

The focus of MDM (mobile device management) has shifted to application management and diagnostics.

The Evolution Of MDM

The rapid expansion of mobility initiatives in the enterprise can make an IT manager's head spin. "Hundreds of new smartphones and tablets have been launched by vendors in 2011, and each presents unique support challenges," says Jonathan Dale, product marketing manager for Fiberlink Communications. "There is no realistic way to test and approve which devices IT will support and which ones they will not. That means IT has a real challenge in setting their support strategy."

Beyond platform variety, there is also the issue of operating system upgrades. "This ranges from highly predictable Apple iOS devices on one end of the spectrum to Android on the other — with its hundreds of devices and several major OS releases per year," says Joe Granda, executive VP of marketing at Syclo. "Companies are scrambling to plug vulnerabilities and learn the differences between device form factors and OS versions."

Due to these trends, MDM solutions have had to evolve. "The focus is shifting from managing the physical device to managing the applications on the device," says Dan Ortega, senior director of product marketing at Sybase, an SAP company. "In addition, provisioning applications on the device has become a major issue. What happens, for example, when you need to deploy a complex application to 5,000 devices, and there are technical configuration requirements that are beyond the skill of the end user? New capabilities such as client-side libraries allow portal-based configuration of complex applications. Without this type of capability, IT would be very hard-pressed to scale mobility across the enterprise."

Enforce Mobile Device Policies

There has been increasing pressure for IT departments to allow any device presented to them onto the corporate network, whether the company owns the devices or not. While MDM solutions can be configured to

accommodate individual-liable devices, it is important to establish security standards and stick to them. "While IT departments do try to support as many platforms as possible, it is absolutely vital that they do not do that at the expense of data security," says Padraig Regan, CTO of B2M Solutions. "For example, you shouldn't give users access to vital corporate resources if you can't ensure the appropriate security constraints are in place."

Corporations inherently have less control over individual-liable devices, and therefore have to establish policies for them. "It's critical to understand that all devices are not equal," Regan says. "They have different capabilities, and companies need to understand each one's capabilities and design appropriate security and access policies. The vital role MDM plays is to ensure that the organization remains in control of its property, even if that is in the form of data or e-mails on a remote device, at all times, in all situations, and for every device connected."

Companies must also establish policies around whether they can wipe or block applications on an individual-liable device, and whether they will compensate the employee for the device or the service plan. "A dedicated MDM solution allows enterprises to enforce their unique device policies, accommodating each of the factors above on a custom basis. In every case, we find that the biggest challenge for IT is having the conversation with users, not implementing the technology," Dale says.

Asset Management And Analytics

MDM solutions help centralize control and reduce risk by enabling enforceable over-the-air policies like remote wipe and PIN protection. Increasingly, these solutions also leverage location-based services and deep device asset discovery, which can allow companies to access details about integrated and removable assets like SIM cards and radios, in addition to device serial numbers.

Analytics have come into play as well. "By charting



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events and device performance criteria over time, and by having good visibility into the impact of changes to any part of the mobile solution [the app itself, security profiles, communication settings, network providers], IT departments can make vastly better software and procurement decisions,” Granda says.

Compliance monitoring features can help eliminate security issues before they become a problem. “By continuously monitoring a device and comparing that device against a predefined rule set, IT can automatically take action on a device that is not in compliance with the corporate policy,” Dale says. “This eliminates the need for daily monitoring and manual enforcement.” Dale adds that an MDM solution that integrates with e-mail systems and Active Directory provides even more control, because IT can identify all devices that have access to corporate e-mail.

New Platforms Emerge In Field Applications

Because of the rapid evolution occurring in the mobile device space, IT departments are often asked to support new platforms without the luxury of preplanning. While it’s fairly easy on a technical level to incorporate these new devices into the network, there is still a responsibility to ensure data integrity. “It is essential to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each device before introducing it to the population: the weaknesses need to be addressed and it is quite acceptable to do this by providing lower levels of corporate network access and reduced functionality on these devices,” Regan says.

Platform proliferation has primarily been an issue for white- or gray-collar applications; most line-of-business apps still rely on Windows-based, rugged devices. But that is beginning to change. “We’re seeing a lot of employees using lighter, consumer-grade smartphones and tablets for certain parts of business processes,” Granda says. “For example, many of our utilities customers that typically have ruggedized laptops are adding BlackBerry, Android, or iOS devices for things like reviewing work orders, taking quick readings in the field, or updating work status. It really has to do with using the best device for the specific task.”

Integrating these new platforms is not nearly as challenging as it once was, since most

of the new platforms are now compatible with third-party MDM tools; the MDM solutions just have to be updated regularly to keep up with the new features. “The OS must have API access available to the MDM vendors; the more access we are granted, the better job we can do of managing the devices and the applications on them,” Ortega says.

Application Management Moves To The Forefront

The focus on MDM will continue to shift from device management to application management, even for enterprise deployments. “Moving forward, we’ll see a proliferation of applications into the enterprise market,” Ortega says. “We know consumers are more frequently spending time on apps versus the mobile Web. As the consumer becomes more accustomed to working in this environment, we’ll see more organizations working to deploy apps in an App Store-like environment to cater to the employees behavior patterns — helping to make them more productive from their mobile devices.”

All of these trends will push MDM vendors to expand even further beyond the asset management functionality they have traditionally provided. Users are looking for tools that can help them take more control of their rapidly expanding fleet of mobile hardware and applications. •



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