Companion Device vs. Single Device Strategy
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There are a number of individuals and organizations that are promoting a single device strategy in the Transportation & Logistics market, particularly as it relates to a removable Tablet that supports some portion of the traditional vehicle telematics data capture and/or transmission and all of the electronic Driver activities such as Navigation, Hours of Service, Driver Vehicle Inspection Reports, Proof of Delivery, etc., whether in the cab or out of the cab. It is Blue Dot’s opinion that this is an outdated strategy that has already been superseded in the consumer market by a “companion device” approach of enabling the same (or similar) functionality on a variety of devices, each with a unique form factor and/or other attributes that make it the right device for the right moment in time.

In many cases, different devices may have significant overlap in capabilities and functionality: for example, most Smartphones, Tablets, and PCs share many of the same core hardware features such as Processing, Storage, GPS, Wireless Networking, Cameras, and high resolution Displays. These devices often share many of the same software capabilities and sometimes even the same exact software applications. Most recently we’ve seen the introduction of gaming consoles that support many of the same hardware and software capabilities as they are positioned as full featured living room entertainment centers.

However, this overlap in capabilities and functionality has not resulted in a consolidation of devices – in fact it is unlikely that any major consumer electronics manufacturer expects a single device type to be used in exclusion of the others. Rather, the strategy has been to enable the user to select the device that is most appropriate at the time, yet enjoy the capabilities and features to which they’ve become accustomed. Few, if any, consumers purchase a Smartphone to replace their Tablet and/or PC. Few business users have purchased Tablets to replace business PCs. In fact, even in the consumer space where there has been a highly touted ‘end of the PC era’, there is growing evidence that consumers are not purchasing Tablets to replace home PCs; they are simply augmenting their PCs with devices that are better suited for use on the go.

The largest hardware and software companies in the world have recognized and are embracing this “companion device” approach:

- Microsoft has recently invested heavily in hardware – not in one form factor but in three: Smartphones (acquisition of Nokia); Tablets (e.g. Surface and Surface Pro); and the Xbox One. Each family of devices not only share similar hardware capabilities and software functionality, Microsoft is working hard to unify the underlying software platforms for all three so that software developers can write a single application that will run on all.

- Google brought Android to the market and not only established it as the leading Smartphone platform in the world but is rapidly gaining ground in Tablets. The most recent Android platforms effectively support both families of devices, enabling the same
software to run on either device type. Google is attempting to make inroads in the PC market with the Chrome Browser and the Chrome OS, and most recently has introduced the Chromecast device to enable content to be passed from a Smartphone, Tablet, or PC web browser to the largest screen in the home: the Television.

- Apple redefined the Smartphone market and practically created the modern Tablet market but rather than assume that such devices would replace their iMacs or Powerbooks, they have continued to manufacture and innovate and have seen modest gains in sales of such devices as consumers again seek the ability to run the same (or similar) software on a variety of devices.

There are many more examples of such companies that have not settled on manufacturing a single device but rather expanding the device and form factor options that they provide.

It is Blue Dot’s strong opinion that this “companion device” approach will also be the more successful strategy in the Transportation & Logistics market. Most Drivers now, or will soon, own Smartphones. Many will also own personal Tablets. We believe that their expectation and desire will be to have access to their business apps on those types of devices as well as a dedicated, vehicle mounted console and then to have the ability to use the device that they feel is most appropriate at any given moment rather than be required to substitute one device for another or to be forced to carry a device that is less convenient than one that they already have (e.g. a rugged Tablet vs. a personal Smartphone).

This approach is not only consistent with current trends, it also provides many other benefits:

- **Reduces the impact of lost, stolen, or damaged devices.**
  If a single device is utilized for all electronic Driver activities, the loss of a device – regardless of the cause – will result in that Driver being unable to perform critical activities until the device is replaced. With the companion device strategy, the same Driver would be inconvenienced, but still able to perform most critical activities through any other device that is available (e.g. the dedicated in-cab device).

- **Maximizes user adoption.**
  Drivers, like all technology users, will gravitate towards the device that is most convenient and has the best features for the task at hand. If a Driver is in the cab, he/she will prefer a device with a large screen and an effective user interface that doesn’t interfere with operating the vehicle (such devices are often augmented with voice prompts and speech recognition). If a Driver is out of the cab, he/she will prefer a device that can be comfortably carried (e.g. thin, light-weight and can be put into a pocket), has a bright screen and a long battery life, and is optimized for
touch interaction. When forced to use a device that is deemed as inconvenient or a nuisance, user adoption suffers. At worst, Drivers will refuse to use the solution. At best, they will minimize their interaction with it – entering the smallest amount of data possible at the latest opportunity.

- **Embraces BYOD.**
  As previously mentioned, many Drivers already (or will soon) have personal Smartphones and Tablets. In most cases, such personal devices are well cared for and always available to the owner. Many Drivers will jump at the opportunity to use a personal device for certain work activities if it means that they can avoid using a separate, less convenient device. Such behavior is well established in other business settings – the BYOD phenomenon has forced corporate IT to accommodate or embrace the use of personal devices for business use even though they already provide fully supported, capable devices at no cost to their employees. In many cases, the accommodation / embrace of BYOD has improved employee moral as well as increased employee productivity.

Blue Dot is not only a strong advocate of the “companion device” approach, it is also a leading provider of the required technical infrastructure required to deliver on it. Blue Dot’s Cyan Mobile Platform combines state of the art mobile and cloud technologies to provide cross-platform apps that run on a variety of mobile platforms and form factors along with secure, reliable, and resilient integrations into all manner of commercial or home-grown business systems. Blue Dot also leverages its 25 years of experience and best practices to ensure that its mobile solutions are regarded as effective and efficient tools for mobile workers – easy to use and directly beneficial to the user.

If your organization is evaluating its options with regards to a single device strategy for enterprise mobile solutions, we hope that you find this paper to be informative and useful. Furthermore, we encourage you to look beyond the sales pitch of providers on either side and consider how you use mobile devices. Is there a single mobile device that meets all of your needs, or do you have different devices that share the same / similar capabilities and features but are better suited for certain situations and scenarios?