

Expert IT Solutions Newsletter

This new monthly newsletter will cover trends in technology for small businesses and related news. It's come about because as I visit various clients I'm frequently asked about different technologies, services and IT security risks and I realised my answers could benefit more than the few people asking at the time. I spend a lot of time keeping up with changes in the IT landscape for SMB and personal technology use and it's my hope that my insights can help you.

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Devices, devices, devices

A few years ago buying new computers for employees used to be a fairly simple choice – if they're on the road buy a laptop, if they're in the office – buy a desktop. Nowadays the buffet is a LOT bigger. There are tablets such as Apple's iPad, a plethora of Android tablets and Windows tablets. Can they replace a laptop for a travelling salesperson or executive? And smartphones, iPhone, Android and Windows, are now mini computers with a lot of potential – where do they fit in? The other big area is Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) where many business have employees bringing their own smartphones and tablets and asking to connect them to company email or even applications and data.

I've used the iPad, Android tablets and various flavours of Windows tablets. In my experience they're *companion devices* – great for when you're on the road (or on the lounge couch) and you need to look up something, write a quick reply to an email or when you're consuming content (reading, listening or watching). But when I need to get real work done (like writing this newsletter) I sit down in front of my computer. Could I write a newsletter on a tablet on-screen keyboard? It's possible but I'd be a lot slower.

So let's look at the different flavours of tablets along with some pro's and cons. This is based on my own experience and research, others might have differing views. There are plenty of sites on the internet with reviews of individual devices and comparisons between them. The other thing to remember is that when you buy a tablet – you're buying into an app store and an ecosystem. It's not just the device, it's the apps and services that go with it.

The iPad started the tablet revolution and is the most beautiful of the bunch. A delight to hold and use (especially the Air) it bears the trademark top quality hardware engineering of Apple. Just as on the iPhone the only way to load apps on this device is through the Apple App Store (around 1.2

million apps with 0.5 million native iPad apps today). This has the benefit of a tightly controlled environment with a small chance of malware infections but it also means less flexibility. The lack of a USB port has always flummoxed me – it seems such an obvious addition.

For users at our clients it can easily be connected to Exchange email and a couple of months ago Microsoft released [Office for it](#) (the free version lets you read and print but not edit Word, Excel and PowerPoint documents – the Office 365 subscription needed for editing can be bought through Expert IT Solutions). Creating simple applications to gather data while on the road (along with photos by the inbuilt camera and voice annotations) is easy. The main drawback of any Apple device however is the (unreasonably) high price.

Android tablets come in a variety of sizes, types and price categories but are generally a lot cheaper than the iPad. A leader is Samsung with their range of Galaxy tablets but there are many, many others. Compared to the tight control of Apple's apps, the Google Play store (around 1.2 million apps) is more a Wild West environment and malware is more prevalent. There are also other sources of Android apps on the internet, some with more dangerous content than others. Android tablets tend to be more versatile with USB port(s), pens for note taking and signatures and even built in phone capabilities. As with iPads, Android tablets can fairly easily be connected to your Exchange server for email and there are rumours of Office touch coming to Android in a similar way that it did to Apple's tablets.

Microsoft was a late comer to the tablet party and it's first round of devices (Surface RT, Surface Pro) followed by Surface 2 and Surface 2 Pro last year hasn't exactly taken the world by storm. Showing their business background however the Surface line of tablets, based on Windows 8's new, touch friendly UI have led the way in unifying the "tablet experience" (touching and swiping) with the "productivity experience" (typing and mouse control with their clip on keyboards). The latest addition is [Surface Pro 3](#) which combines a larger (but thin and light) tablet form factor with a larger clip on keyboard and the promise is that this will combine the ultrabook/notebook utility with the tablet feeling. Along with Microsoft itself of course many other hardware partners make innovative devices such as Lenovo (X1 Carbon Touch, Yoga 2 Pro), HP and Dell. These come in all sizes with smaller 8" tablets, mid-sized tablets with clip on or swivel keyboards, conventional laptops and ultrabooks, all the way up to all in one 24" desktop computers with touch screens. As expected these devices integrate with your current IT infrastructure easier than any other with the ability to run full Outlook (not just a scaled down email client), along with the full Office experience for productivity.

Expert IT Solutions now have a program in place with a sampling of Windows 8 devices on offer for a week-long trial. The only cost involved is the hour for setup and training so you can evaluate the device for use in your particular business. Please contact trial@expertitsolutions.com.au for further information.



Heartbleed

It's long been claimed that [open source](#) software would be safer than commercial software as impartial, external eyes could inspect and verify the security of the code. In reality however it turns out that the volunteer nature of most open source projects means that few people actually evaluate the quality of the code.

In a particular package (OpenSSL) that's widely used on the internet to secure traffic between clients and servers a particularly serious bug was identified early April this year. Called [Heartbleed](#) this issue affected a large proportion of the secure servers on the internet, along with many other software packages. Microsoft's (and other third party vendors) software was unaffected.

Your server(s) at work are unaffected by this bug as we don't use OpenSSL but in your personal life it'd be a good idea to check any secure site you use. Any service that were affected should have emailed you (many weeks ago) and told you of the issue and that you need to reset your password but not all of them are that diligent so it's a good idea to check any site that you use regularly and logon to. Use [this free service](#) to enter the address (URL, the bit in the top of your browser that shows which site you're on) to see if it's affected and not yet fixed. There are also plugins for the Chrome and Firefox browsers, which you can read about [here](#).

Next month we'll look at Mobile Device Management (MDM) solutions and ways to deal with all these passwords we have to remember.

If you have suggestions for topics you'd like covered in this newsletter, please email [me](#).

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