In brief, pressure for and use of individually purchased wireless devices on corporate networks is growing rapidly with no signs of abatement. The trend is driven by wireless growth, device technology and wireless data speed improvements, as well as cost control efforts within many organizations. Those organizations are starting to allow individual liable devices within certain parameters and standards. We review the issue and provide recommendations.

Wireless Policy Briefs from Ovation is a series of short discussions geared to policy-makers in telecom, information technology, and financial management at organizations with wireless user populations. Each policy brief discusses one specific facet of an overall wireless policy, and provides you with information to plan policy at your organization — or arm you with knowledge on the topic if a discussion is thrust upon you by a related issue.

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“I just got an iPhone and I want to get my corporate email on it.”

“I got my own Blackberry and would like to get my email on it.”

Are those types of questions coming up a lot lately at your organization? If they are, you are not alone. Personal data devices, such as Blackberries and iPhones, on corporate networks are growing exponentially. IT groups need to have a policy regarding personal devices that covers security, cost and administration. Policies now range from rigidly not allowing any individually-owned devices to the very accommodating that allow many non-corporate devices. As with so many of these wireless policy issues, there is no general agreement on the best method, though there seems to be some movement.

In this Corporate Wireless Policy Brief, we will provide examples of some of the confusing issues on the topic and offer our advice on the subject including practical recommendations. There is a mix of issues: device standards for support and security thrown in with and liability policy. Many consider personal-liable devices a legal liability when carrying corporate data.

Beyond just popular newer technology like the iPhone pushing the issue, personal-liable devices of all types are also making their way to the enterprise and other large organizations. The Aberdeen Group finds that 42% of devices in the enterprise are purchased by employees and slightly less, 40%, are purchased by the company for employees in 2008.\footnote{A 400 percent increase in one year in employee-liable devices entering the enterprise ... 42% of devices in the enterprise are purchased by employees in 2008.} Aberdeen analyst Andrew Borg notes that their research shows “…a 400 percent increase in one year in employee-liable devices entering the enterprise. This raises significant risks. The big problem is the notion of liability if a personal device is used for business purposes...”\footnote{Research firms produce great insight into trends, but nothing matches the comments from those in the weeds managing the details.}

In two admittedly unscientific examples, those in the weeds have a lot to say. We found a post on the subject of “personal devices on the company Blackberry Enterprise Server” on BlackberryForums.com that illustrates the divergence of opinion. In a group of five postings by BES administrators, there were multiple policies and all had different takes on the issue. Several were in the process of change. And at RIM’s Wireless Enterprise Symposium, the annual Blackberry convention, one session was dedicated to this topic. In contrast to the typically torpid convention session, this was a lively debate with people lined up five deep at the microphone to question the panel.

The continued growth of wireless in the population; new technology producing so many smart devices; and budget constraints to limit corporate wireless costs are all driving this “invasion” of personally-owned devices into organizations. It requires well-
considered wireless policies and procedures and the ability to manage devices on your network.

In the common scenario, the pressure comes from end users who have devices such as Blackberries and iPhones but who do not want or qualify for a company-paid line of service. For cost, "enterprises will only be willing and able to fully mobilize and support a certain segment of their ... workforces." We see ratios as high as ten to one of an organization's employees to those given corporate-paid devices. Since many others have a device capable of receiving email, they would like to connect to the organization's network.

From that organization's point of view, here are employees who want to be more productive by getting email on the go. By this time, we all know the productivity value of having email and other data with an employee at all times. On the other hand, there are costs for CALs, security compliance, administrative burden and on-going support, as well as liability issues. For those organizations that calculate that balance, many decide to provide access. How to best do that is the issue.

At the WES 2009 session, Boeing represented the traditional end of the policy spectrum by not allowing any personal-liable devices whatsoever onto their 22,000 device Blackberry environment, due in part because of the highly secure defense department contracting they do. The other panelists and most of the questioners seem to be allowing some level of personal devices or strongly considering due to demand by end users and cost-saving pressure.

(We should note here that cost saving by pushing people off of a corporate-liable account but then allowing those same employees to submit expense reports or receive an allowance to cover their wireless cost is not a good plan. Corporate-liable devices are typically less expensive, even with telecom administration costs included, than expense report submission for those costs due to the discounts offered by consolidating spend, accounts and management of as many corporate liable devices as possible to garner the greatest discounts.)

The discussion often mixes together two issues: security and liability. For example, assume that the Blackberry Curve is one of the standard devices supported by your telecom, support and security groups. But the iPhone is not on the supported device list. If an employee with an individual liable iPhone asks for access, the answer is an obvious, "No" because the device does not comply with your security requirements. However, if an individual liable user with a compliant Curve asks to be added to the BES, what is the traditionalist's justification for denying the request?

The BES, its policy management, and other security technology do not differentiate by who pays the phone bill. An individual Curve is the same as a corporate Curve to your network. The traditionalists might argue legal liability, for example, but the limited...
Personal Devices/Corporate Networks
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Recommendations

1. Focus on a standard set of devices that can be supported and are security-compliant.

2. Allow personal devices that comply with your security and support policies.

3. Require users to acknowledge security rules and policies, specifically calling out the consequences of a device “wipe” and such cases when that may be required.

4. Optionally recover some costs such as the BES CAL and support from the end-user. While individually, these costs are not large, if you are adding hundreds or thousands of these users over the course of a year or two your support, infrastructure and licensing costs will rise significantly.

5. Optionally offer users to be on plans associated with your corporate account so that you get “spend credit” for those users in your next carrier negotiation.

incremental risk of that may be a fair trade to many companies who can add hundreds or thousands of productively mobilized employees at a lower cost. In most cases these are staff members that would not have been offered company-paid devices, so there is a net benefit to the organization.

We recommend that you manage to a set of standard supportable and securable devices, rather than worry about who pays the phone bill. See box at left for our specific advice. If you are outsourcing your mobile support, make sure your provider can support this individual-liable program, including waiver collection and cost recovery.

In the end, users will appreciate the flexibility for which they have been asking and more productive users are a win for the organization. In addition, wireless continues to grow and smart devices are becoming more prevalent if not yet predominant, so the need, noise and pressure will only grow if you are continuing to prohibit individual devices.

About Ovation Services Group

Ovation provides wireless purchasing and technical services in support of large groups of wireless users. We provide wireless and technical expertise for wireless devices of all types, focusing on cost control and outstanding service.

For more information about this Wireless Policy Brief or other wireless topics, please contact us at Info@OvationWireless.com or download this and future wireless briefs at www.OvationWireless.com.

Notes
1 — The Aberdeen Group, December 2008
3 — Kristofor Swanson, vice president of learning and talent management for mobile strategy at Merrill Lynch from eweek.com. See http://www.eweek.com/c/a/Mobile-and-Wireless/Personal-Devices-Create-a-Dilemma-for-Corporate-IT/
4 — Sean Ryan, research analyst for the Mobile Enterprise practice at IDC, October 2008