

# Picking Up The Right Signals— Wi-Fi vs. Mobile Data

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Create a plan to manage your connections

Deciding how, where and when to rollout wireless connectivity triggers operational, technical and financial questions. The rapidly changing landscape of providers, standards, pricing plans and quality measures only adds to the complexity. So how can you capitalize on new features and capabilities with existing policies, equipment or people? And when should you use Wi-Fi or Mobile Data?

Wireless industry consultant Strategy Analytics found that **reliability, security and flexibility** were the top three factors for IT managers evaluating wireless solution providers. The company reported that IT managers were most influential in 30 percent of cases of deciding wireless spending.

Can you rein in the sheer number of users and gear – phones, smartphones, BlackBerry devices and others? Are your users and in-house data protected from worms, trojans, virus or hackers that have appeared on every mobile operating system from Symbian to Palm or even Windows OS? And which operator to choose: Verizon for its EV-DO data network or AT&T's 3G or another one altogether? What about global coverage and roaming? Consider

that the network technology or the number of Wi-Fi hotspots may be less important than the internal operating changes that could result from this initiative.

Gartner suggests that organizations form a Mobility Center of Excellence, which can then segment the user population and create a platform-based approach for maximum effectiveness. A successful program has to deliver mobility benefits across multiple device platforms, network types, regions and user groups.<sup>1</sup> This platform offers data exchange that's far deeper and more important to your business than access to e-mail, documents or calendars and contacts. Here are a few tips to simplify the process:

## Start at the Start

Asking 'Who's In Charge?' will raise some basic, but very important issues. Identify who will manage remote access and mobile devices. Who in your organization has responsibility for existing mobile phone contracts? It's very likely this person knows the technical landscape and has relationships with your firm's data and voice suppliers. These experts will need to collaborate on expanding the menu of connectivity options. A new set of policies might require the finance or human resources department to review travel and budget allowances. Consider setting up your own Mobility Center of Excellence working group to coordinate the needs of mobile workers and explore how centralized purchasing can maximize overall budgets within the organization.

Learn what your existing provider can deliver in value-added services. Some can track

actual usage minutes and report precisely who is using the network – and where users connect -- so you know which devices are the most productive. Look for expertise in blending remote-access tools with integration to your current communications tools, existing relationships with vendors or third-party software companies -- such as network security or billing management.

Among users, Finance, Insurance and Real Estate companies are the leading-edge industries with an average of 14 percent of IT spending committed to wireless solutions in 2008.

## One Size DOESN'T Fit All

Instead of allowing users to access the corporate network using home e-mail accounts or personal cellphones and PDAs, every company should have a set of approved devices, standardized with a suite of network security, data protection and loss-protection tools. From USB drives to Instant Messaging to Internet-enabled phones, work and play have gotten tangled and their technologies rarely inter-operate smoothly. The risks have never been greater for employees taking work far away from 'tech support' so it makes sense to coordinate training, resources and knowledge on a limited set of approved vendors.

<sup>1</sup> Gartner Symposium (October 2007)

### Who Needs Access?

Sales and services professionals are often the first remote users but, beyond e-mail or messaging, companies need to plan what tasks can be done and what data – or data sources – need to be involved. Will remote workers simply need to retrieve stored documents and data? Or will they be altering inventory levels and changing home office data that can affect others from off-site locations? Set priorities for the metrics that matter – speed, accuracy of data, coordination of home/remote data – and the results you expect. Should this initiative deliver more sales, greater cooperation or quicker action?

For example, service companies have to manage the time of workers while manufacturers may have to adjust production schedules, delivery plans or inventories based on daily reports. Pharmaceutical or food services sales people, for instance, can offer customers more detailed options based on real-time information delivered via mobile data. Construction companies or industries with longer lead times may use daily batching of orders sent via Wi-Fi from a hotel.

Service professionals may need to collaborate with others using voice, documents or online resources like Web conferences – this ‘many-to-many’ system can be easier with mobile data, particularly if people are in metropolitan areas with good signal coverage. If your people are in remote areas or can’t rely on Wi-Fi, then you might value the greater range of mobile data cards. Will you be transferring large files? The reliability of Wi-Fi and quick upload transfer speeds can make the difference. If long-distance calls are eating up

your telecom budget, then perhaps VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) and Voice over Wi-Fi from your Wi-Fi enabled handheld will save the day.

**Forrester Research estimates that *mobility in 2007 equates to nearly 30 percent of North American and European enterprise telecom budgets, with that percentage set to grow. Firms expect to increase spending and extend more line-of-business applications to handhelds.***

### Go With The Work Flow, Wherever You Are

Mobile data offers ‘connect anywhere/anytime’ convenience to deliver instant updates. That immediacy means remote workers can change offers, adjust pricing and availability, alter schedules and meet critical customer needs. But it also means a new way of working to ensure everyone checks messages and coordinates results. Changing calendars and priorities leads to a new approach to managing data compared with daily system updates that refresh inventories, pricing or logistics. Financial companies, utilities, medical providers or government agencies may have special security needs or data coordination

across departments to avoid duplicating effort or meeting regulatory requirements. Trace the flow of information from your remote workers to all the co-workers who share it and you might find entire work processes in need of an overhaul before remote access can be delivered.

Enhanced connectivity means remote workers get updated, accurate information and complete the actions/orders/next steps before leaving a meeting. Capturing electronic signatures or comparing data to existing files accelerates action – but only if the information is accurate. For example, a customer paper trail using electronic access can provide e-mail confirmations, faster processes and share data with clients, while still complying with regulatory standards.

### Get Input From Favorite Suppliers and Clients

The business ecosystem extends beyond your own company. It’s important that you give some thought to how you will involve crucial partners or blue-chip customers that could be more closely connected. Just as self-service package tracking helped logistics companies earn customer loyalty and online payments companies aligned with auction or retail sites, integrated solutions deliver greater value by combining steps into simpler, coordinated services. If your network is already using Wi-Fi, it might make sense to join in.

### Where In The World Are Your Users?

Overseas travel can bring huge and unexpected costs for people who are roaming or using alternative networks. Mobile data

cards or BlackBerry devices are ‘always on’ – checking for e-mail or reporting locations to cell towers. Some people might only need to connect at the start and end of the day to sync their data instead of remaining connected 24/7. Is this worth the cost for everyone, or just a select few globetrotters? Perhaps a pool of mobile data cards should be assembled for country-specific or regional travel. For US companies, savvy managers are getting the best of both by using each technology when it’s most appropriate. Wi-Fi is pervasive in Western Europe so a policy of using mobile data in North America and supplementing with Wi-Fi for access overseas for a cost-effective solution. Some companies use the phrase “Mobile data at home and Wi-Fi when you roam” to describe their policy of using North America’s mobile data network and Wi-Fi in other parts of the world.

Mobile data services work very well in large cities. When users leave the city – or the country – that same service can be slow and expensive. Wi-Fi provides a high-speed, lower-priced method for users to connect from sites that are not optimal for mobile data services. Users will choose Wi-Fi or hotel-based Ethernet in these situations regardless of whether you’ve provided alternatives. Organizations should consider a range of options to ensure that users leverage enterprise discounts and assure secure, reliable connections.

Start with a pilot program and see how use, costs and benefits match up against expectations. Compare both technologies and see if unusual applications or unexpected inventive new services can be developed once the tools are in place. Often people can’t forecast what they will do with new technologies as applications emerge at a later date. Experiment with and challenge remote workers to find new ways of using their access, the data or even road warrior tools.

**Yet even as business moves to ‘anywhere/anytime’ companies are still struggling with poorly-defined missions and technical difficulties for management.**

### Plan Ahead For What’s Next

Un-tethering e-mail from the desktop was a revolution years ago – first via webmail and lately using handheld devices. What is on your horizon? Video chat using webcams and collaborative workspaces are popular even among less-technical employees. File-sharing and video-swapping used to be bandwidth bandits --now it’s a snap to use YouTube,

iTunes and countless other sites. Just start by brainstorming which every day business processes or client problems could be solved or accelerated using new technology?

Navigating these technology options requires charting a course, checking results and looking at more than costs. Get strategic about mobility with centralized purchasing and control but be sure there is enough flexibility to give users what they need, when they need it. The 24x7 global work day increases the need for reliability and a business partner who can deliver services, expertise and advice that provide bottom-line benefits. Mobile workers will need support anytime, anywhere, so you need a partner with the resources and vendor ties worldwide that keeps your people connected.

Consider a pilot program to see how use, costs and benefits match up against expectations. Compare both technologies and see if unusual applications or unexpected inventive new services can be developed once the tools are in place. Often people can’t forecast what they will do with new technologies as applications emerge at a later date. Experiment and challenge remote workers to find new ways of using their access, the data or other tools.

It all begins with a plan, a coordinated approach to enhancing today’s operations by using Wi-Fi and mobile data networks. ■