

The Digital Lifestyle Revolution

A collision course with company cost-control initiatives

There is an evolution occurring with smartphones, and not just from hardware innovations. Expanded handset and application capabilities combined with increased network speeds and video content richness is transforming the smartphone into the remote control of our lives.

Digital Lifestyle Attributes



As evidence of this evolution, the following are behaviors some people are no longer doing: reading a newspaper, listening to voicemail, making deposits at banks, sending faxes, standing in line to buy movie tickets, carrying cameras, use of a proper dictionary, or even reading hardcopy books. Smartphones allow us to control the climate in our homes, to operate our televisions and respond to a doorbell ring from anywhere.

Smartphones have made our lives more productive, particularly in the business world. Mobile productivity apps have changed how we plan, execute, and interact with our peers, associates, and customers. Content can be rapidly exchanged, shared, and accessed from

anywhere. The advent of the cloud has enabled access to documents on any digital device, regardless of where we are.

Popular culture has become integrated on a global basis. It was reported in the Ericsson Mobility Report at the beginning of 2020, and there were 3.5 billion smartphones worldwide. We experience news, memes, or popular jargon available globally and instantaneously. Our daily routines revolve around the information contained on our smartphones. Texts, Facebook, and Instagram posts have become the most reliable and relevant source of connection to those around us. As a result, it is redefining social grace. How many conversations stop mid-sentence when a text message arrives?

The Impact on Cellular Usage

One of the most impactful changes has been the way media outlets deliver information and news. The TV has trained us to seek information via video content. With the evolution of video streaming on mobile devices, much of what we consume digitally now includes video clips. For example, almost every news article has a video clip before the written content. The Weather Channel has video clips of weather dynamics and disasters. YouTube has become a conventional means to share video content for marketing, personal exchanges, and entertainment. Hence, it is no surprise video consumes a significantly more significant amount of data than textual information. As an example, watching a one-hour movie with HD streaming can consume over 2GBs of cellular data.



The impact of this seismic shift in data consumption is validated by current research and studies. Currently, audio and video streaming account for more than 60% of all data traffic. In an annual study by Ericsson in November 2019, they projected 76 percent of mobile data traffic would be video streaming by the year 2025. This, of course, will be aided by the deployment of 5G technology, which is projected to be the chosen conduit for 74 percent of all mobile data traffic in that same year.

The explosion of personal and business IoT devices, the near real-time adoption of the digital lifestyle, and the increase of video streaming in all content delivery have sent us on an irreversible course of high definition video addiction. The question now becomes, not only what will this addiction cost in the future, but how significantly will it impact current wireless invoices? The digital lifestyle works at counter purposes, with most companies' current laser-like focus on capping or even reducing variable costs. The inability to curb or moderate the digital video addiction will drive significant increases in the cellular data usage and correspondingly cause wireless invoices to increase precipitously. The carriers are banking on growing data use to recover the enormous investment in 5G technology. Will they provide a model that helps to flatten the curve of data consumption versus data cost? Unlikely. It will fall on prudent companies to bend the upward curve of cellular data use.

The Challenge

Mission-critical functions in the business world are cost-justified by the return on investment. Business commerce operates on the foundation of timely information and clear communication. But like any other critical resource, companies must find ways to use mobile devices more cost-effectively. This challenge demands a commensurate set of tools to identify and segment beneficial aspects of mobility usage from non-beneficial usage. Once the useful components are cataloged, the non-useful components can be controlled by a variety of means.

In the future, companies will have a much lower tolerance for high data usage on devices they fund or subsidize. With the current evolution of the digital lifestyle, including the stampede to work-at-home triggered by the virus pandemic, data use has grown significantly. A recent report by OpenVault in Q1 2020 showed that as much data as predicted for all of 2020 was consumed in just the first quarter. This study saw a 47% increase in data use in Q1. The use of hotspot/tethered capability now on most smartphones offers an additional accelerator for data use. Therefore, this is an urgent issue today, not just a future concern to monitor.

Mitigating the Symptoms

As with the current pandemic, one first seeks remedies to treat the symptoms before focusing on ways to affect root causes. In the current case of surging data use, companies need to apply tools to mitigate the overuse of data. These tools should analyze where and how data has increased and correlated with changes in the work style of those who are overrunning recommended usage parameters. Consideration will need to be made in assessing public and private pandemic accommodations being offered by governments and wireless carriers. Some carriers have delayed cancellation charges, waived overage fees, or offered increased data. The ability to monitor and react in a deliberative way through automation will be an essential mitigation strategy. While solutions have long existed to optimize wireless usage through pooling, now more than ever, these solutions must provide visibility in real-time



to make just-in-time data pool adjustments. With increased real-time visibility, companies can achieve success in flattening the curve of data overuse, but that does not yet get to the root cause.

Tackling Root Causes

Excessive cellular data use is rooted in the evolving digital lifestyle behaviors. Modifying these behaviors requires a much more complete understanding of the sites visited as well as mechanisms to affect user behavior. To bring about sustained methods of controlling cellular usage, companies have begun to implement enhanced tools to monitor and control data use consistent with company usage expectations. This cannot be accomplished without identifying high video streaming along with pinpointing the activity behind the spike in usage generated by current work-at-home requirements.

Enhanced data management tools exist which can identify sites being accessed on an individual mobile device. An example of this would be data streaming from Netflix, YouTube TV, Prime Video, or Disney+. These sites offer digital streaming of entertainment content considered non-essential for business but none-the-less enticing to mobile users. These enhanced data management tools provide the ability to send real-time alerts to users exceeding pre-defined policy thresholds. When alerts are inadequate to modify employee behavior, category blocks, or caps on data usage can become a more definitive mechanism to control personal data usage. By applying these controls, users will be forced to either use WiFi or find other non-cellular streaming options, effectively acting as a vaccination to eradicate this seemingly addictive behavior.

Getting Started

Organizations struggling with the evolution of the digital lifestyle and data use attributed to the current pandemic, that is not using available data management tools would do well to become more conversant with these types of solutions. Tools for optimizing data use based on the best application of carrier-provided data plans, and the control and oversight of sites being accessed by users must be implemented as a permanent solution to data overuse. Both traditional tools for managing wireless costs combined with enhanced data management tools are proving indispensable to companies finding success in bringing order to their mobility programs.

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