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# A Day In The Life Of A US Information Worker

by Ted Schadler

for Information & Knowledge Management Professionals



**by Ted Schadler**  
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## A Day In The Life Of A US Information Worker

### A Snapshot Of US Information Worker Devices, Tools, And Activities

This is the first document in the “State Of US Workforce Technology: Benchmark 2009” series.

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a graphical overview of how US information workers (iWorkers) spend their time with computers, smartphones, and key productivity and collaboration tools. It is our first analysis of Forrester’s Workforce Technographics® US Benchmark Survey, Q2 2009, a survey of 2,001 US information workers at organizations with 100 or more employees. Use it to separate fact from fiction about how common each tool is in the workforce.

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## DESKTOP COMPUTERS STILL ANCHOR MOST EMPLOYEES' DAYS

Forrester recently surveyed 2,001 US information workers (iWorkers) — individuals between 18 and 88 with a job in which they use a computer or other connected device.<sup>1</sup> This report is a snapshot of the devices, applications, team composition, and activities of information workers. A subsequent report will analyze a full set of iWorker topics, including portals, mobility, productivity tools, real-time collaboration tools, generational differences, and social networks.

To paint a picture of a typical day in an information worker's life, we look at the devices and applications they use, the teams they are on, and the mobile and Web 2.0 activities they engage in. Devices are the entry point for information work, and this study shows that across all industries, fully 25% of information workers share a computer with at least one other person.

- **Desktops are the most common device overall.** Three-quarters of information workers have a desktop computer today. Desktop computers are also the workhorse of the workday, as 63% of desktop users spend 4 or more hours per day at the keyboard. **What it means:** The ergonomics of desks and chairs are critically important to the long-term health and productivity of these workers.
- **Laptops are available to only a minority of employees.** Despite years of availability and rapidly falling prices, laptops are available to only one in three employees across all industries. However, laptop provisioning varies widely by industry. In business services, for example, 47% of iWorkers have a laptop, while in retail and manufacturing, only 17% of information workers are given a laptop. **What it means:** Laptops provide location flexibility benefits — but not all employees want or need location flexibility.
- **Smartphones are still reserved for a special few.** Only 11% of iWorkers have a smartphone to use for work today, although if you are a sales or marketing professional, you are half again as likely to have a smartphone (16%), and managers are twice as likely to have a smartphone (22%). But those who use smartphones are greatly empowered. For example, 81% of smartphone users use them at home or while commuting. **What it means:** The more corporate applications IT can port to smartphones, the more productive those employees will be.

## Distributed Teams And Meetings Are The Norm

Technology is key to the daily life of information workers to help them communicate, create and review documents, and collaborate with teammates. In the multiskill, multilocation, multidiscipline world of knowledge work, teams and meetings are a critical component of the workday.

- **Meetings are a daily or weekly occurrence for most employees.** It's no surprise that meetings consume a big chunk of an information worker's day. But it is surprising that 45% of information workers are on two or more teams, and daily meetings with employees are a reality for one in four iWorkers. **What it means:** Technology to support meetings and to coordinate multiteam activities is much more than a convenience — it's a requirement.

- **Many employees are on distributed teams that include customers or partners.** While almost 60% of iWorkers report that most of their team members are in the same location, about 30% of team members work in other locations, and 12% work for another company altogether. **What it means:** Meeting technology must support cross-organizational meetings — for example, instant messaging and co-authoring must be possible across the firewall.

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN INFORMATION WORKER

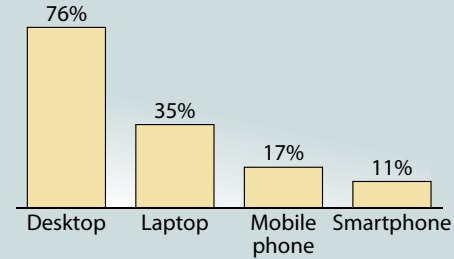
### Computers dominate the workday.

While most information workers use desktop computers at work today, the 35% of information workers who use laptops, and especially the 11% who use smartphones at work, are much more likely to work away from their desks, at home, while commuting, or while traveling.

Most information workers are on teams, and fully 45% of them are on two or more teams. Surprisingly, more than 60% of information workers meet at least occasionally with customers, partners, or suppliers; even an information workers' primary team is very likely to be distributed across multiple locations and organizations. This means that real-time and team site technologies should support cross-organizational collaboration.

#### 1-1 Laptops Are The Dominant Mobile Device

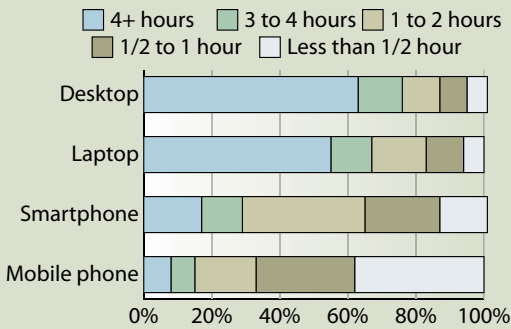
**"Which of the following devices do you use at least weekly for work?"**



Base: 2,001 US information workers (multiple responses accepted)

#### 1-2 Smartphones Are A Quick-Dip Device

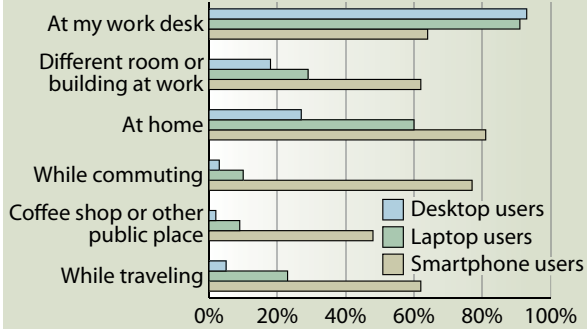
**"How many hours do you use the following devices for work in a typical day?"**



Base: US information workers who use each device at least weekly for work (percentages may not total 100 because of rounding)

#### 1-3 Smartphones Unshackle Work

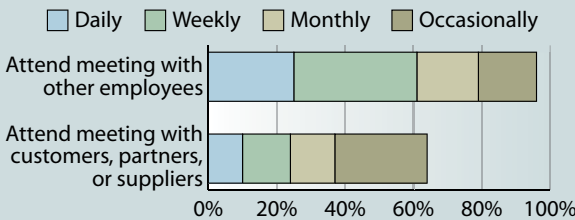
**"Where do you use a computer (or smartphone) for work in a typical week?"**



Base: US information workers who use each device at least weekly for work (multiple responses accepted)

#### 1-4 Meetings, Meetings, Everywhere

**"In a typical week, how often do you do each of the following at work?"**

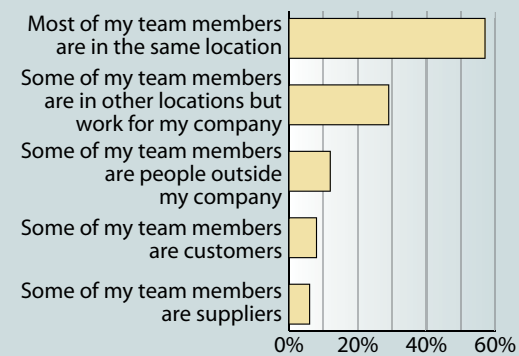


**Did you know?** On average, iWorkers are on 1.8 teams — and 45% of iWorkers are on two or more teams.

Base: 2,001 US information workers

#### 1-5 Distributed Teams Are The Norm

**"Thinking about your primary team (the one you spend the most time with), please select all that apply."**



Base: 1,602 US information workers who are on a team at work (multiple responses accepted)

## EMAIL AND WORD PROCESSING DOMINATE THE INFORMATION WORKDAY

Information workers are handed a tool kit of more than a dozen applications and services and expected to master them all. Some employees do. But many employees are, at best, only occasional users of most applications:

- **Email is an hourly addiction and the most popular application.** Email and the Web browser are the two most popular applications, but it's email that dominates information workers' hours. An astounding 57% of iWorkers use email every hour. But email is not universal: 12% of information workers don't use email at all. **What it means:** Dislodging email as the way to get things done will be difficult. Any replacement would have to be much better, and it too often isn't.
- **Word processing is popular, but more for reading docs than creating them.** Word processing is used by four of every five information workers. But only 42% of information workers create documents every week, and only one in four information workers agree that they spend more time creating documents than reviewing them. **What it means:** Six of every 10 information workers don't need a full-featured word processor to get their job done.
- **Presentations are not common in the workday.** Spreadsheets rank up with word processing as an important productivity application. Not so with presentations. Less than a third of information workers use presentations at least weekly, and only 26% create presentations weekly, regardless of the size of their organization. **What it means:** It may be time to take presentation software out of the RFP for office productivity tool bundles for at least some employees.
- **Real-time collaboration tools are not in the weekly tool kit of most iWorkers.** It turns out that most collaboration tools — instant messaging, Web conferencing, and videoconferencing — are used by a distinct minority of employees. Web conferencing in particular is used hourly or daily by only 4% of information workers, and instant messaging is stalled at 22% of employees. **What it means:** To support the distributed teams that 43% of iWorkers are on, the real-time collaboration tool kit needs to be more widely adopted, which means identifying barriers and overcoming them, simplifying the user experiences, and promoting the benefits of these tools.

## Internet Access Joins Email On Smartphones

The 11% of US information workers who use smartphones for work have a powerful tool for staying in touch and getting real work done. Even before IT shops “mobilize” corporate applications, these lucky users use their smartphones to:

- **Use email and calendars to stay in touch.** Email is the killer application on smartphones today, although calendars and mobile texting are right behind it. While 68% of smartphone users access their work calendars, only 49% bother to change or schedule meetings on the go. Mobile phone users, on the other hand, are much less likely to use email or calendars. **What it means:** Smartphones unshackle work from location, giving employees more freedom, flexibility, and

probably more working hours. Further, full-feature parity between PC-based and phone-based applications is not a prerequisite to serve information worker needs.

- **Access the mobile Internet.** Accessing the mobile Internet from a smartphone — is the second-biggest mobile application. As browsers improve on smartphones and 3G and Wi-Fi networks provide decent access speeds, we expect information workers to join the 58% of smartphone users who access the Internet from their phones today. **What it means:** Browser access to Internet and corporate resources will become the most important application delivery platform for smartphones. Providing mobile browser access to email or other corporate data is also a safer way to allow employees to use their personal devices for work.
- **Even begin to access company resources.** Some firms clearly provide access to dedicated applications or other corporate resources via smartphones. Already, 16% of smartphone users access company resources from their smartphones. **What it means:** Firms that build dedicated applications to deliver business dashboards or provide access to customer relationship management (CRM) systems or other transactional systems will make these work-from-anywhere devices even more valuable.

### Separating Fact From Fiction: Gen X Leads In Web 2.0 At Work

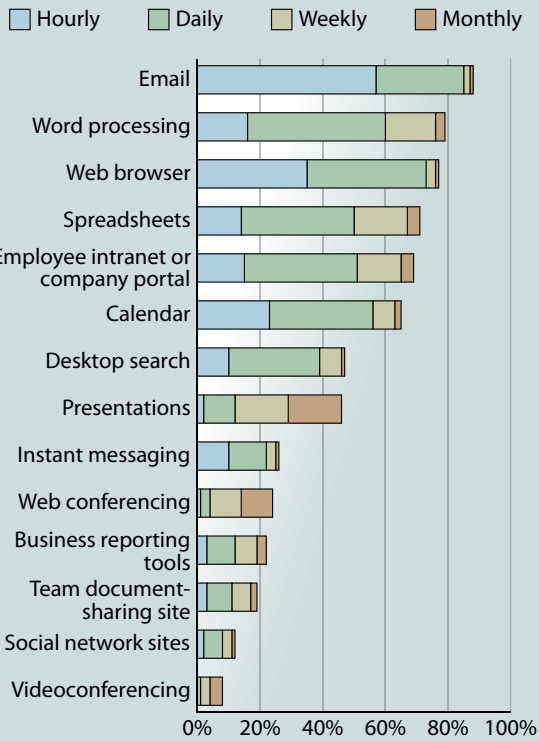
This study reveals two essential elements of Social Computing or Web 2.0 tools: 1) Few employees are using these tools at work today; and 2) Gen X is the leading user, not Gen Y. Drilling down into the Web 2.0 data, we see that:

- **No Web 2.0 application attracts a majority of employees.** Web-based discussion forums, a 13-year-old technology, attract only 15% of Gen Xers and Boomers (and only 11% of Gen Yers). And while 36% of information workers use social networks from home, only 11% use them for work purposes.<sup>2</sup> **What it means:** Web 2.0 behavior is clearly on the rise at home, but until businesses figure out what problems social networks and other Web 2.0 tools can solve at work, most information workers will stay away.
- **Gen X leads in most Web 2.0 adoption.** Lest you think that only Gen Y employees are interested in social networks, wikis, or blogs, this study shows quite clearly that it is Gen X employees, those between 34 and 43 years old, who are leading the Web 2.0 charge. **What it means:** When looking for the killer application for social networks or wikis at work, think about what more tenured staff might do to get more done in a day. Can a social network be a better employee directory? Can wikis be extended to support partner collaboration? Can podcasts help train field service or sales?

## FEW APPLICATIONS HAVE WIDESPREAD ADOPTION

### 2-1 Email Is An Hourly Addiction; Instant Messaging Isn't

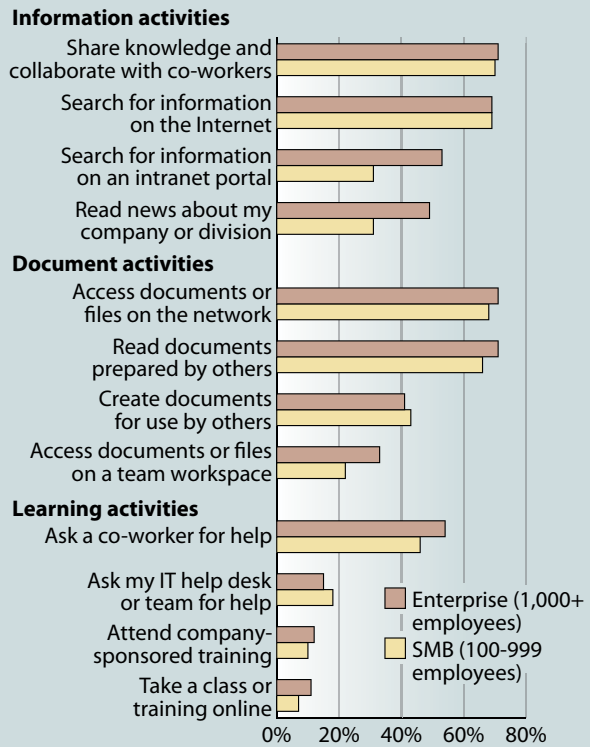
"For each of the following products or services, please indicate how frequently you use them."



Base: 2,001 US information workers

### 2-2 Sharing And Search Are Ubiquitous; Co-Workers Provide The Most Help

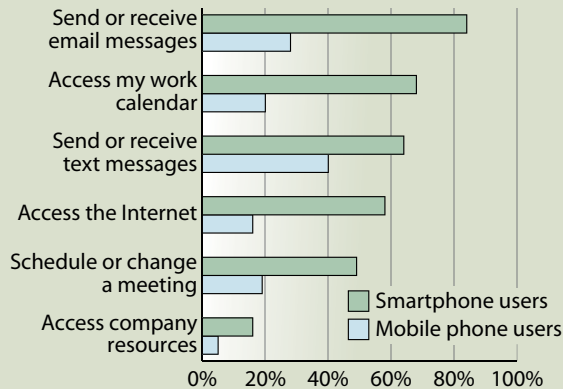
"Which activities do you do weekly for work or while at work?"



Base: 2,001 US information workers (multiple responses accepted)

### 2-3 Smartphone Users Tap Work Tools

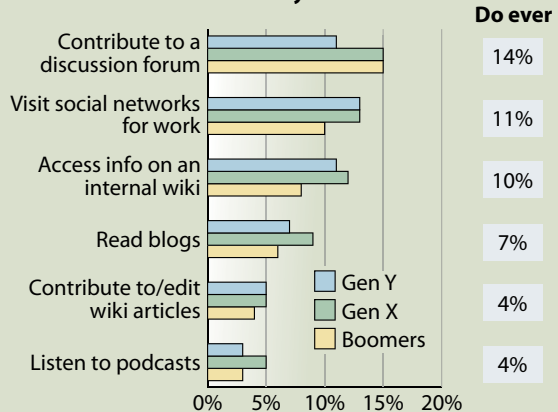
"Which of the following types of activities do you do at least weekly on your mobile or smartphone for your job?"



Base: 497 US information workers who use a smartphone or basic mobile phone for work in a typical week (multiple responses accepted)

### 2-4 Gen X Leads In Web 2.0 At Work

"Which of the following online activities do you do at least weekly for work?"



Base: 1,999 US information workers ages 18 to 64 (multiple responses accepted)

## SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL

### Methodology

Forrester conducted an online survey fielded in April 2009 of 2,001 US information workers ages 18 to 88 using a computer or terminal in their job and working at an organization with 100 or more employees. For results based on a randomly chosen sample of this size (N = 2,001), there is 95% confidence that the results have a statistical precision of plus or minus 2.2% of what they would be if the entire population of US online information workers ages 18 and older had been surveyed.

Please note that this was an online survey. Respondents who participate in online surveys have in general more experience with the Internet and feel more comfortable transacting online. The sample was drawn from members of MarketTools' online panel, and respondents were motivated by a sweepstakes drawing. The sample provided by MarketTools is not a random sample. While individuals have been randomly sampled from MarketTools' panel for this particular survey, they have previously chosen to take part in the MarketTools online panel.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that the practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. Other possible sources of error in polls are probably more serious than theoretical calculations of sampling error. These other potential sources of error include question wording, question ordering, and nonresponse. As with all survey research, it is impossible to quantify the errors that may result from these factors without an experimental control group, so we strongly caution against using the words "margin of error" in reporting any survey data.

These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Source: Forrester's Workforce Technographics US Benchmark Survey, Q2 2009. Forrester recently surveyed 2,001 US information workers to benchmark their technology adoption, use, and attitudes. This survey includes data on device adoption, use of productivity and collaboration tools, IT and application satisfaction, and barriers to success.
- <sup>2</sup> Source for use of social networks from home: Forrester's North American Technographics Benchmark Survey, Q2 2009 (US, Canada).

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