

# PROBRAND

## MAGAZINE

### GROUP



Issue 1



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INNOVATION**  
in your business?

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OUR INTEGRITY


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## Peter Robbins

Managing Director, **Probrand Group**

**T**he last 20 years have been characterised by constant change, but there is one consistent, that IT, commercial and procurement teams continue to innovate and help organisations thrive. For that reason the pace of technology enabled transformation, in all its forms, is set to quicken well into the future and cement a key watchword, growth.

We can see it already. Organisations are clearly taking quick steps to maximise the upturn in the economy and rapid adoption of new hardware, services and software are clearly driving the ever-widening touch of technology in business.

Since 1992, we've grown a group of three award winning specialist technology businesses, covering the three pillars of IT provision – products, services, software – and listing as some of EMEA's fastest growing businesses. Each has had to undergo its own transformation over time, so we empathise with your pains.

More importantly, at the heart of our story is investment in great people, putting value into relationships with our

innovation, commitment and integrity. That is, helping customers thrive with relevant and innovative technology. Traits that have seen us roll-out our software across 150 countries in 27 languages for one of the world's biggest tech brands.

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What, apart from success, does this have to do with you and an insightful Magazine?

**Probrand Group** fulfils many common and niche business issues with technology and we recognise that there simply isn't enough support in the world, whatever the level of your transformation challenge – from buying the right IT products at the lowest price possible to globally unlocking efficiency and productivity with game-changing software.

That's why we've launched the Probrand Group Magazine, bringing you credible articles written by leading tech journalists on current topics around driving innovation and transformation, mobility, supply chain and procurement, security, cloud and infrastructure.

Now's a great time to be an innovator in your organisation.



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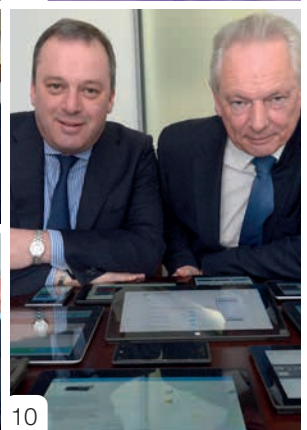
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Probrand Group Magazine provides news, views, analysis and information on pivotal subjects relevant to IT, procurement and business leaders looking to thrive with technology.

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



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Dave Banks, Senior IT Procurement Coordinator

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\*KnowledgeBus IT Edition survey evaluated over 1,000 organisations with perceived supplier relationships of between cost +3-5%.

# Technology research in brief

## Digital data to double every two years

**The volume of global digital data will double in size every two years and will multiply 10-fold between 2013 and 2020, according to IDC.**

The analyst warned that the amount of storage capacity available will not keep pace with the 'digital universe'. By 2020, the world will only have enough storage capacity to hold 15% of global digital data. Fortunately, most of the world's data is transient.

## Half of CIOs are struggling to grasp digital opportunities

**More than half (51%) of CIOs claimed they cannot respond to digital opportunities in a timely manner, according to Gartner.**

The analyst's CIO Agenda survey found that 42% lacked the skills necessary to enable digitisation and 70% believed they would need to change their IT sourcing mix over the next three years to take advantage of the digital opportunities available.

## Connectivity issues costing UK business £30bn

**UK businesses are missing out on £30bn worth of potential growth due to connectivity issues, research has claimed.**

The Smarter Working Britain study, carried out by the Centre for Economic and Business Research (Cebr) and O2, claimed slow uptake of technological solutions had resulted in productivity declining since the onset of the recession. It said, despite a proliferation of smart technology in business, 80% of staff still don't have full access to key business systems on these devices which is stifling mobile working.

## Half of firms move beyond Cloud pilot stage

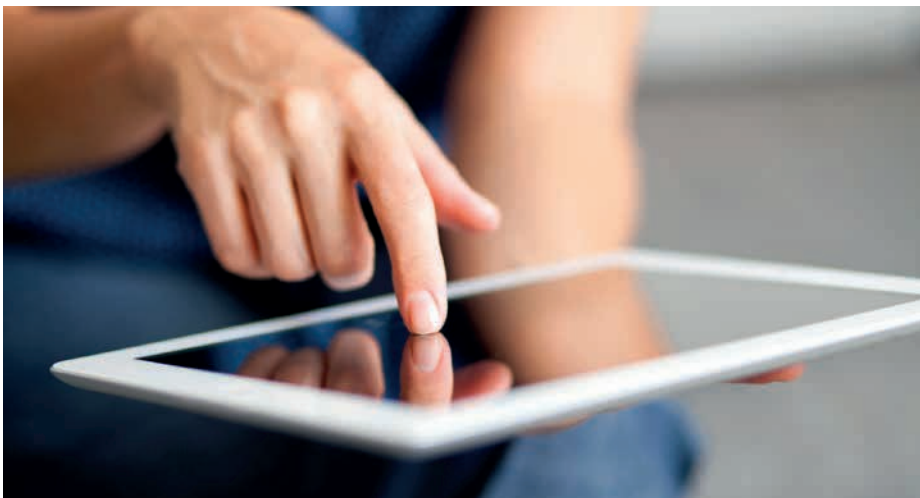
**Almost half of businesses have moved their Cloud strategies beyond the pilot phase, according to a report by 451 Research.**

The study found that 45% of organisations have moved to the next stage and almost a third (32%) have included a formal cloud computing plan within their overall IT and business strategy. The research also found that spending on private clouds was happening both on and off premise. It said 32% of all spending on hosting was being dedicated to private clouds, while 26% of on-premise infrastructure spending was also being dedicated to private clouds.

## Mobile traffic to grow 11-fold by 2018

**As mobile device use increases the data generated by these tools, traffic is forecast to grow 11-fold, between 2013 and 2018, according to Cisco.**

The networking company claims there will be 10 billion mobile devices connected to the Internet by the end of this period – a figure 40% greater than the world's projected population. The study said the traffic generated by mobile devices will grow three times faster than fixed connections, with the majority of this being offloaded on to WiFi networks.





## Mind the skills gap

Neil Tonkin examines how the IT industry can work with educators to help bridge the growing IT skills gap in our economy

**74%** of ICT teachers do not believe they have the skills to teach computer science

**T**he Council of Professors and Heads of Computing predicts the UK will need 15% more IT professionals by 2022. Despite this, the number of students looking for jobs in the sector has fallen by 50% in the last decade. Demand is outstripping supply and we are facing a skills shortage.

The government has started to take steps to address this problem. It is introducing a new Computing curriculum this September which will see children learning how to code as early as Year 1 - but this still leaves a generation gap.

Furthermore, a survey by MyKindaCrowd has revealed that 74% of ICT teachers do not believe they have the skills to teach computer science.

It's essential that we provide teachers with the necessary support to deliver lessons that inspire young people – whether this is via the government, the industry itself, or a combination of the two. Moreover, we must ensure that what is being taught is applicable in the real world in order to guarantee that children are equipped with the right tools to enter the workforce.

We already know that apprenticeships are a fantastic way to bridge the gap between education and the workplace. Why then can't we form a similar business model between the IT industry and educators? Developing such a scheme can surely benefit all involved.

Coding is an extremely skilled occupation that is constantly evolving but we must realise a long-term plan that brings multiple parties together to make it happen.

Neil Tonkin is Head of Development at **Mercato Solutions**

## Software platforms are putting business teams in control

**D**igital technology is transforming businesses by helping people to work smarter, leaner and faster.

The case for digital innovation is clear. Research in the insurance industry, conducted on behalf of Mercato Solutions, found companies are wasting an average of 3,000 man hours per year due to legacy processes and poorly implemented IT. If organisations want to be progressive they need systems in place that enable more flexibility, agility and efficiency.

Ideally, business teams would be able to develop their own bespoke applications to automate processes and use data better. The reality is bespoke development can often involve long lead times, considerable cost and risk. There have been some very high profile examples of large scale projects which have been retired without delivering any benefits. One notable example was the shelving of

the UK's £12bn national Electronic Care Records system, which was described by MPs as one of the 'worst and most expensive contracting fiascos' ever.

These software platforms allow for the rapid creation of intelligent business applications without a single line of code needing to be written

As a result progressive, but risk averse, organisations are looking to drive greater efficiency, productivity and growth through software platforms. These software platforms allow for the rapid creation of intelligent business applications without a single line of code needing to be written.



by Peter Robbins

Every organisation has processes where improvements can be made and these platform-based applications can automate complex and simple tasks alike - from surveys, claims processing and compliance applications to tech support, configurators and even artificial intelligence.

With business teams able to take control of projects away from IT in this way, many think an internal tussle could break out as a result. In fact, modern IT departments are under such pressure with day-to-day support and network optimisation that the prospect of giving the business a platform it can self-manage is seen as a welcome addition that relieves pressure.

Equally, the prospect of flexible costs and deployment are welcomed by IT and finance departments alike.

Peter Robbins is Managing Director of **Probrand Group**



by Danny Bradbury

# Is innovation being driven outside of the IT department?

**K**ing Canute would have made a great IT director. The Anglo-Saxon ruler, father of King Harold, is said to have set his throne on the shore and tried to turn back the incoming tide. Legend says the whole thing was an act, planned by Canute to demonstrate a simple fact to his courtiers: some things are bigger and more powerful than kings, and can't be stopped.

Modern IT departments have a lot in common with Canute. Until now, they have been the rulers of technology, firmly in control of the software and devices that run on their networks. They were seen as the masters of innovation.

Now, they're facing a fast moving current that won't be stopped. It's sweeping away the old, and ushering in new ways of working. Business users, from the postroom to the boardroom, are using IT on their own terms - and it's creating a tide of innovation.

Take software development as an example. For over half a century, companies have been working to make software development easy for

people with no technical background in IT training. Over the decades it led to a category of software called rapid application development (RAD), designed to allow business users to create their own applications - without writing lengthy, complex lines of code.

Unfortunately, enabling business users to write their own code can make IT departments uncomfortable and a little territorial, says Peter Robbins, managing director of Probrand Group.

"It's like turkeys at Christmas time," he quips. "It isn't that they're deliberately obstructive. But we're opening up their skills base to a lot more people, and they don't like that," Robbins says.

## TIME FOR CHANGE

Clive Longbottom, founder of IT advisory firm Quocirca, argues that it may be scary for IT departments but things are changing.

"Everything has to be presented to the business in terms of the three variables that they care about; how does the

change to technology affect the business' overall costs, its overall risk and how does it add value to the business?" he says.

IT departments may have taken months to develop applications before, but in a new world where users can develop their own software without typing a line of code, that simply won't fly.

To that end, the IT department must embrace faster ways of developing applications as they are not going away, Robbins says.

"It makes sense to adopt processes and platforms that give you the outcomes you need; something that can achieve the same results, but faster and cheaper."

IT professionals can find themselves swept along by this business focus whether they like it or not, because it's part of a broader cultural change. In addition to developing their own applications internally, many business departments are also turning to third-party suppliers who deliver cloud-based applications from outside the organisation.



"It makes sense to adopt processes and platforms that give you the outcomes you need; something that can achieve the same results, but faster and cheaper."





Johnathan Mitchener describes another perceived threat: the onslaught of consumer devices. Business users want their own smartphones and tablets, on which to access these new, seductive applications.

Mitchener is the lead technologist at the Technology Strategy Board, a public body that works with businesses to develop best practices in technology innovation. He has spent years studying technology futurism, and is highly tuned to emerging trends in this fast moving space.

The bottom line for IT departments? Don't fight it, says Mitchener.

"What you need is a realisation that very few companies could keep up with and roll out the innovation in devices, applications and software that individuals can now do as consumers in a corporate environment," he says.

## A STRATEGIC ROLE FOR IT

Instead of trying to turn back the tide, IT can define a more strategic role for itself in the organisation, concentrating on finding new and innovative technologies that can contribute positively to the bottom line.

Antony Walker, managing director of techUK, says that IT's interests must be completely aligned with those of the business. Formerly known as Intellect, techUK is a UK trade association for the technology industry.

"It's moving from a world where the IT department is an enabler, to the point where IT is really helping to drive and shape the future of the business," Walker says.

And yet some IT departments, inexperienced in coping with a change in company culture, may find it difficult to drive transformation when they feel as though they are losing control of key IT assets. Accepting this change as a positive thing, rather than a loss of control, is critical to the IT department's success as companies recraft those relationships.

It starts with the skills inside the IT department, points out Adam Thilthorpe, director of professionalism for BCS, the chartered institute for IT in the UK. Every technological advance creates a need for different and more diverse skills, and IT is no exception.

"Demand for IT skills today is based more on the ability to apply and exploit technology in the business than on pure technical implementation," he says. He sees companies relying more on blended teams with different talents. "They are managing average workload/workforce levels in IT more closely, and leveraging external subject matter experts."

Those subject matter experts can be long-standing non-technical members of staff, who understand the nuances of a business's process. To date, that information has been locked up inside their heads, and difficult to tap. But by giving them a hand in application development, the IT department can perform a valuable service to the rest of the organisation.

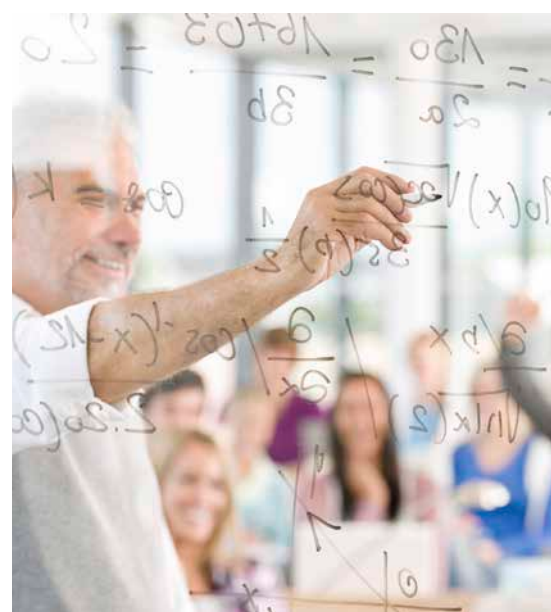
## FACILITATORS OF INNOVATION

What might that look like in practice? Mitchener describes a scenario in which the IT department acts as a central clearing house – or even a marketplace – for innovation that springs directly from business departments. "It is not unusual now for some organisations to have their own app stores, and the business unit to contribute to that," he argues.

Developing applications is one thing but it still takes technical expertise to validate what has been written, and then distribute effectively to others around the organisation who might be able to benefit. IT could handle version control and updates, introduce standards for effective software development and enable different departments' applications to work seamlessly with each other.

In addition to polishing and packaging technology from business units, there

"It's moving from a world where the IT department is an enabler, to the point where IT is really helping to drive and shape the future of the business."



Adam Thilthorpe,  
Director of  
Professionalism  
for BCS

there is also an opportunity to identify internal applications that could be marketed externally to others in an industry, Mitchener says.

Developments like these can help make the relationship between IT and the business units less adversarial, and more cooperative, he adds. "I wouldn't say it's a support role; it's more a question of involvement, and partnership," says Mitchener. "The users develop what they want, and the IT department helps finish it off."

## A WIN-WIN

These more mature relationships work because instead of resenting each other and hogging their own territory, both sides get something out of the deal. It makes requirements analysis far easier. Capturing information about business processes in lengthy Word documents is a notoriously gruelling task for IT departments, who in many cases may not know which questions to ask.

Enabling non-technical staff well versed in the business process to design their own applications collapses the layers between the users and the developers. In fact, as Robbins points out: "These products don't need developers; they need implementers."

It also benefits the business, by giving it more control, Robbins points out. Traditionally, a business department may have to stand by as IT development costs spun out of control. By the time it realised that something was wrong, it may already have spent several months and significant financial resources on the project. Putting development in the hands of non-technical users closer to the business side introduces more visibility.

"Because you're going back to people with developments swiftly, it speeds up the process, enabling you to control the costs more," he points out. "This lets you make judgement calls on projects early on, and that's crucial to businesses generally."

## MEETING HALFWAY

For all of this to work, IT departments must give up their own preconceptions about how technology is provided within a company. But business departments must also rethink the relationship in some cases, warns Longbottom.

"The business is still not including IT at the beginning of the business decision making process, which leads to technology being decided upon in a rush and so being suboptimal," he says.

Over the past few years IT departments and business units have become wary of each other and it takes two to break down a wall. Involving IT early on in the discussion stage, rather than treating it as a potential barrier, could provide businesses with unique strategic insights into new projects.

Technology experts can advise on a variety of topics, from how datasets can be analysed to best determine target audiences for applications, through to how social networks could be used intelligently to drive an initial campaign and everything in between.

"The power of data is well understood among business leaders, but that doesn't mean that other parts of the business will have that knowledge in how to make it a reality," points out techUK's Walker.

For that kind of relationship to develop, both sides need to be constructive, forward thinking - and willing to get their feet wet. Is your organisation up to the challenge?

Danny Bradbury is an award winning freelance technology journalist

"The business is still not including IT at the beginning of the business decision making process, which leads to technology being decided upon in a rush and so being suboptimal."



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**MADE IN THE  
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# Discovery, alpha, beta, live: the government's new digital look



by Michael Cross

**F**rom this summer, people registering to vote or update their electoral register details have been able to do so online in just three minutes - thanks to a new national system.

The website, gov.uk/register-to-vote, now connects to every local authority's electoral register and cross checks identities against the DWP's national insurance database.

Greg Clark, junior Cabinet Office minister, said the introduction of this online registration will strike a blow against electoral fraud.

In its scale and ambition, however, the electoral registration project initially had all the hallmarks of a classic government IT disaster waiting to happen. It had to meet a national policy deadline (moving 46 million voters to individual registration), while cutting across tiers of government and pioneering new identity matching procedures. In the past, this would have been the cue for delays and overspending.

The system's developers at the Government Digital Service say the success of the project is thanks to a new agile approach to development, which removed the inflexibility of previous 'big bang' government IT systems.

The online electoral registration is one of 25 projects pioneering a new approach for developers of 'digital by default' public services, as set out in the Government Service Design Manual. This approach is breaking down projects in to four phases, Discover, Alpha, Beta, Live (DABL).

Discovery involves finding out what users need, what to measure and what the constraints are.

Alpha is the stage of building a prototype and testing it with users.

Beta is scaling up and going public - while retaining the ability for continuous improvement.

Live is where the system becomes available to all users.

This DABL approach is attracting a lot of attention. The big question, however, is whether it can be applied to the really large scale projects endemic to government - and especially to the UK government.

Chris Haynes, a veteran of e-government projects in local and central government, is cautiously optimistic. Although he warns of the dangers of 'messianic zeal', he says DABL offers a way out of a major problem with public sector IT - the lack of solid technical skills.

He said: "Over the past 15 years the government has denuded itself of IT skills and left itself vulnerable. A benefit of the DABL approach is to re-introduce expertise at a low level.

"New approaches allow for rapid application development, which compresses timeframes and risk. If you have the ability to prototype you're 90% of the way to getting customer support.

"The prototype stage is also where to decide which technical platform the end system will use."

He adds: "I'm 65% certain that the outcome will be really positive in the long run. You need to deal with the technical vacuum in government."

Over the next year, as the remainder of the 'digital by default' projects work their way through the DABL stages, the new philosophy will be put to the test. With the UK still lagging in European e-government benchmarks, there is definite room for this improvement.

Michael Cross is a technology journalist, formerly with the Guardian and the Independent



# Law change forces firms to consider flexible working

With the government extending the scope of who can ask to work from home or non 9-5 hours, Gary Flood asks how employers can best react to this change of law.



by Gary Flood

**F**ollowing a change of law in July 2014, anyone who has been working for an employer for more than six months is now legally empowered to ask if they can work flexibly.

Employers might be used to this kind of request from staff who are either parents of young children or who have to care for others. But now the government has decided that everyone, even those with no dependents, can put a "flexibility request" on their manager's desk at least once a year and employers will be expected to respond.

The extension of flexible working legislation has raised fears, in some quarters, that there will be a flood of requests that bosses will be hard-pressed to meet - especially within mid-range or smaller companies.

Employers may be reassured to know that these changes provide no cast-iron guarantee that all requests will need to be accommodated. "Legally, employers have to consider the request but can reject it at any time on business grounds," points out Tina Wisener, partner at London-based employment solicitors Doyle Clayton. But employers still need to tread carefully to ensure they are following the correct procedure around this, she adds.

"When a member of staff asks for flexible working, the employer must consider the request in a reasonable manner," she warns. Employers must also consider the plea carefully - balancing the benefits for the employee and the business against any adverse impact for the business.

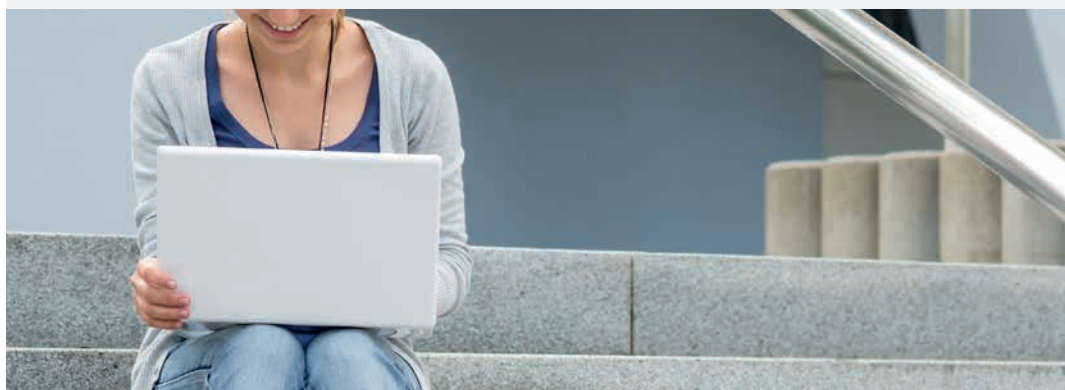
In reality, an employer can refuse a bid on a number of grounds, such as cost to the business or the impact on their ability to meet client demand, according to employment law expert Dan Peyton from law firm McGuireWoods.

So long as the request is turned down on reasonable grounds, employers should be OK. But if they do not, they need to be aware that they could face legal action on grounds which could include disability or indirect sex discrimination - among other possibilities. If it goes to tribunal, employers may also be liable to pay out thousands.

So while there is no gun being held to employers' heads, they do need to tread carefully around this issue. Meanwhile, there is also the factor that in today's interconnected world technological advances mean that, on paper at least, a staffer should be able to work wherever they want.

"Modern technology is likely to have the most impact on decisions on requests

"When a member of staff asks for flexible working, the employer must consider the request in a reasonable manner."





Tina Wisener,  
Doyle Clayton



Dan Peyton,  
McGuireWoods



Claire Blyth,  
Red Setter

to work from home, given the ease with which employees may now access work IT systems remotely," notes Peyton. "It may be more difficult for an employer reasonably to assert that such a request contravenes one of the statutory grounds for refusal."

## Good Business Sense?

The reality is that employers need to be up to speed with what technology can do to support flexible working. After all, the whole idea of 'telecommuting' has been around for years, although, it's only in the past few years - since the growth of the World Wide Web and 3 and now 4G Internet broadband - that it's become more than a slogan.

Some mid-range companies do claim, however, that such advances mean that enabling flexible working is a doddle. One such is Red Setter, a Brighton-based business development consultancy. "To attract and retain the very best people, we offer significant flexibility," says its director, Claire Blyth.

"We've never seen flexibility as something that needed to be imposed by regulation; for us, it is simple business sense if someone wants to come in 30 minutes

late so they can do the school run or work from home a couple of days a month because the trains are disrupted. In fact, our longest-serving member of staff now works from home full-time."

To support such structures, Blyth says she and her fellow managers have had to ensure the right technology is set up to make it possible. But so positive has the experience been she says, "I would urge other SMEs to see flexible working as an opportunity to really engage and energise your workforce."

So the bottom line seems to be that employers need to get ready for flexible working approaches, which could now come from anyone in the firm. Employers need to spend some time thinking about their response to these requests and what technology will effectively support such ways of working.

The price involved in enabling flexible working could well be worth it, however. As Red Setter's Blyth puts it, "Senior professionals are looking for a job which uses the skills and knowledge they have gained over many years in an industry they love - but which doesn't require them to work 14 hour days, six days a week. They want a job which fits around their lives."

Gary Flood is a freelance technology journalist

"We've never seen flexibility as something that needed to be imposed by regulation; for us, it is simple business sense."



# The rise of mobile

**A**s organisations look to enable flexible working and increased collaboration, the deployment of mobile technology has become a top priority in business. Companies have sought to gain these advantages as quickly as possible and in so doing have been allowing, and in many cases encouraging, employees to use their own mobile devices for work purposes.

Providing employees with access to corporate networks via mobile devices has not been without its challenges, however. Concerns around the increase in mobile cybercrime and the leaking of sensitive data, which can be stored on these devices, has led to security becoming a priority for businesses.

"Companies are realising that by enabling employees to work from a location of their choice using their preferred technology, they are taking one of the single most important steps in motivating business productivity"

- Adriana Karaboutis, CIO of Dell

## Flexible working

"Consumerisation of IT cannot be ignored. Providing employees with a simple secure way to access the company network is a key factor which will enable employers to embrace mobile working and BYOD."

- Bob Tarzey, service director at industry analyst Quocirca



# BYOD

**B**ring Your Own Device (BYOD) is an approach that allows employees and partners to utilise personally selected and purchased devices, such as smartphones, tablets and laptops, for work purposes

47%

of UK adults now use a personal smartphone, laptop or tablet for work purposes  
– YouGov

74%

of companies are allowing, accommodating and encouraging the use of personally owned devices  
– Vanson Bourne

Bring Your Own Device

59%

of organisations feel it would be a **competitive disadvantage** to not allow **BYOD**

DELL QUEST

"What happens if you buy a device for an employee and they leave the job a month later? How are you going to settle up? Better to keep it simple. The employee owns the device, and the company helps to cover usage costs" – David Willis, vice president at Gartner

38%

of companies will stop providing devices to workers as early as 2016

GARTNER

## Mobile security

"Companies need to wake up and realise they're facing a massive security issue and risk having their intellectual property walk out of the door with people."

– Alastair Mitchell, CEO of Huddle

84%

of tablets and smart phones connecting to company networks are insecure  
– Ponemon

## Enabling mobile

"Virtualisation bridges the gap between the network and BYOD by allowing users to connect from anywhere, on any device. Furthermore, BYOD highlights the things that thin clients and virtualisation do best, like securing corporate and customer data."

– Tom Flynn, HP chief technologist

9 in 10

UK office workers are storing, sharing and accessing corporate data on personal devices  
– Ipsos MORI

38%

of mobile users have experienced mobile cybercrime in past 12 months  
– Norton

70%

of firms hit with security issues implemented encryption solutions, such as virtual private networks, to protect information in transit  
– Ponemon

75%

of firms hit by a security breach introduced endpoint security, such as two step authentication, to provide protection when devices access networks remotely  
– Ponemon

80%

of large corporations have implemented VDi due to BYOD  
– Decisive Analytics

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