Bring your own anything

By Saurabh Kumar

24 Oct 2014

Wearable technology is one of the next great frontiers of innovation. Starting with things like wristbands, watches and glasses, this emerging domain seems set to evolve over the coming years - with a variety of enhanced, connected, wearable items hitting the market.

Saurabh Kumar

However, what does this mean for Chief Information Officers (CIOs) and Chiefs of Security? As many organisations grapple with the concept of Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) - employees using devices like smartphones, tablets, and laptops in their daily work - they now have to contend with the growing range of wearable technology items.

On the one hand, this new technology offers up new opportunities and, on the other, it presents a host of new risks. Clearly, the concept of BYOD is undergoing a metamorphosis: and the new term is 'bring your own anything'.

This all-encompassing term includes traditional devices like smartphones and tablets, wearable technology, as well as one's own applications (apps), encryption technologies, networks, and identity management.

Gartner predicts that, by 2017, nearly half of all companies worldwide will be actively encouraging employees to bring their own devices. In fact, it suggests that most of these companies will stop providing computing and mobility devices to their staff altogether.

While new innovations and devices promise to improve employee productivity, flexibility, and satisfaction radically, there are a number of challenges for organisations in terms of managing and securing this new technology.

We believe that, as the concepts of wearable technology and 'bring your own anything' start to take hold among South African corporates, there are three key areas of focus that the CIO needs to address:

- Creating the infrastructure that enables employees to use various forms of wearable technology;
- Defining policies and standards that ensure interoperability, and protect the privacy of corporate data, and
- Adapting business processes and workflow systems to capitalise on the opportunities of new forms of wearable devices.

Creating the infrastructure

We've already seen the opportunities of Google Glass in various industries. Airlines are using it to recognise premier customers as they approach a check-in counter and tailor their service accordingly. Factories are using it to enable a completely 'hands free' working environment; and surgeons are getting real-time feeds of patients' vital signs during critical surgeries.

However, to enable all of this, the CIO and his team need to develop new sets of Application Program Interfaces (APIs) to integrate wearable devices into the organisation's inner workings. This can range from simple things like Customer Relation Management (CRM) and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) integration, to more complex services that need to receive information from wearable technology, and to render services to those devices.

The key questions is: How can wearable technology (like watches, earphones, glasses and helmets) enable new services, such as augmented reality or real-time data feeds, to provide a tangible business impact?

Defining policies

The CIO has to maintain pace with employees' mobility and productivity expectations, while minimising security, privacy, and regulatory risks. The only way to approach this is to design 'future proofed' policies and controls that extend across the entire ambit of wearable devices - and to invest significant energy in ensuring these policies are adhered to.

Local companies need to move a lot faster in this area and clearly define how access will be controlled, what security policies will be in place, and what will be the rules around how new 'recording' devices (such as Google Glass) can be used in the boardroom.

Adapting business processes

The beauty of wearable technology is that it can further extend the boundary of the organisation. A simple device worn on the wrist of an engineer in the field can collect vast quantities of useful data, for example.

However, without properly addressing the issue of how to manage that information (big data), and integrate it into the organisation, the value of this new technology may be largely lost. The key consideration is to ensure that the unique capabilities of new wearable devices are leveraged and then tightly connected with workflow systems. Importantly, this may require extensive remodelling of the business processes.

The step-change with wearable technology is that it promises to make the interaction between the user and the device more fluid, more intuitive. However, as consumer gadget makers constantly strive to sync new technology with the rhythm of our lives, the next big chasm to cross will be to bring these new devices onto corporate networks - and get them to start delivering real business value.

ABOUT SAURABH KUMAR

Managing Director at In2IT Technologies South Africa
▪ Digitisation and tech are key for businesses to thrive in 2021 - 8 Jan 2021
▪ The value blockchain can bring to business - 26 Jan 2017
▪ Digital change begins with business leadership - 14 Nov 2016
▪ ICT investment can help fuel SA's GDP growth - 3 May 2016
▪ Outsourcing vs insourcing: trust innovation to the experts - 25 Feb 2016

View my profile and articles...