

Utah's iPad User's Manual for State Employees

Adam Stone | March 26, 2012



Thad Levar's iPad has become a lifeline. As deputy director of the Utah Department of Commerce, Levar relies on his device to keep him plugged into the office during long stretches of utter tedium.

A legislative budget hearing, for instance, can run as long as four hours, while Levar's turn to speak may fill just 30 minutes. That's a lot of down time during which Levar must monitor events back at the office and elsewhere. "I need to keep track of other legislative activity that is happening while I am there, things like new bills, new amendments to legislation, new budget documents," he said.

Levar isn't alone in turning to the iPad for support. A growing number of Utah government workers rely on the device, with the support of a proactive IT department. In fact, Utah's tech team took an early lead, producing a user's manual for state employees in August 2010. The document has become a go-to [guide for iPad users](#) in the state and was updated in February.

Bringing iPad on Board

Some 3,000 to 4,000 users have brought their own iPads into the system: It's a rough number based on how many sync to the state's email and calendaring applications. Other types of tablets are in play, but the state IT leadership has chosen not to support them.

iPad use cuts across all government agencies. Executives use the devices for mobility; homeland security officials use them to keep in touch with emergency responders; agriculture field workers use them to keep connected in a state where agricultural facilities may be separated by hundreds of miles.

Utah's Department of Technology Services started supporting iPads in an experiment involving an RFP for a hosted email system. "Normally every member of the committee would get a copy of these RFPs and print them," said CTO Dave Fletcher. "That's a couple hundred pages each with seven or so responses. Now with the iPad that's very easy to do and it eliminates a lot of paper."

Formal adoption began in June 2010 with the publication of [*iPad Functionality: A User Experience*](#), a Department of Technology Services paper that outlines 20 user success stories.

The report gave high marks to the use of diverse iPhone apps on the iPad. It approved the synchronization of existing work documents so that the iPad always provides the most current version. It also gave the device top marks as an e-book reader.

The report noted that minimal training was needed to get going on an iPad. The authors pointed out that third-party software could greatly enhance the user experience, usually for less than \$100.

To further integrate iPads into the state's IT infrastructure, technology planners released a user guide in August 2010. "We want to have something in common in terms of the basic productivity applications that people are using," Fletcher said. "We would rather not have all our employees spend their time researching applications, and if they use common applications, it's easier for us to provide the kind of support we do provide."

A common base of understanding and a recommended core of apps help IT managers ensure standardization across business units, and make it possible to share documents and data across the enterprise.

The 10-page user guide devotes itself almost entirely to a rundown of recommended apps in categories such as document editing, remote desktop, office applications and social media. Some apps like Google Earth and Facebook will be familiar. Other more business-specific tools will be new to many users: Quickoffice (connectivity and mobile editing); NewsRack (an RSS reader); and SugarSync (external storage). The second edition of the user guide includes more apps that the state will support.

Users can deviate from the list, but Fletcher cannot guarantee support. His office gets calls for email connectivity, virtual private server setup and other needs, but beyond the recommended tools, "we are less likely to support that," he said. "If they have a problem with an app and it's one we are less familiar with, they usually are on their own."

iPad In Action

Joe Dougherty is partial to the guide-approved Dropbox remote storage system.

“It’s like an online hard drive accessible from any device. You can get those documents from wherever you are,” said Dougherty, public information officer for the Utah Division of Emergency Management, which uses iPads to support seven employees who spend their time on the road, often in remote parts of the state. The department bought its iPads without 3G, but keeps up connectivity through a clever piece of engineering — forging a tethered Internet connection via iPhone, then broadcasting that iPhone as a Wi-Fi hotspot.

Utah is not the only government experimenting with iPad use. Manatee County, Fla., for instance, has purchased at least 27 iPads for county workers, especially department heads and IT professionals. In Clarksville, Tenn., City Council members routinely conduct business on the devices.

Despite the enthusiasm, the iPad’s greatest strength can also be its greatest liability. While it’s nice having hundreds of apps available to boost productivity, sorting through all of them can be cumbersome.

“There are usually 300 or 400 new apps a day. So we will scan through those apps while we’re having lunch and there will be maybe half a dozen that are of interest on a given day,” Fletcher said. “ Then there will be maybe a couple a week that end up in our regular use patterns.”

<http://www.govtech.com/policy-management/Utahs-iPad-Users-Manual-for-State-Employees-.html>