

Special Report



Choosing the right mobile device platform for your business

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About Trinsic

Trinsic is a new kind of business communications specialist, built from the ground up to help your organisation leave behind siloed IT, telephony and mobile communications thinking, and move confidently into today’s landscape of converged business communications.

Taking business mobility beyond just being an airtime provider we can provide you with a comprehensive range of managed service options to help with your mobile communications, right through the lifecycle from project planning through deployment and mobility management to device retirement.

Choosing the right mobile device platform for your business

Just a few years ago it was a relatively simple decision when it came to selecting the right mobile phone platform for your business. If your staff just needed to make and receive phone calls and text messages you gave them a simple 'candy-bar' style phone such as the Nokia 6310i. If they needed email on the move you would provide a Blackberry and if they needed to run a line of business application such as collecting proof of delivery or job reporting you would have used a ruggedised PDA running the Windows Mobile operating system. Following on with the explosive growth in 'Consumerisation' of mobile technology since 2007 the decision is no longer that straightforward. The purpose of this guide is to provide you with information to help you come to the right decision for your business from an informed perspective. We shall be looking at Apple iOS, Android, Windows Phone and Blackberry 10 device platforms in this report.

What should you expect from a modern mobile phone?

Many features now available in modern smartphones are common across all four device platforms, although functionality may vary between individual vendors and specific device models.



Form Factor

Previously device/screen size was a feature that did vary but options are available across all featured platforms covering a standard screen size of around 10 to 12cm through to large screen devices often referred to as 'Phablets' with screen sizes of 14cm and above. In addition Tablet devices in various forms are available across all platforms but they are beyond the scope of this guide (and the subject of a future paper).

Connectivity

All new devices across all four platforms come equipped with Bluetooth, Wi-Fi and a minimum of 3G cellular connectivity. Many devices are now 4G enabled although you will need to connect through a 4G enabled data contract to benefit. If you require 4G connectivity we recommend subscribing to a larger data bundle than you might normally subscribe to on 3G as it doesn't take long to swallow 500MB of data with download speeds in the region of 40Mb/s, especially if streaming video!



Microsoft Exchange ActiveSync Email

Microsoft Exchange is the dominant corporate email platform and all featured platforms support ActiveSync connectivity for synchronising email, calendar entries and contacts. Even Blackberry devices now support 'Push' email, calendar and contact sync by direct connection to Exchange without the need for a BES server. All platforms also support Exchange ActiveSync security policies which enables Microsoft Exchange (On-Premise and Office 365) to ensure devices connecting to corporate resources have required security settings applied. These could include a device passcode of minimum length and complexity as well as enforcing device storage encryption.

Business Apps

Your final choice of device could be down to a critical line of business application your mobile staff need to run when working remotely. All platforms do support installing applications from either a public appstore or enterprise applications you've developed or had developed for you in-house. However it is a requirement that each device is enrolled with an account for that device to download from the vendor's App Store (see below).

Company App Stores

One factor that can catch organisations out is the fact that all mobile device platforms require a 'Company Store' account setup on the device. For all platforms this can be setup using the employee's own work email address and this would be our recommendation. Some organisations choose to use a single Google account for all company owned Android devices which is fine as long as you don't add any credit card details to the account and all required applications are either free or Enterprise Apps developed by you or specifically for you. On Apple and Windows devices there is a limit on the maximum number of devices that can use a single account.

Device Platforms

Apple iOS

Introduced by Apple in 2007, the iPhone quickly evolved to be the premium device of choice for many and it's easy to understand why. Excellent build quality, a superb range of features and extremely easy to use all helped to put Apple firmly at the top of the tree (excuse the pun!). Early devices and versions of iOS (the Operating System software that runs on iPhones) had flaws that restricted practical use in the business environment, such as a lack of multi-tasking prevented 'Push' email and other notification based applications that need to run in the background. As the iPhone and iOS have evolved many business critical features have become available and iOS is now an extremely manageable 'enterprise friendly' device platform. Through the Apple Push Notification Service (APNS) alerts and notifications can be sent to users without the App running on the device, data encryption is automatically enabled as soon as a device passcode is used and Apple have published a sophisticated range of device features and restrictions that can be configured when integrated with a Mobile Device Management (MDM) Solution.

What's good

With all devices manufactured under direct control of Apple themselves and operating system software updates released simultaneously this has led to a stable and consistent device platform. Apple devices are extremely popular with end-users and an excellent range of business apps are available. Apps available from the iTunes Store will have been tested and verified by Apple so you can be reasonably sure they shouldn't compromise security.

Cautions

The main concern from a business perspective is around cost as there isn't really a budget iPhone available. The lowest cost model is the 5C which has a price of around £300 with 8GB storage. Another area of concern to some customers is a new feature introduced in iOS7 known as 'Activation Lock'. When a user sets up a new phone and enables 'Find My iPhone', this locks the device to the user's iTunes account. This is great for preventing theft of the device but can cause problems if the employee leaves the business and returns the device without signing-out from their iTunes account as the device can't be re-deployed until they have.

Our Recommendations for iPhone

Assuming you are OK with the initial device costs of iPhones they will provide a popular choice with your colleagues and will certainly aid productivity due to the ease of use and range of apps available.

If you are looking at deploying a significant number of iOS devices we would strongly recommend deploying devices as 'Supervised' devices through an Apple Configurator then manage using a MDM/EMM (Mobile Device Management/Enterprise Mobility Management) Solution. If you need any help or guidance on this speak to your Trinsic representative as we have vast experience in this area.

Android

Although Android had its roots as a mobile device operating system for around five years prior to this date the first publicly available device appeared in late 2008. Unlike iOS, Android is an 'Open Source' operating system and is freely available to a wide range of device manufacturers for them to modify and customise as they see fit. This has led to explosive growth and popularity amongst consumers as there are now devices of all shapes and sizes accommodating all budgets which has led to Android holding largest market share across all device platforms. Unfortunately, as a consequence of this there are many variants available and as such compatibility issues have arisen and many enterprise friendly features vary enormously between device vendors. Manageability through MDM has relatively few features on native Android devices although Samsung devices that are SAFE (SAMSUNG For Enterprise) enabled have a very rich MDM feature set. Another issue for Android users is that manufacturers have been either very slow or even non-existent in making operating system upgrades available on existing devices, preferring to pair new Android releases with new devices.

What's good

A very large range of devices across all sizes, form factors and budgets. A very broad selection of business apps available on the Google Play Store ensure you should be able to find the apps you need. Using a compatible Mobile Device Management (MDM) solution Android devices can be locked down in to 'Kiosk' mode relatively easily for task-driven staff who need a device just for one or two specific applications.

Cautions

Due the 'Open Source' nature of the Android Operating System you may encounter compatibility issues around running certain apps on devices of different manufacturer. Not all manufacturers update their devices to new releases of Android operating system software when available, sometimes forcing early hardware upgrades when new features are required. Applications available in the Play Store may not be as rigorously tested as those in Apple or Microsoft stores.

Our Recommendations for Android

Due to the 'Open-ness' of the Android Operating System different manufacturers offer varying levels of manageability. We strongly recommend that when evaluating devices for business use try and select a single device and test compatibility of all apps you require. If you can't use a single device model due to form factor requirements, at least stick with a single manufacturer. In our experience Samsung SAFE devices provide a far higher level of manageability and security than other Android vendors. If you decide to deploy Android devices using a single Google Play account, ensure you set the device to not require a password for new app installations and do not provide any credit card information for that account!

Microsoft Windows Phone

Although Microsoft with Windows Phone were quite late in entering the Mobile Device arena they have demonstrated a clear commitment to the cause with their acquisition of the devices business from Nokia in 2014. With Windows Phone, Microsoft have almost a halfway house between iOS and Android as, although Windows Phone devices are available from other manufacturers they have to conform to a particular minimum hardware specification and the operating system cannot be modified. This has led to a device platform that is generally very stable, a good choice and price range of devices and reasonably consistent availability of operating system updates. With the Windows Phone 8.1 release in the summer of 2014 enterprise manageability was significantly enhanced with functionality available quickly catching up with iOS and Android.

What's good

A great range of devices are now available on Windows Phone 8 covering all budgets and size requirements. In a business environment this can be very as you can deploy Windows Phone across all areas of business without creating an 'us and them' climate as lower budget devices don't look or feel significantly inferior to premium devices. In addition support becomes very easy as you would only have one software platform to worry about looking after. Interoperability with Microsoft systems and applications is excellent too as Office is built in to the device operating system.

Cautions

The main concern with Windows Phone is that there are still not as many apps developed as on iOS and Android. From a business perspective this may not be a bad thing as long as the business apps you need are available.

Our Recommendations for Windows Phone

In our opinion Windows Phone offers the best balance between providing a consistent user experience across a wide range of price points due to the device requirements laid down by Microsoft. Although the vast majority of devices are manufactured by Microsoft, following their Nokia acquisition you do get some choice of manufacturer. If you use Microsoft technologies in your business Windows could be your best option as all Windows Phone devices come preinstalled with Microsoft Office and Outlook apps to provide seamless integration with Office 365 and other Microsoft technologies.

Blackberry

Blackberry has traditionally had a fantastic reputation for enterprise manageability and security, particularly around secure delivery of email to devices. The problem is that their original Blackberry O/S devices struggled to keep up with the slick touch-screen sexiness of the iPhone device generation. In response Blackberry acquired the QNX operating system and the first Blackberry 10 devices were launched in early 2013. A number of subsequent devices have been released across a range of budgets and form-factors but they have struggled to gain any significant market share. Blackberry 10 devices can now connect directly to a Microsoft Exchange Server/Service using ActiveSync to deliver email, calendar and contact information and for secure environments can be connected and managed through a BES10/12 server. Blackberry have split their devices and services in to separate business units and it remains to be seen if they continue to develop new devices.

What's good

An improving line up of device sizes and form factors are now available including the unique Passport device with a full keyboard that can also be used for swipe gestures. For users who really enjoyed the 'Qwerty and Trackpad' experience of the original Blackberry devices the 'Classic has recently been launched which brings back this experience. For end-to-end security, when used with a BES110/12 server Blackberry can't be touched as they are the only vendor who control data from device to server. Android apps can now be downloaded and installed on Blackberry 10 devices from the Amazon app store.

Cautions

In spite of Blackberry launching an exciting range of new devices there is still some concern over the long-term viability of Blackberry as a device manufacturer. We've also received comments from customers that the gesturing used on Blackberry devices can be tricky to get used to as it is unique to Blackberry.

Our Recommendations for Blackberry

If you have staff who use mobile email extensively and prefer a physical keyboard to a touchscreen then Blackberry could be your answer. Basic security and password policies can be enforced using Exchange ActiveSync device policies but if you require more comprehensive device management you will need to use BES 12 as this is currently the only service that fully supports Blackberry device management.

Summary

As you can see from this report you now have far greater choice and value in selecting a mobile device platform as the various vendors compete for market share. The choice now is more about budget, security requirements and specific application needs than device form factor. Looking at specific business roles we have put together the following suggestions:

- General mobility covering email, access to Office format documents and Sat-Nav – **Windows Phone**
- Task driven staff such as Couriers requiring proof of delivery, retail or surveys – **Android**
- Email heavy mobile workers requiring a physical keyboard – **Blackberry**
- Providing a premium user experience – **iPhone**

We hope the contents of this report will help you make informed business decisions. If you have further requirements the Trinsic team may be able to help you. For more information Trinsic, please contact us by using the contact details on the cover page of this report or visit our website at www.trinsic.co.uk.



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