

TROUBLE *IN STORE?*

HOW CAN SCHOOLS KEEP MOBILE DEVICES SAFE? JOHN HASLAM DISCUSSES THE OPTIONS...



If you closed your eyes and I played you a series of noises, one of the quickest you'd recognise, I suspect, is the sound of a trolley rattling down your school's corridors. I expect you can hear it now; bumping over the floor and steering waywardly into doorframes, and maybe the odd person by mistake. Fortunately for all of us, that sound is becoming less and less frequent, because IT equipment is more portable.

Students may be carrying their own devices around, if you allow Bring Your Own Device (BYOD). You also may have laptops or desktops for specific subjects or classrooms. But more portable technology doesn't mean more secure, in fact, it probably makes your IT estate less secure. Things can literally go for a walk, by mistake or otherwise. Secure storage for laptops, notebooks and tablets is still a necessity, but the size and shape of what's available has changed. If you're considering adding more portable devices to your estate, you need to be researching, and budgeting for new, more secure, less obtrusive storage, which is designed for these thinner, lighter units to keep them from damage.

Either or...

So, the options most popular with the schools we work with are two-fold; updated trolleys made for laptops and tablets, and smart-style locker solutions.

If you're looking at trolleys, there are some important factors to consider. The trolley is effectively a storage box on wheels, with a handle that allows you to charge all devices en masse by connecting to a mains power supply with a single plug. Once you've decided on your budget, think about the amount of devices you need to store, and their form. Are they convertible tablets? Are they rugged? How heavy are they, both individually, and in groups? How much will the trolley be pushed around, and on what sort of surface, and by whom? My two best pieces of advice are:

- Avoid storage units that house devices in an 'upright', or 'vertical' style where possible. Though they may have the word 'book' somewhere in their name (Notebook, Netbook, UltraBook), not many devices enjoy being stored like books - on their spines. They rattle around and can, over time, cause damage. They are more prone to hinge or peripheral slots being harmed, and it also doesn't do the hard disk much good in the long run. They can fall out if put in carelessly by a student in a hurry. Horizontal storage is preferable. Turn most laptops or hybrid style tablets over, especially Windows 8 ones and you'll see their little rubber feet, all ready to take the momentum pressure of trolley transit.

- Think about buying more trolleys to store fewer devices. A trolley full of 30 laptops is extremely large & heavy, so maybe 2 x 16 units are more practical and easy to manage than a

bulky 30 unit box.

If, like many schools and academies, you are looking for a more permanent storage solution that's integrated into a pupil's school day, then lockers are an excellent option. Many schools with one to one device provision are turning to lockers - which are a smart version of the conventional school locker and contain a storage unit and a charging point. Each pupil has a designated locker which they can access with their unique key or Smart Card tag.

Lockers give users the responsibility for safe storage and they can be clustered in groups in corridors, common areas or classrooms. With BYOD being discussed in the majority of schools in some form, the installation of some lockers is a safe, future-proof move. A blend of the two solutions might give you some good grounding to judge what works best for you.

Power play

Whether trolleys or lockers are right for you, the issues that can make both solutions more expensive in the long-term are power and security, and the risks associated with not managing both successfully.

Laptops and tablets should not be kept on continuous charge when not in use. Although the partial function of the trolley or locker is to charge the device when in situ, many of the schools we partner with are using power-timers to charge the devices for several hours before school starts, rather than overnight. This minimises energy bills, as an important point, but also cuts the extra expense of battery replacement for devices that have been damaged by over-charging.

The second partial function of storage being security for your estate, trolleys and lockers can also be useful in ensuring their own integrity, and that of the devices they contain. Some trolleys can be connected to the school's network and will send the IT manager a message or email if their locking system is tampered with. Some units can also be connected to the school's network so that software updates or re-imaging jobs can be done on the devices whilst they are charging. This, of course, depends on the capabilities of your devices as well.

When you buy a tablet for use at home, you don't consider where you're going to leave it when you're not using it. As the school's purchaser, though, you must be thinking of this issue, preferably at the point of choosing which brand and form of device you're going to buy. One school laptop without somewhere to be stored would be a pain. Many would be a risky logistical oversight, which shouldn't happen with careful planning.



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