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The era of the (digital) omnivore is upon us

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There's a new class of digital consumer, and he or she is making their way to an enterprise near you. Call them the Digital Omnivores: comfortable with consumer technology, these are the growing population of consumers who own a laptop, a smartphone, and a tablet.

These are the early adopters, but digital omnivores are hardly a fringe group. In the US, this population is growing rapidly – from 10 per cent in 2011 to 37 per cent in 2013 according to Deloitte's Digital Democracy survey. We expect this trend to accelerate as tablets become more affordable and move into the mainstream. It isn't just that omnivores own multiple devices, however, but how they use those devices, which has implications for the enterprise.

While the tablet was once considered a potential replacement for the laptop, the increase in tablets hasn't been a laptop killer. Instead, at least so far, it has been more of a complimentary device. Digital omnivores are using a combination of the three devices for individual and distinct purposes, and we think this trend will transcend personal use and become prevalent in the enterprise, too.

Who are the digital omnivores? While they skew younger, this population truly spans generations. In fact, it was Gen X'ers (aged 31 to 47), not the Millennials (aged 14 to 30), who were among the first to adopt tablets. Digital omnivores are defined by their use of devices and attitude toward technology, rather than age. Not only do they own more devices, they do more with those devices.

For one, digital omnivores have a voracious appetite for content – they stream movies and play games more often than non-omnivores. Across their multiple devices, they are developing their own unique patterns of use and preference for viewing and interacting with content.

For some, "TV-viewing" occurs on-the-go, streaming on the small screen in the palm of the hand. For others, the smartphone is only for tasks and internet activities, while the tablet is reserved for entertainment, and real work happens on the laptop. Many shift their consumption fluidly across these environments, relying on the cloud and broadband to make their content available wherever they may roam.

In part, because their technology travels and provides nearly ubiquitous connectivity, social networks and social media are also a bigger part of omnivores' lives, across generations. They tend to rely on social media for information and update social profiles more often than non-omnivores.

In fact, most omnivores check their social profiles at least daily, with many younger omnivores checking multiple times a day. Social networks also have a greater influence on how they feel about a brand or a product, more so than the company's website or

advertisements. A company's social media persona can have a dramatic effect on the individual's relationship to a brand or a company.

Next up, the enterprise

As the world has shifted to digital, we know that many trends start in the consumer space and move to the enterprise. Individuals became comfortable with digital technologies like search, ratings, and social media in their personal lives and have, with mixed results, brought them into the workplace. This has already been manifested in the trend toward bringing personal consumer devices to work and will continue.

The growing population of digital omnivores wants to bring all three devices into the enterprise world. And each individual will want to do different aspects of their work on each device. They are unlikely to conform to a certain use pattern dictated by corporate IT policy. The upside is that this group of workers is also accustomed to consuming and interacting with large amounts of content on small screens, an attribute that may prove useful in everything from training delivery to wearable-assisted work to gamification.

The relevance of the social network will carry into the enterprise as well. This growing class of workers will care about the social presence and behaviour of the leadership and companies they work for as well as those they buy from.

With BYOD (bring your own device), company IT leaders are already getting used to the idea that they have to respond to the desire for consumer-grade technology in the enterprise. Now they also have to recognise that users have their own preferences for how and when they use devices for different types of activities but still expect IT to support a seamless transition from one device to the next one they use.

This decoupling of content from specific platforms will lead the enterprise to start thinking about content that threads across devices, settings, and use-cases. The contact information for colleagues with relevant experience for a project, for instance, must be findable through a mobile app on a phone on a commuter train, or on a tablet in a hotel room, in addition to through a webpage on a laptop at the office. There won't be a single, monolithic experience of corporate IT shared by all employees.

To be sure, the younger generations are at the leading edge of shaping these patterns, and companies will need to consider the variety of preferences and behaviours the younger workforce brings with them, but the omnivore class reminds us that new use patterns will come from all ages and for a variety of reasons.

More and more, the X'ers are starting to look more like the Millennials when it comes to technology adoption, while new form factors open the door for entirely new applications and use cases in populations that will be tomorrow's digital omnivore.

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