

Report on **Business**

Weekend Workout

Going wireless without going broke

Any firm worth its commitment to connectivity provides its employees with mobile devices. But in the cost-cutting frenzy of a recession, companies are taking a second look at their expenses and cracking down on mobile fluff.

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Connectivity

If you're working with demanding clients, especially in multiple time zones, your employees need to be able to check in with them at all times. It's also nice to be able to reach your employees whenever you need to, and for your customers to feel confident they can get in touch, too.

Flexibility

The days of the cubicle-bound workers are gone. Mobile devices allow people work from home, from their cars, from the airport.

Availability

Fast-paced, workaholic customers want to be able to reach you and your employees at any time, anywhere.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Cost

Do you really want to pay for a three-hour phone call to Shanghai? Is it really necessary to download all of *I Love You, Man*? Although companies are able to get group rates and often pool their mobile minutes, these plans can get pricey – especially when you factor in often astronomic data bills on [smart phones](#).

Security

It's one thing to ensure your sensitive information is safely stored in your in-house computer network. But if you have dozens or hundreds of globe-trotting mobile devices, it gets a lot trickier. Increasingly, companies are finding themselves blocking suspect websites on Web-enabled mobiles, or issuing policies on data sharing.

On the clock ... or not?

Mobiles make work hours fuzzier, which is helpful when you need a call answered at 9 p.m. But are these billable hours? Two recent U.S. lawsuits filed against T-Mobile USA Inc. and CB Richard Ellis

Group Inc. allege that employees weren't being paid for the work they were doing taking calls or e-mails on their smart phones after hours, a sign of why it's important to have clear policies to handle "flexible" jobs.

HOW TO KEEP COSTS DOWN

Pool minutes

If your employees are going to be talking and texting often, get a plan that will give you a bulk amount of minutes spread out among all your handsets.

Limit long-distance

If it isn't practical (or necessary) to give your employees all the minutes they could possibly need, make sure they know what the limits are on long-distance calls or roaming fees.

Watch your data usage

If smart phones are in use, watch what's being downloaded. Data costs can accumulate rapidly if employees use their handsets to download or stream music and video. If it's not necessary for them to catch the next episode of *Mad Men*, make sure they know it's not okay.

Be selectively strict

Instead of trying to track the minutiae of each employee's call history, keep an eye out for unusual costs: The CEO of one Fortune 500 company personally calls any employee whose monthly bill goes above \$500.

Be picky about who gets mobiles

You probably don't want to give free cellphones to every employee. If your bottom line has that much leeway, says Vancouver-based human resources consultant Gayle Hadfield, phones can be a feel-good perk and a way to win worker loyalty. (Jumping ship to another job could be less attractive if your mobile belongs to the company you're thinking of ditching.)

Take advantage of hard times

If your company needs to trim costs, most workers will understand if you have to pinch pennies on cellphones.

CALL IN THE EXPERTS

So you want to ensure your smart-phone-toting employees are toeing the line.

But who has time to pore over cellphone receipts, searching for illicit long-distance calls or over-the-top downloads?

Keeping track of company phones – who's using them, for how long and for what purpose – causes enough of a headache that it has spawned businesses that help corporations manage the mobile devices given to employees.

For example, Avema Corp., which has offices in Toronto and San Francisco, co-ordinates companies' cellphone plans, and monitors them for anomalies.

“Because wireless devices are mostly used outside of the office, they're ‘invisible’ to upper management, except for the bill,” says Roger Yang, CEO and co-founder of Avema.

THE EXPERIENCE

Senior partners at Vancouver-based accounting firm Smythe Ratcliffe need to be available to clients at all times. The company pays for BlackBerrys not only for its 25 senior managers, but also for their family members, making for a total of 75 corporate-issued smart phones.

Over the years, the firm has learned how to keep costs down and its employees connected: The company pools the phones' 9,000 monthly minutes – about twice what is normally needed, said partner Perry Munton – so that long-distance calls or hour-long consultations aren't an issue, and personal calls are acceptable. “We were all over the map with paying for personal minutes,” he said. “The pooling system really allows us to not worry about it.”

Data usage, on the other hand, has proven a headache: It isn't included in the plan, so employees are discouraged from downloading.

And Mr. Munton knows what happens when they forget. “If I want to watch a football game using my BlackBerry, which I did once ... it costs \$600,” he said. “We warn people now.”

The firm also blocks access to gambling sites and social-networking sites such as Facebook, the same as it does with its in-house computers.

BY THE NUMBERS

6,000

Highest number of contraband text messages on a single phone, caught by Avema on behalf of a corporate client.

\$25,000

Highest additional data charges linked to a company-issued smart phone of an Avema client.

\$5,000

Most expensive roaming charges issued for a single phone of an Avema client.

5 per cent

Portion of Avema's Canadian clients that are switching from cellphones to smart phones, since the financial crisis began last year.

40 per cent

Rate at which its clients were migrating to smart phones a year ago.

Source: Avema Corp.

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