

4G: it's the end of the line for cables

William Buller, Lead Consultant for O₂, thinks 'mobility' will become a redundant term before long – it'll just be the way things are with 4G.

It'll be a subtle change. As we get used to the wider capabilities of 4G, we'll find we're collaborating more readily with technologies optimised for working anywhere.

Office 365. Lync 2013. These will be just some of the tools we will use as unquestioningly as we now use the phone and email.

And not just on the move. For years now we've been sitting at our desks with our smartphones, or jotting notes in meetings with tablets. Really, it's about freedom of movement – the end of the line for the cable to the endpoint.

But what difference will 4G actually make? Surely we can do it all already, with 3G and wifi?

The big difference: true mobility

Here's the difference: 3G is fine for working almost anywhere. But it's not good for the bandwidth-hungry apps and rich content we routinely work with these days, whether they're business apps, or personal apps used for work, like Evernote or Dropbox. And wifi is fine for all that – but it's a fixed technology, so you still have to be near an access point.

4G will be the best of both: rich content and enterprise applications, without fixed connections.

We'll also have the added bonus of easy connectivity for groups of people. 3G in particular is essentially a one-person technology. With a 4G mobile wifi device, you can create an instant hotspot for several people, with a high-capacity mobile internet connection.

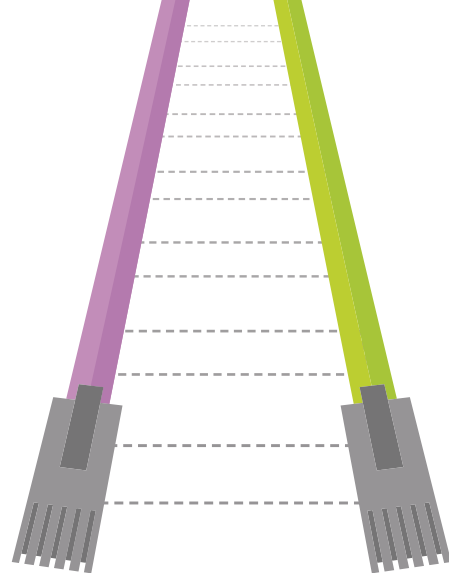
Pop-up productivity

Hence the arrival of pop-up offices, command and control centres, shops and instant workspaces. With 4G you can work remotely with everything you would have if you were back at the office. It can save hours or even days if you don't have to wait till you're back at your desk to finish some key tasks.

There may be audit teams working on a site who want a dedicated connection, independent of their client's corporate wireless LAN. Or engineering teams, working at remote sites, who can work collaboratively with a local mobile wifi, and then connect with the people back at base over 4G if they need to.

These are just a couple of examples – I could give you many more. And for many people, it'll simply be about doing things differently just because they can.

But smart organisations are not waiting for it to happen organically.



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Making it work from Day 1

Those organisations that have a lot of people who need true freedom of movement – in and out of the office – are looking at what 4G could make possible from Day 1.

They're exploring technologies like virtual desktop – so users can have a familiar computing environment on any device. Automated processes like form-filling – expense claims, service schedules, incident reporting – can cut out the cost of re-keying paper-based documents.

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Capabilities like these point to big leaps in productivity.

Take a scenario where a surveyor is with a customer on-site and needs to check something with a colleague.

Instead of having to keep the customer waiting, they can simply exchange Lync messages with the right person and give the customer an answer on the spot.

Applications optimised for mobile

You can also see the move to 4G happening in the way the big applications developers have shifted their priorities.

Applications like SAP and Salesforce are now optimised for the mobile environment, as well as the traditional desktop.

Devices are going the same way too, recognising that familiarity is a key driver of adoption. While the gadget fans have hungrily adopted new devices with new interfaces, like Windows Phones, which share their look and feel with laptops and fixed PCs, driving the next phase of mobile.

We can also expect to see much more use of Voice-over-IP (VoIP) services, like our TU Go service. And video collaboration will become commonplace for groups of people working apart from each other.

I'm not sure one-to-one video calls will take off as quickly though. There'll always be a place for the quick and easy phone call.

The commerce and the culture

For now, it's impossible to tell just how much more we'll be able to do with 4G. But it'll be the shifts in culture and the commercial benefits that will really drive its adoption.

As we discover what it makes possible, it will unlock new levels of innovation throughout the organisation. We'll be working smarter, achieving higher productivity and greater efficiency.

We'll also be living smarter. The freedom of movement 4G brings will allow us to blur the work/life balance even more. Work will increasingly become simply something you do, not somewhere you go. We'll be working when and where we are most productive, and giving ourselves opportunities to do more with our free time.

3G and wifi have given us a glimpse of what's on the way. I can see a time when people will look at Ethernet cables attached to a laptop on a desk and say, "what are those?" And with 4G approaching fast, it's not that far off.

It's time to get 4G into your business. We can help you put everything in place, from the front line to the back office. Talk to your Account Manager or get in touch with Matt Worth on 01235 433 507.

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