

# WORKER OF THE FUTURE

■ Property Week brought together some of the real estate industry's leading lights for a thinktank to discuss the findings of its latest survey: Worker of the future – the consumerisation of technology within the property industry

A panel of industry experts met on 4 October to discuss the findings of *Property Week* and property and facilities management software supplier Qube Global Software's latest research. More than 850 survey respondents shared their thoughts on how technology is changing the way they live and work.

The thinktank was held at Tower 42 in the City of London, and began with chairman Giles Barrie, *Property Week's* editor-in-chief, asking the panel their views on employees using personal mobile devices, rather than corporate equipment, for work.

The practice, known by the acronyms BYOT (bring your own technology) and BYOD (bring your own device), was identified by many survey respondents as a significant and growing trend (graphs, right).

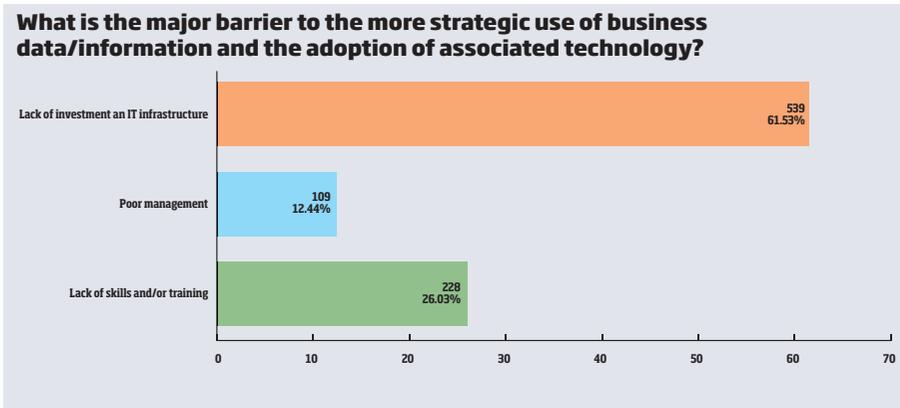
Neil McLocklin, head of business consulting at Cushman & Wakefield, said his company's decision to open up its systems to enable BYOD had met with considerable grassroots support.

"The consumer market is well ahead of the corporate market in respect of the range of devices available and the functionality they provide, so what people choose to use at work is down to individual preference," he said.

"The question is, how far do we go down this road? In theory, if you have good security around your networks, there's no need for corporate devices at all."

Knight Frank partner John Reyers said businesses were increasingly following the lead of consumers.

"Only a short time ago no one bought a BlackBerry as a consumer because work would provide them with one. Now people are buying iPhones and iPads for their own purposes and they want to use them for business," he said. "As a consequence, our logistics are increasingly concerned with making sure we can support people with their own devices."



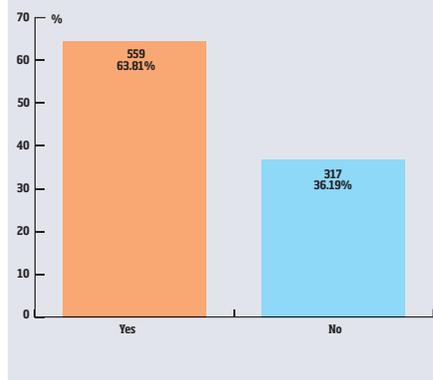
With employees now able to access information from almost any location, the panel were asked if they had noticed an increase in home working, and if this created new challenges for managers no longer able to physically check up on staff.

"Home working gets a lot of bad press, but these days home is just another work setting," opined McLocklin. "We have people all over Europe, so if they are working in different offices or at home it doesn't matter. They are performance managed, and they have 101 ways to communicate with me, so there's no need for me to see them physically."

Although mobile devices are allowing staff greater freedom in respect of where they work, McLocklin warned they could also create a "culture of availability" in which employees would become unwilling or unable to switch off from work issues.

Nick Berry, partner at Mountgrange Investment Management, agreed, saying it was important for companies to adopt a more flexible, give-and-take attitude to working hours, to help staff to maintain a

### Do you believe that you and your colleagues own more advanced technology at home than that supplied by your employer?



good work/life balance. "At my company, if a project requires someone to be on call more regularly, or to work later into the evening, then we expect them to step up to the mark."

"Equally, we're not so precious about staff being in the office when the pressure is not on, and we try to be flexible when they have domestic issues such as childcare to deal with."

### Rise of social media

The panel was asked how it viewed social media, and if members agreed with the almost 80% of survey respondents who now regard it as a valid business tool.

"At one time we would've blocked social media sites," said Reyers. "Now we're committed to embracing social media, and we have someone specifically promoting Twitter internally to make sure staff give out a consistent message."

McLocklin voiced similar support for platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, but advised against companies trying to micromanage social media outputs: "I don't think you can corporately control all the conversations that are going on via social media. You've got to trust and empower people," he said.

Although the panel was largely positive about the changes to the working environment brought about by the adoption of new technologies, they agreed it was still important to be discriminating in the use of technology – particularly where clients are concerned.

Almost 40% of respondents reported that clients were impressed if they used mobile technology during meetings, leading the panel to emphasise the importance of good content over slick presentation.

"There are different types of client with different requirements, and technology should be used appropriately," said Reyers.

"We don't have a policy saying everybody must use an iPad for things like presentations. You must use the technology that best gets the message across – and that includes the dreaded paper."

There was also unanimous agreement to resisting the urge to take all business interactions online.

"Face to face is still the most important interface when it comes to making key decisions," said Berry.

"There are times when email exchanges go round and round in circles, and email can keep clients at a distance by allowing you to 'stay in your castle'."

"If you're doing the really difficult things, you can't beat the give and take you get in a conversation. People like dealing with people."

The panel were asked if they shared respondents' enthusiasm for "cloud" computing, which has experienced rapid take-up despite concerns over its security.

"The convenience of mobile devices and the ubiquity of the cloud go hand in hand," said John Cuppello, CEO of Qube Global Software. "There are security concerns, but I don't think they should stop people adopting cloud technologies."

"The sheer level of back-up available, which



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includes dedicated disaster recovery, and the mirroring of data across drives and locations, makes security immensely better within the cloud than it ever could be on a personal or corporate computer."

### Impact on real estate

To end, the panel discussed the potential impact on the commercial and retail real estate markets if, as predicted by many respondents, home working and online shopping become the norm in future.

"In theory, office space should contract, but we will still have offices in the future, they will just look different," Berry suggested.

"Regardless of whether we have the ability to work at home, some people will always want to put a distance between their professional and private life."

"Human interaction is where ideas come from, and in an office environment it's easy to speak to people and develop and share ideas."

Berry was also sceptical about the rise of online shopping sounding the death knell for traditional retail premises: "These days retail is about using a number of different channels to cater to the needs of customers."

"That means having an online presence, but people still want to go to shops to see and touch items. They will want to do the same in the future, but what they do on retail premises and where they go will change."

"I think you'll see more experiential retail and more big retail units where it's easy for customers to get in and out very quickly." ■

Four thoughts: clockwise from top left: Cushman's Neil McLocklin said advances in technology meant that "home is just another work setting", aided by mobile devices and Cloud computing, Qube's John Cuppello added. Mountgrange's Nick Berry cautioned that gadgets should only be used if appropriate, and that face-to-face interaction is still paramount when making key decisions – a point shared by Knight Frank's John Reyers

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WORKER OF THE FUTURE  
AND THE EVOLVING USE OF TECHNOLOGY  
WITHIN THE PROPERTY INDUSTRY

To read the results of the survey, go to [bit.ly/PWworkeroffuture](http://bit.ly/PWworkeroffuture)

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