make companies better at anticipating customer needs. He gives an example of being able to draw data from an online service linked to a customer's wearable fitness tracker.

This could lead to some interesting targeted phone calls, he suggests: "You've been practicing for a marathon, so we'll give you an offer on new trainers in four rather than six months."

The connected dangers

It's clear that this hyperconnected future is coming, but it also brings its dangers. Having computers tell other computers about your daily habits, and then having companies calling you to sell you things

related to them? It all sounds a little too 1984. The human element seems to be missing somewhere. That's why privacy and identity are going to be so important in the next few years.

This presents vendors with a challenge, because there has always been a tug of war between convenience and security. "Whatever happens in that space, whatever we do to put the right levels of controls in place, it will be perceived as bureaucratic," muses Shaw about security, adding that companies need to take advantage of modern technologies to make things more seamless.

That's the part of this utopian story that seems to be missing. Quite how we'll protect the sovereignty of our data in this new, hyperconnected world isn't quite clear – and it isn't entirely certain that the interests of technology companies and consumers will always be 100% aligned.

Countless newspaper headlines over the last year and a half make a pretty convincing case that we haven't even started to get privacy and identity right in the present. As the world advances towards context awareness, artificial intelligence, and computers that know you better than we do ourselves, we'd better learn quickly.

Danny Bradbury is a freelance technology journalist

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Device *rethink*



by Gary Price

Gary Price urges people to ask whether the device they are set to buy is really the best tool for the job.

The range of computing devices we can now choose to work with appears to be endless. It is just down to us to decide the best tool possible.

No longer are we restricted to a desktop or a laptop, we can use a tablet, a phablet, an ultrabook, an all-in-one and more. The list of options is getting bigger all the time.

When making a purchasing decision, people now need to forget about what they knew ten years ago and look at what the vendors are doing today. The question they should be asking is not 'how much computer can I get with my money?' but rather 'what am I trying to achieve and what is the best tool for that job?'

Certain individuals may be stuck in their ways and say that they want a 15" notebook because they have always used a 15" notebook. A procurement professional cannot afford to think that way, however. They have to query whether their

employees actually need that big beast of a workstation with massive computing power, or would they be equally well served by a standard desktop or even a thin client?

Too often organisations will buy devices without suitability in mind. For example, an education institution may buy a set of computers because the colour of the lid matches the colour of the school badge. Businesses also need to be wary of personal egos and internal one-upmanship, which sees individuals within an organisation push for devices that are far more powerful than what is really necessary.

Too much power

Buying too much power is a common theme which results in businesses wasting huge amounts of money. And it happens more than you think.

For example, when vendors are trying to shift stock they may be willing to offer a healthy discount on certain products. A buyer could get the resellers to agree to sell

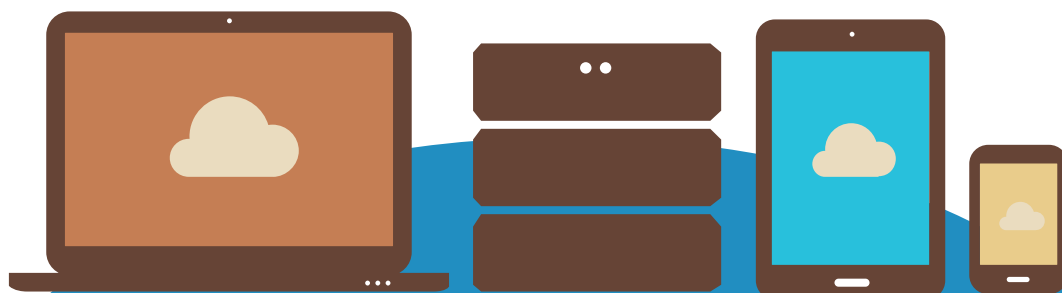
a bulk order of laptops with i7 processors at £700 per unit rather than £800.

On paper the savings may look impressive. It may well be, however, that the majority of people receiving the laptop would get along fine with a laptop with an i3 processor which would have cost £400 per unit. You could end up with the receptionist, having enormous amounts of computing power that will never come close to full utilisation.

With an endless list of possible tools, it is better for buyers to concentrate on what the end user is trying to achieve before choosing the device. It is also worth thinking about how they will actually use that device. If the business has a cloud storage facility, do they need a terabyte of storage on the computing device? Probably not.

Through a conversation with a trusted reseller, engagement with vendor specialists, or with careful research, buyers can, however, identify the perfect device and achieve large savings in the process.

Gary Price is product and category manager at **Probrand**



Tracking IT product trends into 2015



by Oscar Diamond

Oscar Diamond, of leading market research company GfK, takes a look at the IT product market to review last year's trends and forecast where things are likely to go next.

Product news in the UK IT market during 2014 was dominated by the dramatic fall in tablet sales. Despite growth across most other sectors this drop was so severe the retail market saw its headline figure decline in value by 3.8%. Although tablets are set to continue falling during 2015, GfK expects technology trends such as mobility and data growth to have an impact in other areas.

Tablets

It is fair to say that this market is now saturated, with most people who want a tablet owning one. Unfortunately innovation seems to have dried up, with most brands only able to offer thinner and faster versions of their existing tablets. As a result tablet sales dropped by 13.3% in volume and 21.8% in value during 2014. GfK expects this market to decline further in 2015 but this is unlikely to be more than 20% in volume.

Desktops

The other surprise story of 2014 was a growth in desktop computer sales in the consumer market. Ending seven years of volume decline, this market grew by 21.7% in volume (27.2% in value). This remarkable turnaround, for a product many thought would disappear, has been driven by two factors; demand for productivity and gaming. GfK expects this growth in the consumer market to continue into 2015. On the B2B side,

however, the market was down 9.2% in value in 2014 and GfK expects this decline to carry on at a similar pace as the demand for mobile computing continues.

Mobile computing

The need for mobility saw the value of the B2B mobile computing market overtake the desktop computing market for the first time in 2014. As workers continue to demand smaller screen sizes and lighter laptops, with greater focus on mobility rather than power, GfK expects further growth in this market - between 1% and 5% during 2015.

The switch to laptops and agile working by large employers has also resulted in growth in the docking station market - 41.5% in value during 2014. This is another trend we would expect to continue this year.

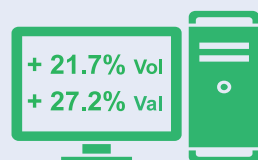
Networking and Storage

With organisations handling an ever increasing amount of data, sales for both networking and storage grew significantly in 2014. The B2B networking sector grew 21.4% in value, while the UK B2B storage market grew by 18.8%. Storage Area Networks (SAN), in particular, saw strong growth - 141.5% in value. GfK expects networking and storage to continue to grow by a similar value - although the SAN growth may remain below 100% this time around.

Demand for lighter more energy efficient laptops, also helped SSD sales grow by 88.6% in value in 2014. GfK expects this trend to continue at a growth rate of 50%+ for 2015.

UK Retail IT 2015

All quoted growth rates are 2014 vs. 2013 GfK panelmarket



High end desktop sales drove growth in 2014, catalysed by PC gaming and media editing. GfK expects desktops to grow again in 2015, but the growth will slow down significantly



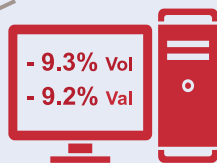
Saturation, combined with a lack of innovation in the tablet market means the 2014 declines are set to continue

Peripherals (both gaming and non-gaming) have benefited from desktop growth to enter strong growth themselves

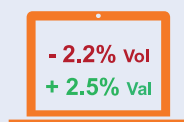


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Despite a strong start to 2014 driven by the end of Windows XP support, desktops ended the year in decline and look to be facing further declines in 2015.



Jan 14 Dec 14



An emphasis on lighter, more portable laptops drove ASP up in laptops, even though volume continued to decline



B2B Networking was in strong growth in 2014 and GfK are expecting this to continue into 2015.



+ 88.6% Val

SSD growth continues to dominate the storage markets, and 2015 will be the year where the B2B SSD market will be worth more than the HDD market

UK B2B IT 2015

TECH PRODUCTS FORECAST

the movers and shakers



by Danny Bradbury

2014 was a surprising year for the IT industry in many ways, but what will it mean for 2015? Danny Bradbury asked vendors their thoughts.

Figures released by market research company GfK have revealed some surprising sales results for technology products during 2014.

One thing that came out of the research very clearly was that tablets are in decline. It's hard to deny a 21.7% fall in tablet value, and a 13.3% drop in volume. The decline is happening across the board in both the business and the consumer sectors.

Tablets will still be significant in the growth of mobile computing going forward, however. "I think longer term, through to 2016-18, the tablet and smartphone market will probably be a key growth area overall," says James Morrish, chief technologist at HP UK and Ireland. GfK figures bear his predictions out; in mid-January the company said that it expected smartphones to grow 7% overall in 2015.

It's also worthwhile noting mobile computing will also include different form factors very close to the tablet in size, such as phablets. GfK is predicting a very

healthy 41% growth in 2015 for the phablet form factor, which sits in between the smartphone and the tablet at around 5.5-7 inches.

That's a healthy figure, but Morrish believes that yet another product category could become a rising star.

Hybrids

"At the moment, we have a clear differentiation in performance trade-offs between tablets and laptops," he says. Consumers have had a choice: browse with a tablet, or get the heavy work done with a PC.

Hybrid devices, typified by HP's own Revolve, combine the best of both worlds. They have the portability of a tablet with the horsepower of a conventional laptop computer. They also feature keyboard access, making content creation easier.

"That's been around for a little while, but in the past we've focused on the CPU under the keyboard deck, because there have been limitations in how much horsepower you can get behind the glass," Morrish says. "There are fewer compromises with next-generation chipsets and architectures."

Manufacturers can put processors into a certain sized chassis if it has sufficient





cooling to keep the processor stable, but there's also a power consideration. Mobile devices always balance power efficiency and performance. But advances here are enabling companies to get the CPU behind the glass.

This is something that Microsoft has done with the Surface Pro 3, a device that went through a shaky start but which is looking promising for 2015. In its Q1 2015 earnings report, Microsoft revealed that it sold \$908m of the devices, outpacing the previous model twofold, as customers begin to wake up to this new product category.

Wearables

You may ask, with tablets sales dropping to more realistic levels, what alternative areas of product innovation are emerging? Look to wearables, argues Joseph Bradley, vice president of the IoE practice for Cisco Consulting Services.

He does admit, however, that 'the adoption of smartwatches among consumers is still very low'. With Apple's smartwatch still not shipping at the time of writing, the market for such wearables has still barely even begun to develop.

Some of the current killer apps for wearables are as companion devices that can change the way we interact with everyday services, from transportation ticketing through to payment systems. Yet Bradley believes that there are challenges that will slow the adoption of these applications.

"Consumers, especially in western Europe, are concerned about data and transaction security and privacy, which will further lead to the slow adoption of smartwatches as alternative payment methods," he says. GfK's survey last autumn showed that just over one in four people in the UK were interested in wearables as a payment system.

People are still likely to buy smartwatches, however - just for the sheer sexiness of the technology. GfK predicts a 637% increase in smartwatch sales in the UK in 2015.

Desktop PCs

In the traditional computing world, desktop PC sales results were more complex than tablets last year. GfK identified a growth in desktop computer sales, ending seven years of volume decline - at least in the consumer market. Yet in the business market, sales decreased over 9% in value.

"The price/performance ratio is a key factor," says Morrish. "You get pretty unrivalled bang for your buck in terms of what you get from a desktop vs a notebook."

With that in mind, HP is continuing to drive forward the desktop PC format. One of its showcase designs, launched in late 2014, was Sprout. This desktop machine features a 3D camera and projector, which replaces the keyboard. It enables users to scan items directly to the machine, and manipulate text and images virtually on the projected flat surface.

Morrish describes this as immersive technology, citing it as an example of how desktop technologies will evolve. In the consumer space at least, GfK envisages a buoyant 2015.

Regardless of whether the desktop or notebook gain traction in the enterprise space over the next few years, HP believes that Windows' stronghold in enterprise will loosen. A survey of IT decision makers published in mid-January showed that 42% of respondents still viewed Windows as critical to their business, but this is a relatively low number given the iron grip the operating system has traditionally enjoyed in the corporate space. More diverse operating system strategies are more prevalent in organisations with a comprehensive bring your own device (BYOD) policy.

With tablets reaching saturation point, excitement is likely to shift towards other mobile products, given that there is a strong pull to mobility hardware and software among consumers and businesses alike. Technology always inspires innovation, and where one product area stagnates, another will become the focal point for new feature developments. It's nice, however, to see the desktop PC still holding its own, nearly 35 years after its introduction. Clearly, there is at least some life in the old dog yet.

Danny Bradbury is a freelance technology journalist

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Mobile device strategies aren't just about phones



by Antony Savvas

Mobile working is allowing business leaders to develop strategies to improve competitiveness, increase productivity and efficiency, and get closer to customers.

Companies have looked to use this technology to support flexible working, while at the same time satisfying those employees demanding to use their own gadgets for work. But mobile usage is changing.

As well as using mobile devices to email, share files and communicate with others, staff now want access to business applications like ERP (enterprise resource planning), CRM (customer relationship management) and data analytics for business intelligence.

Gartner analyst Nick Jones says the mobile 'application era' ushered in by the iPhone is now being replaced by the 'service and social era'. He says: "The service and social era will build on the application era, but it will be characterised by cloud services and streaming media. Applications will survive, but often as a component of a more complex end-to-end experience involving the cloud."

Gartner is now advising enterprises to develop a mobile strategy based on technology-independent management goals and styles, rather than detailed device, platform or application policies.

Flexibility

Companies like HP, for instance, are adamant that any mobile strategy must be based on flexible gadget choices to get each specific job done. That includes anything from smartphones and tablets to traditional laptops and hybrid platforms – those devices that work as either a mobile clamshell PC with a full keyboard or that can be converted into a tablet by detaching the screen.



James Morrish

James Morrish, chief technologist at HP printing and personal systems for UK and Ireland, says: "If there is

too much focus on only smartphones and standalone tablets then some benefits of mobile strategies may well be missed. In many cases it is better giving users a greater variety of devices, as it may be more productive for them to use a laptop or a hybrid, rather than a tablet or a smartphone."

When it comes to successful mobile strategies, Morrish says it is all about having the right apps, data and features on the right devices. This is something HP itself is focusing on with one of its products known as the ElitePad.

Windows 8 ElitePad tablets are being targeted at specific industries by way of hardware 'jackets' being offered with the machines, to work in industry verticals

such as health, construction and retail. This ecosystem of accessories allows the same standard core device to be used in a range of different use cases offering a great deal of flexibility.

Accessing data

Morrish advises that companies must have their eyes on the big picture and that's big data. He says they must have the back ends in place to efficiently collect and process mobile data through CRM, ERP and other business systems to create "actionable intelligence", to ensure the right data gets to the right person at the right time.

He adds: "That's not always easy, and as far as we're concerned it's not just about throwing everyone the latest tablet and telling them to get on with it."

Indeed, many organisations think they are well down the path towards mobility enlightenment. In reality, a large number may well be in mobile chaos, experimenting with various approaches and wrestling with inherent BYOD challenges and security threats.

For a successfully integrated enterprise-wide mobile strategy, Morrish says that some organisations may need outside consultancy help to make sure they remain on track. He says: "Some organisations believe they are more forward on mobile than they really are, while others aren't sure where they are."

Antony Savvas is a freelance technology journalist

The business case for transformation



by Rob Bamforth

Analyst Rob Bamforth assesses how organisations can better meet customer expectations

There is no point making changes just for their own sake, but in challenging markets and uncertain economic conditions - where competitive threats can emerge from anywhere and established markets can disappear almost overnight - businesses need to be able to be flexible and prepared. For many, this will mean embarking on a significant transformation as they try to become more agile, efficient and effective.

The most important drivers behind the need to transform are customer experience, according to 55% of UK businesses surveyed for *The Future of Work* research report by Raconteur, followed by 45% saying innovation and 30% technology.

While the second two might seem to be heading in a different direction to the first, they are all closely linked. Advances in technology have brought mass connectivity, a diversity of means of access - mobile devices, tablets - and, heading into the near future, more ways to collect

information through wearable technologies and the Internet of Things. These are transforming the lives of consumers and increasing everybody's expectations of how they interact with each other as individuals as well as

with organisations. Businesses that fail to transform their operations to meet these demands from their customers for a better experience will fail.

It once seemed that size of organisation and the legacy of a great brand would insulate businesses from these types of changes, but access to communications anywhere and the instantaneous impact technology has had on social connections through Facebook, Twitter and other social media means that none are safe. Commercial momentum can slow the effect, but for example in retail, where loyalty (or apathy) once retained customers, even mighty supermarkets are showing obvious signs of stumbling.

What needs to change?

Those surveyed believe that the top changes to have the biggest impact on profitability were, by a long way ahead, the ability to respond more rapidly to market opportunities, followed by better use and integration of available technology and people. With the same research indicating that marketing, senior management and IT are the key departments to be leading the transformation of an organisation, it is clear that businesses need to be looking outwards as well as within; transforming the customer experience and transforming the working environment to better serve the various constituents.





Smarter communication

Fundamental to this is communications. Where once there were narrow and well-defined routes between customer and organisation, there is now a multiplicity of modes of communication and customers want to be able to use whichever is closest to hand or preferable at every stage. The purchasing process is no longer a matter of 'bricks or clicks' (high street or online), but a complex multi-modal set of stages involving online, mobile access on devices of widely varying form factors, in-store, remote pickup and even the telephone (and the occasional written communication – particularly when a person is complaining). It might have started as simply 'e-commerce', but other processes from obtaining support, dealing with utilities, healthcare or financial institutions have all followed a similar path.

Despite this, customers expect the entire process to run smoothly and do not expect to have to repeat their words or actions, no matter who or what within the organisation they have to communicate with.

This means better internal communication and collaboration between what were once separate teams or departments. This is another area where innovation and technology can be exploited in a similar way by the organisation as it has been by its customers. Employee interactions can be viewed as a shared social experience oriented around the customer using multiple methods of communication

rather than relying on the overly formal lines of communications oriented around internal structures. Familiar tools – mobile phones, tablets – can be employed, even supporting employees to bring their own devices (BYOD) to encourage and facilitate sharing and collaboration.

Smarter information

The next element of the transformation is information. The growth in data storage seems inexorable, but although a lot of data is already being stored, it is not always the right stuff or in the right place. A greater understanding of what is really going on in critical business processes would help. For example, tracking customers as they go through a purchasing process, where were they when they were interrupted or they decide to stop – and can an appealing intervention be made to enable them to continue to the closure of a deal? Do employees have all the information they need to complete a task?

Some of this information will already be there, but legacy departmental structures and agendas may be keeping valuable knowledge from finding the right person to take advantage of it. The days of companies allowing critical data to be left languishing in Excel spreadsheets or scattered across diverse file systems should be long gone, but many organisations still have separate silos of data repositories disconnected from each other.

Smarter action

This is where most of the much-vaunted value of 'big data' will surface. Not simply in the volumes of new data being collected, but in the rapidity that information from multiple sources can be combined, analysed and turned into smarter action. Individuals need to have this data quickly transformed into valuable knowledge so that they can be responsive to immediate customer needs as well as longer term changing market conditions.

The research indicates that marketing, senior management and IT have an opportunity to ensure that these smarter actions are focussed both externally on the customer experience and internally on transforming the working environment by streamlining and automating existing business processes.

While technology advances may have catalysed much of this, the imperative for business change is a straightforward one based on competitive pressures and affects people and the processes they have to work with. Customer awareness, needs and - critically - their expectations have changed, and the organisations that fail to meet them efficiently and effectively will lose.

Rob Bamforth is Principal Analyst at Quocirca. Quocirca carries out research and analysis on behalf of IT decision makers across Europe.

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