BYOD – an educational revolution?

Tony Probert, European Managing Director, Cherwell Software, asks if bringing your own device is service improvement or a Service Desk nightmare?

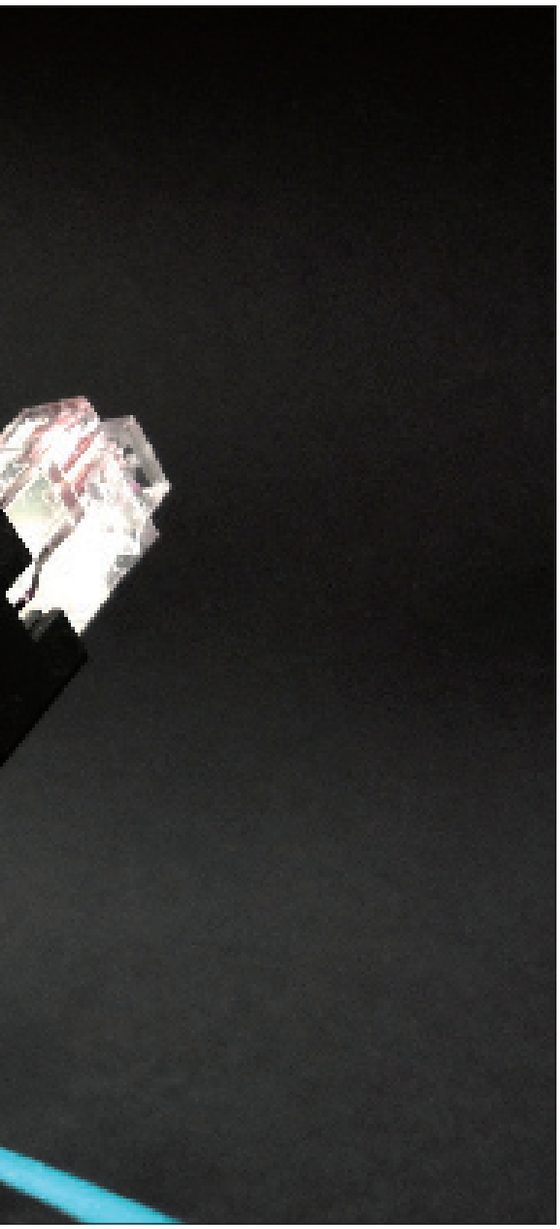
There is no doubt about it that Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) is not only a trend, a big trend, but a revolution – fuelled massively by the Internet – in regards to the way we communicate, how we communicate and when and from where we communicate.

Sitting alongside BYOD is another fast-growing trend – the consumerisation of IT. People want to use various devices, multiple devices to access networks and the Internet, and they expect the same experience regardless of the device they chose to use.

Both trends are having a huge impact on higher education Service Desk operations around the world.

People today have an increasing array of devices and tools at their disposal, empowering them to communicate more freely, to access information easily, to consume services and perform functions whenever they want and from wherever they are. This capability is very alluring, and for universities and colleges it can improve the quality and extent of services delivered, enhance productivity for staff and students, and ultimately increase choice for its community of users. To readily take advantage of this communication revolution, organisations either have to supply people with devices or utilise personal devices. For the majority, the latter is the only viable option.

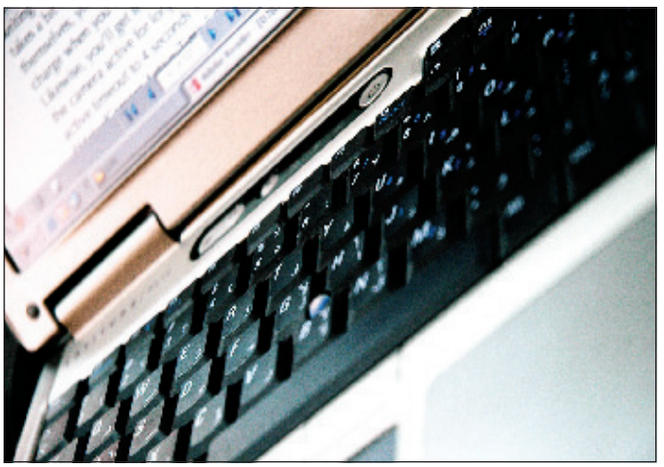
In higher education circles, the premise of students using their own personal devices is fairly accepted practice and began with the rapid adoption of personal computers back in the late 1980s. However, what is now different is the way in which these devices can be utilised and the availability of new technologies to rapidly develop communication platforms,



Tony Probert

deliver information and provide access to services not previously considered or envisioned.

A leading analyst group predicts that within the next five years, BYOD will become the predominant practice for all educational environments. If this prediction is anywhere near realised, higher education institutions will need to devise and implement clear and cohesive strategies for the implementation and management of enhanced BYOD services. The following issues are amongst those that will need to be seriously considered:



- The creation of clear policies that align the use of personally owned devices to support and enhance classroom-based academic learning
- Ensuring that no student is disadvantaged through the lack of available technology, should a BYOD policy become accepted or required
- Sufficient investment is needed to provide a robust infrastructure to support a greater number of devices
- Create and implement a clear and strong acceptable use policy (AUP) along with effective support procedures and expectations
- Review and implement appropriate security measures to protect networks and systems from inappropriate access and use

So why is there such a groundswell of focus relating to BYOD in the higher education sector? Quite simply, it all comes down to the expectation of young people. Increasingly, they have and will have direct and immediate access to an increasing array of smart devices and social media-based applications, which they view as their primary and preferred means of consuming services, accessing content and communicating.

Therefore, if you want to engage and excite them it seems obvious that you have to leverage tools and technology that they can use and can relate to. I might be showing my age, but I can remember the furore when calculators were introduced into the classroom, which today is absolutely accepted as being commonplace.

In addition, companies will become increasingly creative in the tools and applications they create and deliver to these personal devices. Just think about the number of apps now available for smartphones. Educational organisations need to identify innovative ways of tapping into and leveraging this increasing demand. I am not advocating that 'one size fits all'; it absolutely does not. There are a wide range of educational segments and demographic considerations that will strongly influence the use of such technology to ensure it is beneficial, appropriate and needed.

Given that the drive to BYOD is inevitable, a whole host of business issues need to be considered and addressed, covering a raft of topics from definition of use policies, through technological to the practical support of BYOD-based services. It should also go without saying that 'use policies' and 'product support' need to be modelled and delivered very differently depending on the classification of end user, i.e. student, employee, executive, etc.

The challenge faced by many Service Desk managers is that they are not being given the budget or resources to provide the enhanced support services required. If organisations want to embrace and benefit from BYOD, they need to provide the funding to enable IT and the Service Desk to provide the required services and support. In addition, the Service Desk should be responsible for the delivery and maintenance of 'knowledge-based' content so students and staff can conduct self-diagnosis and perform the necessary, ongoing management of their personal devices. To this end, the Service Desk also needs to agree appropriate support procedures and expectations for BYOD with users as part of an acceptable use policy (AUP).

Unlike other trends, I believe BYOD is here to stay. If you are not already doing so, you should plan for it in a way that best meets and addresses your staff and students' needs and expectations. You should also investigate how it can boost the offerings provided by higher education and enhance the student experiences both inside and outside the classroom. ●