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BLOGS

Archives; Privacy & Information Security; Social Media & Technology

The Consumerization of I.T. Just Another Double-Edged Sword for Employers

A recent article in the *New York Times* highlighted, yet again, the significant challenges faced by employers when they try to balance the possibilities of technology with the need to protect company data. [That article](#) discussed allowing employees to conduct company business through the use of their own personal computers and devices. This development is being referred to as the consumerization of I.T. In a nutshell, consumerization of I.T. represents a significant shift away from a closed technology system, in which an employer supplies all computers or other devices (such as smartphones or tablets) to be used by its workforce and supports only that hardware. Some employers are moving instead to more open systems, in which employees are routinely allowed perhaps even encouraged to use their own laptops and other devices. The popularity of the iPad is frequently pointed out as playing a key role in this movement. Some are predicting that this movement could eventually lead to the use of open systems for the software used by employers, including word processing software.

Although this consumerization approach offers significant benefits to employers, including increased employee productivity (due to the use of their most favored forms of technology) and decreased hardware costs (because employees often pick up all or a portion of the purchase price for the computer/device), there are also important concerns raised by this type of system. In particular, a more open system presents greater threats to the security of a company's data and systems. It can also cause inefficiencies due to the need to run and support multiple devices and software platforms (with possible resulting employee down time). One particular security concern is whether allowing this type of system will increase the likelihood of employees misappropriation of an employers confidential and trade secret information.

It is too soon to know how widespread the consumerization of I.T. approach will become, and particularly hard to predict whether it will gain popularity within smaller companies. As we watch its development, we need to keep in mind that innovations in technology often require adjustments in many other aspects of business practices, particularly those related to the privacy and security of company information.