



Choosing their own devices

Employees demanding a say on which gadgets they work on

I AM getting a BlackBerry next week."

A friend said this during a recent *teh tarik* session with a rather forlorn expression on his face.

"Eh... shouldn't you be happy? New phone!" exclaimed another friend.

"No la, this one company-issued one. First of all, I don't want a second phone let alone a BlackBerry, why can't I just use my own phone?" replied the first friend who happens to work in banking.

While my friend is new to the concept of company-issued devices, his emphatic wish to have control over which smartphone he uses for work is illustrative of an emerging trend.

The concept of bringing one's own device to work or BYOD for short is starting to gain some traction after years of employees accustomed to company-issued laptops, computers and phones.

There are many reasons, the proliferation of smartphones, the rise of mobile computing and the much-touted consumerisation of IT.

Employees are now demanding a say in the type of devices they work on.

But I digress.

Going back to that *teh tarik* session, I of course proceeded to play the devil's advocate, taking the side of the IT department and telling my friend that he's just got to live with it.

"But it's insane! Did you know, that if you leave it alone for more than three days, it would automatically shut down? That means if I take leave for four days, on the third day I would have to touch the phone, press a button... do something! If not, I got to call headquarters to get it reactivated!" exclaimed my friend in a huff, much to the amusement of the others gathered around the table.

So I asked if he could ensure that no one else will have access to that phone? He snatched back his smartphone from a friend using it to watch a YouTube video.

Can he guarantee that he will never ever lose it? Another guilty expression.

"But I don't want to end up like my colleague in Singapore!" he moaned.

It appears his colleague, a Malaysian-based



in the Singapore branch, owns four phones.

One for work and one for personal, with a set for each country, as she travels back and forth quite often.

"Every time the phone rings, it's like watching a lucky draw!" he exclaimed.

Depending on the industry, some IT departments are open to the idea of letting staff choose which smartphone or laptop to work on.

The expanded capabilities provided by more companies such as Apple or Samsung to enterprise clients who want flexibility and control over the devices in use by employees has made the choice of "something other than a BlackBerry or IBM ThinkPad" more palatable.

However, in an industry such as banking and finance, heightened security concerns over confidential information usually means you don't get to choose.

Spare a thought for the poor guys in IT, I told my friend, whose necks are on the line every time there are security breaches.

They are essentially paid to be paranoid about network security and data.

To do their jobs; they need to cover all the bases.

But of course, even the brains that run the IT department can't account for everything, as illustrated by this following anecdote:

Walking by my friend's desk shortly after receiving his BlackBerry, one senior manager, a Japanese national who communicates frequently with the company's headquarters in Japan, had a bewildered expression on his face.

"This BlackBerry has 38 languages installed on it," he told my friend who proceeded to nod appreciatively.

"But... no Japanese!"