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# As more workers roam, pundits tout mobile device management strategy



by Pamela Deloatch

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Companies are allowing employees to work anywhere using mobile devices, but industry watchers say MDM is just one part of a strong overall mobile strategy.

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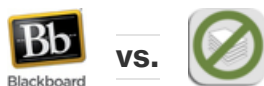


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Work no longer just takes place behind the desk in an office. Employees are more mobile than ever and are doing their work on the go. Sometimes they access company information from the office computer, but more often they access work email, company documents and confidential corporate information through mobile devices.

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With this increasing trend, companies must determine how to manage, control and secure corporate information that employees may access on company or private devices. Many businesses are turning to [mobile device management \(MDM\) platforms](#). Companies

can operate these software systems remotely to reach devices wherever they are. And organizations don't have to be a large to need them.

“MDM solves a lot of challenges when it comes to mobility in general,” said Mark Jordan, senior product manager for SAP Afaria, SAP’s MDM platform.

### Strategizing for security

Although [mobile devices provide more flexibility for employees](#), it can be a nightmare if that confidential information is exposed. A stolen tablet or a misplaced smartphone can contain data that can make a company devastatingly vulnerable. Research group IDC’s December 2011 report *Worldwide Mobile Worker Population 2011-2015 Forecast* predicts that in the next three years, 75% of all U.S. employees and 37% of global employees will be using some sort of mobile device.

One of the reasons organizations began using MDM platforms was to ensure that sensitive company information stayed confidential, Jordan said. With an MDM platform, if a device is lost or if an employee leaves the



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Another problem could occur if company data becomes corrupted after an infected device or malicious app on a device is transferred to the corporate network system. Many MDM systems use software to scan for viruses, decreasing the likelihood of a major viral infiltration.

Companies face security issues when employees access company information with their own devices, and they may not have – or may not use – encrypted passwords or other types of security measures to ensure the information stays secure. And employees who use company-issued devices inevitably use them to access personal information, such as emails and social media.

In such cases, companies can use MDM platforms to separate personal and professional data. For enterprises, the better option may be to have companies issue the devices, taking advantage of economies of scale to get pricing on devices and service contracts, said Phillippe Winthrop of The Enterprise Mobility Foundation in Boston. This way, employees get a free phone while organizations can control the security of the company information, he said.

### What to look for in an MDM platform

The ability to manage all facets of software distribution is essential, according to research group Gartner's report *Magic Quadrant for Mobile Device Management Software*. According to the report, companies need to be able to install, delete, deploy, update and block information and applications. What's more, companies should be able to do this remotely.

Companies should make sure that the MDM platform selected is aligned to the company's specific challenges, said Phillip Redman, research vice president for Connecticut-based Gartner. Companies also need to know how it will be integrated into their existing systems.

Most important, Redman said, is determining whether the potential platform can meet future needs, beyond just device management.

“There are more important mobile device management challenges,” he added. Those include preventing data loss, application development, management of how the MDM is offered – in the cloud or remotely – and anticipating different mobile needs.

Reliability of the vendor is important, SAP's Jordan said. Because of the tremendous growth in this sector, many new businesses have been started, but they may not have staying power. Companies should look for vendors that have a proven track record of dependability, Jordan advised.

### **A holistic approach**

Enterprises may start looking at MDM platforms to solve specific problems, but they need to develop an overall strategy to mobility, instead of handling it piecemeal.

“The next stage in evolution is broader,” Jordan said. “Not just device management, but application management. Who is writing them, how do they work with my device, how to support and integrate parts to that,” he said.

Larger enterprises are looking at how to strategically use an MDM platform to enhance their overall business intelligence, incorporating other technologies, such as enterprise resource planning.

Whether companies like it or not, the mobile workforce is here to stay.

“It's just the way it's going to be,” Winthrop of Enterprise Mobility Foundation said. “The future is mobile.”

What's more, the technology employees use will continue to develop and change, so companies must develop a long-term plan for harnessing this challenge and turning it into an opportunity.

*Pamela DeLoatch is a freelance writer in the business-to-business and technology environments. She has written articles, profiles and case studies for numerous organizations.*

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