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Your Smart Phone: Friend or Foe?

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The Business, Technology, Innovation and Digital Media Blog.



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Mobility and convergence are buzzwords in today's technology-oriented business world, and the Smart Phone incorporates both features in one package. Whether your company has mandated the use of one of these sophisticated devices, or you are considering purchasing one for business or personal use, there are positive and negative aspects to owning these devices.

First, what is a Smart Phone? A Smart Phone is a mobile device that not only can make and receive phone calls, but it also incorporates personal computing features into its repertoire. A user may be able to access the Internet, send and receive emails, download files, and connect to the company database to make and receive updates. The range of features available will differ depending upon the device and how the company allows mobile devices to interact with its network.

A variety of brands of Smart Phones are available, and some of the names you may have heard are BlackBerry (TM), iPhone (TM) and Palm. Additionally, wireless mobile services from leading phone companies are providing their own brands of Smart Phones with features customised to interact with the provider's network. Thus, contemporary Smart Phones are really miniature handheld wireless PCs.

The advantages are obvious. The salesman who is in the car all day can check email, respond to customer requests, submit orders, and provide needed information to his company, while still making the required number of sales calls. The service provider who makes house or office visits can receive new appointments via email on his mobile device. A business executive who travels frequently can easily answer questions from his managers even though he is at a remote location. With access to the Internet, a user can essentially choose to replace a laptop with a Smart Phone. The business user with a Smart Phone can now be contacted twenty-four hours a day.

This constant availability can also be a drawback. Most professionals will turn off their devices during non-work time, but with global outsourcing and on-call emergency coverage, some business users are not allowed to turn the devices off. Additionally, people may become too-frequent users of email and the web.

Spouses have been known to insist that the device be left at home while the family is on holiday, to avoid the addicted user continuing to work while he or she should be relaxing. This blurring of the line between work life and personal life has led to debates over whether Smart Phones can actually be addictive for a certain percentage of users. Studies carried in the academic field have shown that workers deprived of their mobile devices show signs of withdrawal. A recent study of teenagers using mobile Smart Phones shows these devices may have detrimental effects upon their school work.

Should you view your Smart Phone as friend or foe? For most users, it is a handy device that can make one more efficient and productive. Study the features and functions, spend time learning how to use it effectively, and it may actually shorten your work day and lighten your load. Keep in mind that for all the potential advantages offered by these devices, disadvantages also appear.

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Business users may need to set boundaries on their own work hours if they find their enthusiastic use of the device interfering with personal time. Employers also have a responsibility to provide sensible guidelines to employees. With reasonable expectations in place on both sides, the Smart Phone can become a valuable asset to the company and to the employees.

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