

Taking tablets

Mobile technology could help treasury to move on from the spaghetti of systems it's built up over the past 50 years, argues Lesley Meall

Two years is a long time in the world of technology – and treasury. Economic developments have made the traditional treasury role more strategic, and end-user enthusiasm has made the iPad into an enterprise device. Before it came along, staying connected on the move meant straining your eyes with the screen on your smartphone or straining your patience with the boot time on your notebook. Then everything changed. Apple's iPad wasn't the first tablet device, but it redefined what consumers and corporates expect from a mobile computing device, and there is no going back.

“Every organisation should now be thinking about how the iPad and other tablet devices could change the way they operate,” suggests Dave Clearly, an analyst with the researcher Gartner – and some parts of the treasury ecosystem already are. Treasurers are used to gaining remote systems access using BlackBerries and notebooks, but over the past couple of years, access from all sorts of mobile devices has been added to all sorts of systems, from the latest treasury and risk-management solutions to dashboards that sit on top of multiple legacy systems, and more will follow – even in areas where treasury was previously cautious.

According to Fundtech, a developer of transaction banking systems, security hasn't been the only thing tempering enthusiasm for corporate mobile banking; the small screens on smartphones are factors, too. “Tablets have made it easier for corporates to mobile bank,” says George Ravich, executive VP, Fundtech. Over the past year, a number of banks have launched new or improved mobile offerings, and they have been well received. In just six months, HSBCnet has attracted 400,000 users, who have authorised payments of more than \$1.2bn globally, as well as checked account balances and statements, and received alerts and reports.

But the possibilities created by tablets go beyond their potential as access devices. “Think of tablets as something that can augment what you are doing with smartphones and with notebooks and with desktop devices, and think of the new applications and interface models they make possible,” says Clearly.

So what does this mean for treasury? According to Chris Skinner, technology expert and chairman of the Financial Services Club, tablet devices have implications for users of tablets and, perhaps more



importantly, for the underlying systems that they provide access to. “The iPad was built for idiots,” says Skinner, “so you can set them up in a way that makes them easy for less-skilled people in treasury to use.” But he urges you to look beyond benefits such as reducing the need for extensive training. “Some people in treasury see developments such as mobile and touch screens as merely the froth of the front end of core systems,” he says. When they are part of a broader trend including cloud computing and social media, that has enormous potential, but only if treasury can “throw away the past, rather than concrete over it”.

“Developments in cloud, mobile, touch screens and social media could help treasury to move on from the spaghetti of systems it’s built up over the past 50 years,” asserts Skinner, but only if modern systems adoption is managed as part of a broader plan to automate, consolidate, streamline and integrate treasury processes.

If developments such as cash management portals, hosted SWIFT bureau services, and mobile banking apps are put on top of pre-1990s infrastructures, the disparate and disconnected systems of the past will be replaced by the disparate and disconnected systems of the future.

➤ Preventing this demands fundamental changes that will take time and money, and moving treasury systems up the corporate agenda will be challenging. Meanwhile, there are other more immediate barriers to the adoption of emerging technologies such as the iPad and other tablets, not least the cost and complexity their exploitation creates for software developers. This is highlighted by the Ovum consultancy in its recent report *Tablet Adoption in Corporate Banking and Wealth Management* – as are some of the implications for treasury technology-buying decisions.

Ovum predicts a change in the current preference for accessing treasury systems using downloadable apps, which may threaten the dominance of the iPad. This will happen partly because of the increasing availability of alternative tablet devices. But developments in the web programming language HTML will also make it more likely that developers offer browser-based mobile access to their software products, rather than write a new app version for each operating system they run on. So, although increased treasury use of tablet devices looks likely, it may not take place from an iPad. A lot can happen in two years. 📍

THE APPLE IMPERATIVE

In the battle for the workforce, Apple’s mobile devices seem to be blowing the opposition out of the water. BlackBerry may once have been the default smartphone, but the iPhone has already overtaken it (and every other smartphone on the planet), and the iPad is also proving popular.

According to the latest numbers from the mobile enterprise specialist Good Technology, around 80% of new device activations on corporate networks during the first quarter of 2012 involved Apple iPhones and iPads – and the financial services industry led the pack by accounting for 35% of these new users.

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