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Consumerized IT: How is it affecting your association?

By HEINAN LANDA | 11/17/2011

Within the past five years, internal and external IT support professionals across the country have witnessed a new trend: the consumerization of IT. And, it is no coincidence that this trend surfaced just as tablets, notebooks, and smarter smartphones became everyone's must-haves. But, what is it? In plain-speak, the consumerization of IT is the name industry experts have applied to the phenomenon in which consumers buy tech toys, like iPads, and then bring these technology platforms to their workplaces and demand that IT departments integrate the devices with company networks and support them.

So, who has the final say? The association executive who goes to the IT department confident that this new device will make him/her more productive? Or, the association's IT department professionals whose must contain technology scatter and maintain data integrity and security? The answer can be found by considering the following:

- Culture of the association: Is your organization composed of technophiles? Are you trying to attract a younger employee base?
- Sensitivity of data: Is your association a HIPAA or Sarbanes-Oxley compliant organization that exchanges sensitive data via email? Or is your data available for public consumption?
- IT resources: Do you have the internal or external IT resources to support the consumerization of IT? Will your training budget allow for new platform education? Or is your IT department a one-person shop?

After evaluating these three things, a staff decision must be made. Will employees be allowed to bring in devices they have personally bought for organizational IT support and work purposes? If so, which consumer platforms/devices is your organization willing to support?

Make your decisions based on business needs. What would adding iPhone support do for the organization? If, strategically speaking, the answer is nothing, then there is probably no need to start supporting that device. But if nearly all of the association's staff has iPads and uses them to portably check and respond to emails, then incorporating iPad support could increase productivity across the organization.

The proliferation of technological devices shows no sign of stopping and that makes the consumerization of IT a very real problem, or advantage, that association staffs must consider. In addition to weighing security risks and IT resource bandwidth, be sure to make your decision on supporting or denying the consumer-ization of IT from a business perspective. There is a broad middle ground to this issue and association staffs must decide where they stand on the continuum. Once your corporate stance on this trend has been established, create a set of IT policies that reflects your decision and protects your organization – and its data.

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