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Supporting Mobile Devices in 2011

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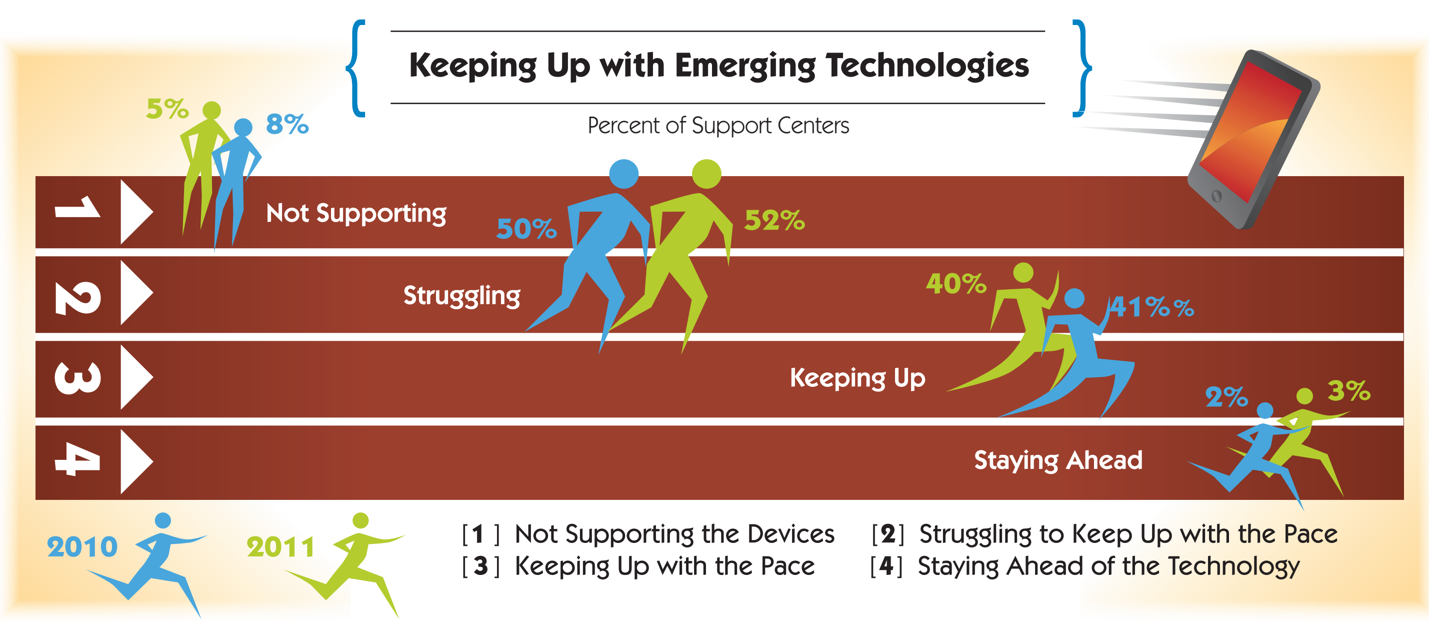
Analyzing the results from two years of data reveals some interesting trends in the world of mobile device support. For starters, if mobile device support was a race, BlackBerry devices started out strong in 2010 and were leading by a mile, but the Apple iPhone, iPad, and other mobile devices gained speed and, at the current pace, will soon have the advantage.

In 2010, half of the IT support industry was openly struggling with the pace of emerging mobile devices; this struggle continued in 2011, with 52 percent reporting in the most recent study that they are having difficulty keeping up. The battle between the rapid acquisition of technology by customers and the support center's mission to support them was not settled in the past year; on the contrary, it only intensified. Fanning the flames, tickets related to mobile device support continue to flood the queue. On average, these tickets comprise 12 percent of an organization's total ticket volume.

Which devices are organizations supporting? Which ones are allowed to connect to resources? What changes are being made to accommodate customer needs? Last fall, HDI's Research Corner collected survey responses from 286 support professionals concerning the IT service and technical support industry's response to the rapid evolution of mobile device support. A similar survey was released in fall 2010, and the results of both are reported below to highlight changes that took place in the period between the surveys.

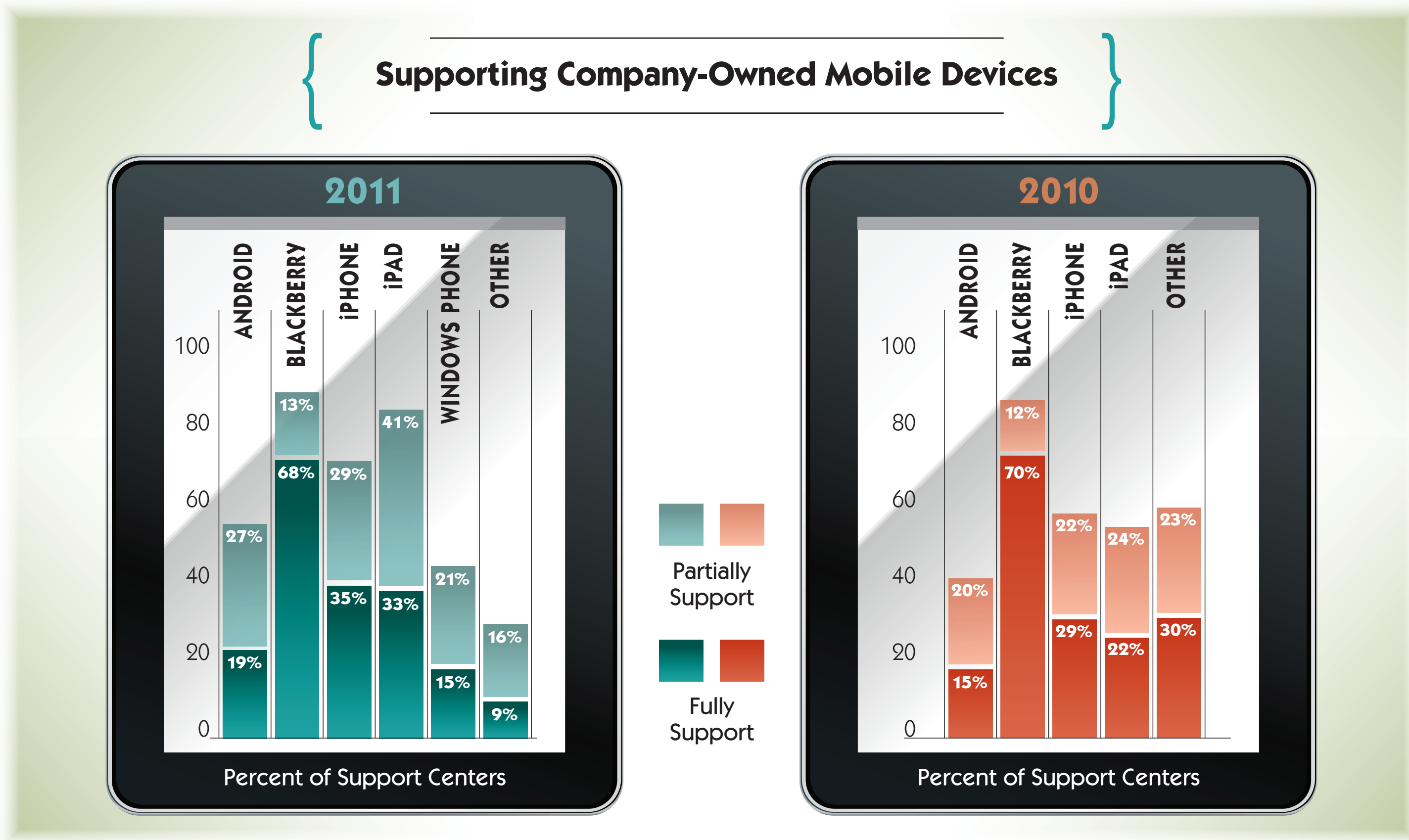
Survey Results

Mobile devices are being released and embraced by customers faster than organizations can create policies around them and support teams can learn about them. As mentioned above, 52 percent of support organizations are struggling to keep up with the pace of emerging technologies. Forty percent feel like they are keeping up with the pace, and three percent say they are staying ahead of the race. These results are very similar to the 2010 findings.

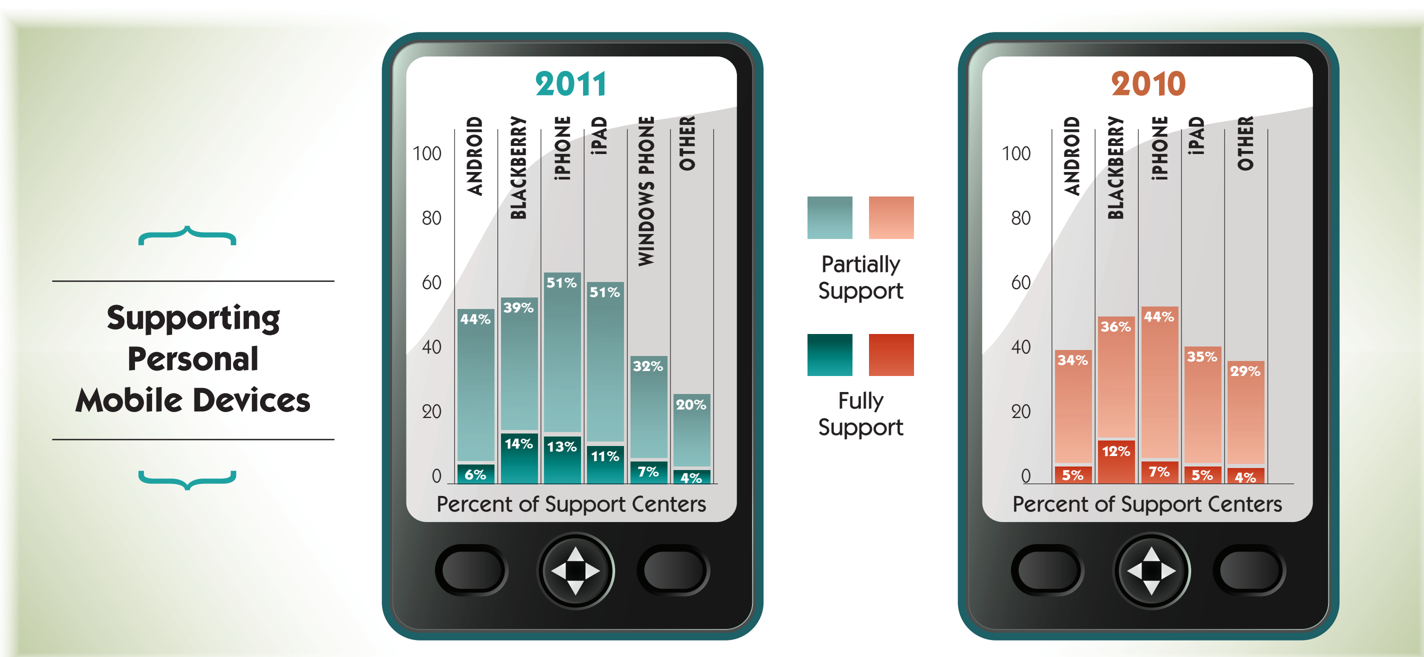


Supporting Specific Devices

BlackBerry devices continue to be the most supported company-owned devices, but the support gap between devices seems to be closing quickly. The percent of organizations fully supporting company-owned Apple iPhones and iPads is increasing. More specifically, the number of organizations that are at least partially supporting iPads increased from 46 percent in 2010 to 74 percent in 2011.

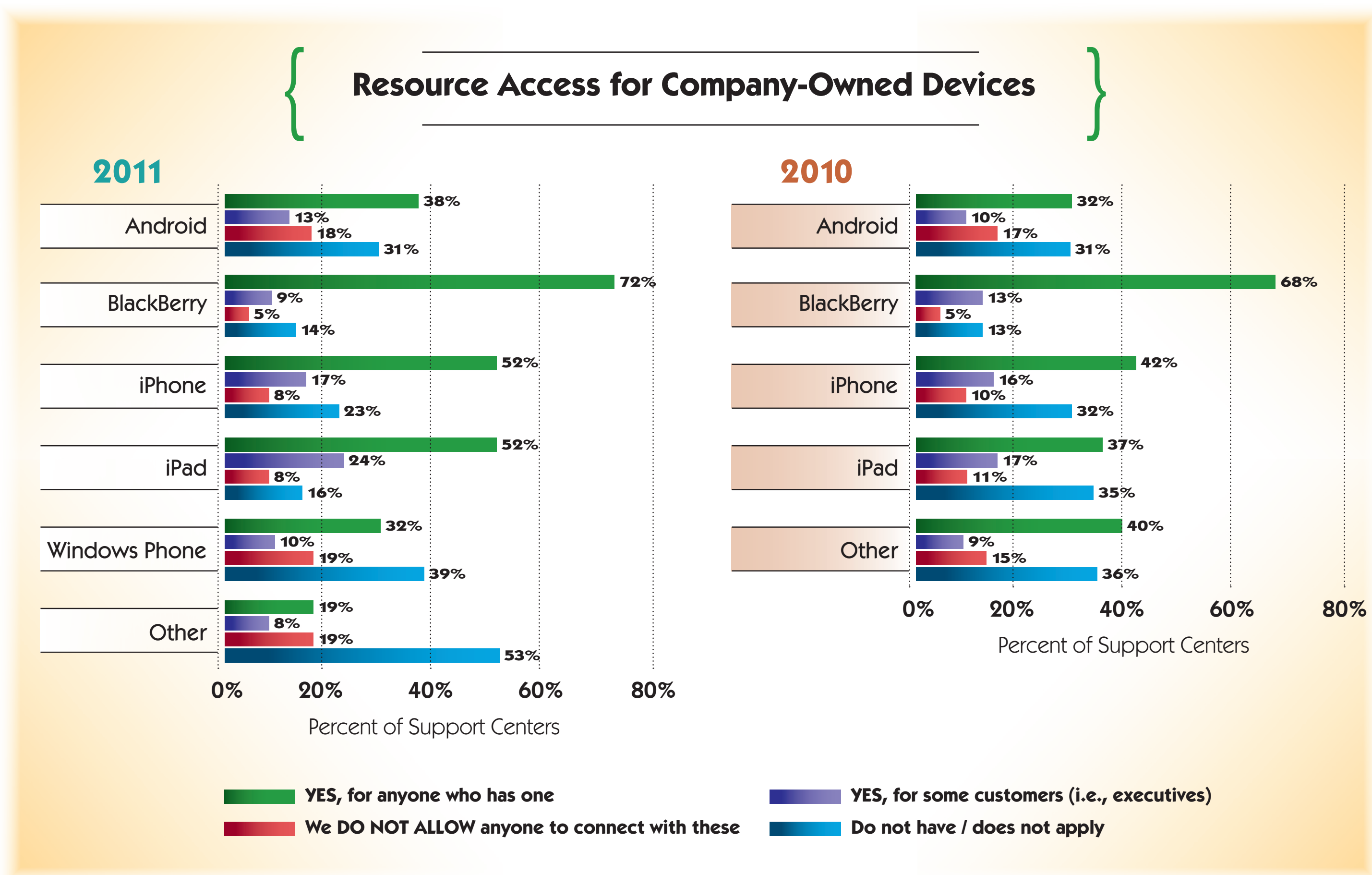


Companies are supporting personal mobile devices more, at least partially, across the board. Again, iPhones and iPads have seen the most acceptance by support centers in the last year.

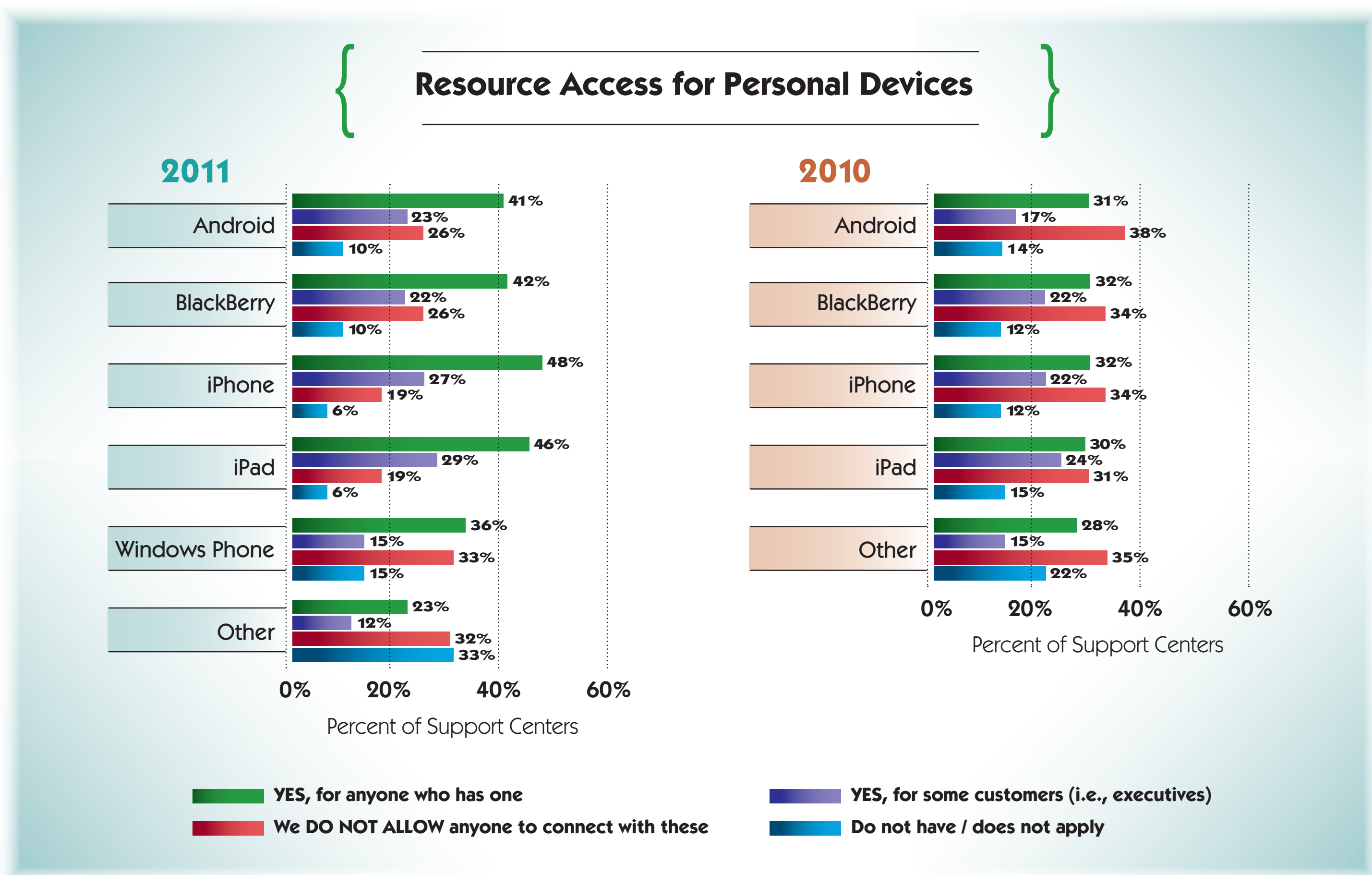


Connecting to Resources

Regardless of the type of devices, we have seen an increase in the number of organizations allowing them to access resources. As a legacy device, BlackBerry continues to have the largest support. Although other devices are gaining acceptance at a more rapid rate, and although BlackBerry saw the smallest increase, it remains the most permitted type of company-owned device.

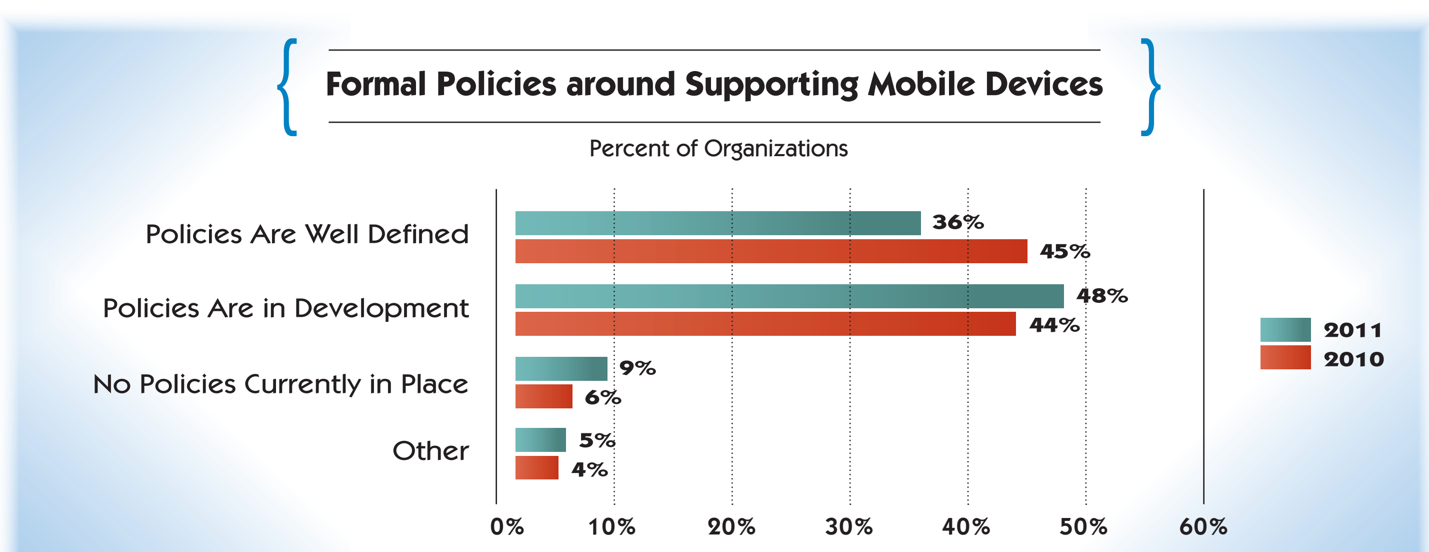


For personal devices, company policies appear to relate more to resource access than the particular type of device. The numbers were very similar across the list of devices in 2010, and there was minimal variance in 2011. Microsoft's line of Windows Phones, which was added to the survey in 2011, is the exception. They are least likely to be permitted to connect to company resources. Overall, however, more devices and people are being granted access to resources remotely.

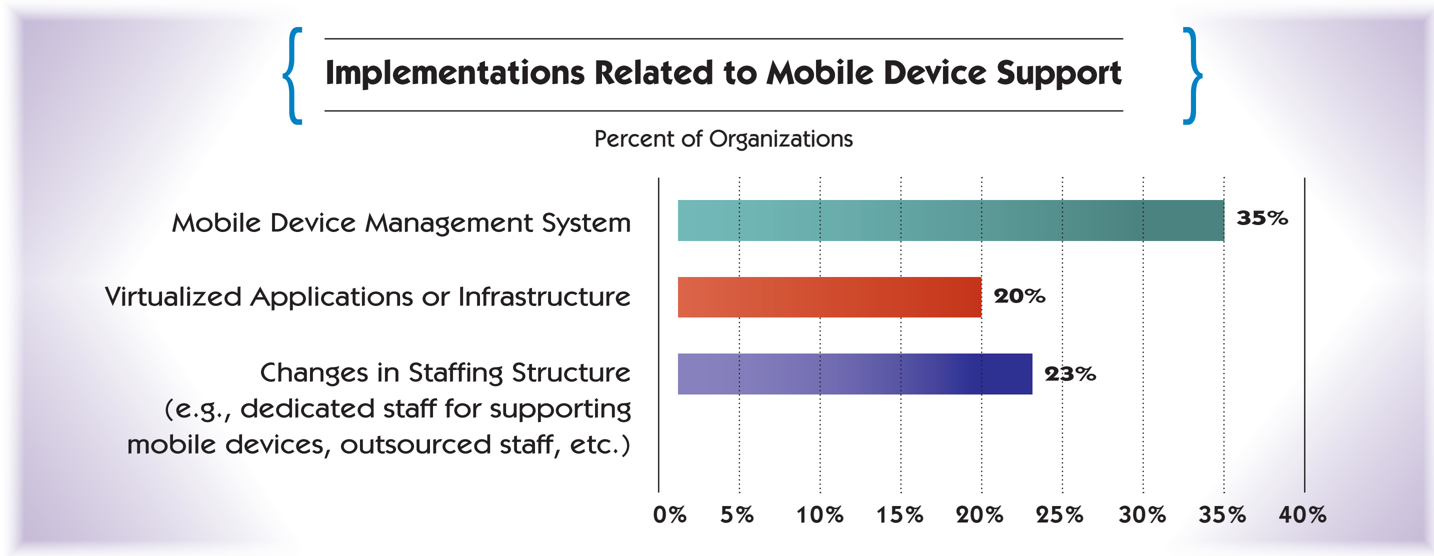


Policies and Changes

Organizational policy development continues to lag behind support needs. Survey results actually show that more support centers felt they had well-defined policies in place in 2010 than in 2011. It appears that, as the technology race continues, organizations are finding that they were not as prepared as they may have thought they were, and they may be going back to the drawing board to develop more-enduring policies that will fit their customers' needs and that fall within the support center's capabilities. Deeper analysis of the survey data validates and reinforces the importance of well-defined policies. In both 2010 and 2011, those organizations with well-defined policies were more likely to feel like they are keeping up with the pace of emerging technologies.



Many organizations are not only creating and developing policies, but also changing areas of their support to address the influx of mobile device tickets. More than one-third of support organizations have implemented mobile device management systems, 23 percent have made changes in their staffing structures (i.e., adding staff dedicated to mobile device support, outsourced staff, etc.), and 20 percent have implemented virtualized applications or infrastructures.



Conclusion

The 2010 report triggered many questions about where the industry would be a year later with respect to mobile device support. The 2011 results proved that this is a rapidly changing area for IT support. However, instead of throwing up their hands and sending customers directly to the vendors, most organizations have jumped in with both feet. They are not only continuing to support the devices that are currently on the menu, they have also expanded their services to include support for more devices. However, it is apparent that this is and will be an ongoing battle. It is a rapidly changing landscape and, in general, organizations seem to be much in reactive mode. Consumers will continue to use various devices—and, more specifically, personal devices—and the industry will continue to be challenged to find ways to manage their support.

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