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iPads at trustee meetings: a help or a hindrance?

I am often asked whether using iPads helps run trustee meetings more efficiently.

I've always found this a slightly odd question, as I've always had an underlying sense that there is only one right answer – to say, “yes!”

Having stopped and thought about it, I'm now not sure it really is that clear cut.



PSIT opinion by:
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First, let me add some context to explain why I think I am qualified to try and answer the question...

- I like **technology**, and believe it **can be very beneficial**.
- This note was dictated to my iPhone (using the laughably named software 'Bighand'), sent to my PA who typed it up and saved it to our secure network, then accessed securely by me while out of the office to amend it before emailing it to our graphic designer from a coffee shop.
- I have tried most technology offerings.
- I attend between 12 and **18** trustee **meetings a month**.
- I travel to these meetings (which are usually off-site and without wifi), often by train.
- I like meeting packs to be **comprehensive, easy to read and simple to find my way around**.

So, I'd say my level of technological sophistication is pretty high - which I realise may not be the same for all of my co-trustees, unlike my desire for ease of use, which is common across us all.

So, can iPads make trustee meetings more efficient?

My actual answer is **a very reserved, “yes.”** The mistake most people make is assuming that the iPad does most of the work for you. In reality, it only does this if you have some decent software and security controls, and a very organised and **adept person loading everything onto it** in the first place.

When we trialled iPads for trustee meetings a few years ago, one of my clients said that if you use an iPad you don't do any real work. It's a point that still resonates, as iPads have their limitations.

Know your options - and your audience

There are countless options on the scale from paper-based board packs to the whizziest technology solution. To decide whether a bought-in online governance system or simply using existing software more smartly is for you, you need to consider factors such as:

- **cost** - both direct and hidden (such as online storage charges)
- **security controls** - what can be accessed, uploaded, amended and removed and by who? How quickly and easily can this be changed?
- **downloading and offline access** - will trustees need to download software or packs themselves? Does everyone have an internet connection? Will they need to be online to view or can they be accessed offline?

Above all though, **think about the people who are on and work with your trustee board**. Do they all spend several hours each day on PCs, laptops or handheld devices? For those of us who do, it can be easy to forget how complicated computers and software can be for others.

We've seen many trustee boards find a sensible middle path. They've decided **using some form of technology is better than none**, as packs can be distributed more quickly and cheaply, with hard copies only being produced for those trustees who still prefer paper. By using standard software to create **fully indexed and searchable digital packs** and viewing them on Windows-based tablets they've struck a cost/benefit balance that avoids limitations such as interactive PDFs not working correctly whilst delivering distinct efficiency improvements.

Where have I ended up?

Like many others I wanted an iPad to solve the problem for me – they are light and very tactile. I tried really hard to make it work, but for the level of sophistication I need and the volume of documents I edit or review I very **happily opted for a lightweight laptop**.

Others in my team use tablets but, for me, an iPad does little more than allow me to look at emails – a bit like a very large phone (without the phone!).

What do you think?

Share your thoughts with us,
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