



BlackBerry to invade Canberra

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Public servants who enjoy the luxury of leaving work-related worries on their desks will soon be forced to suffer the same fate as their private sector peers. The federal government has struck a whole of government contract with communications limpet BlackBerry.

Announced by Special Minister of State Gary Nairn last week, the deal will allow all commonwealth agencies and departments to procure the mobile email terminals at set volume discounts as part of a conspicuous effort to boost the productivity of Canberra's 50,000-strong bureaucracy.

The deal represents a breakthrough for BlackBerry manufacturer Research In Motion, which has often struggled to sell the benefits of the system in the face of worries from government information security guardians, including the secretive Defence Signals Directorate.

As part of the deal, DSD has undertaken extensive security testing of a fortified version of the BlackBerry email server, part of a wider government move to lock down its growing fleet of mobile devices.

RIM's Australian director, Paul Osmond, yesterday said product testing through the spy agency would continue as upgraded hardware and software came onto

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the market. DSD had previously cited concerns about the possibility of public servants exposing classified and sensitive electronic documents via the hand-held device, an issue that has been resolved by instituting a blanket ban on the transmission of security classified correspondence.

Mr Osmond said the opening up of the public sector market represented a substantial sales opportunity for his company.

Long-term government contracts are particularly sought after by technology companies because they provide a consistent stream of revenue to vendors with minimal credit risk.

Federal agencies in Australia generally lag their US counterparts in BlackBerry uptake, particularly in the military sector, which has developed a number of secure and encrypted versions of the popular email platform as part of its pursuit of network-centric warfare.

A Defence source said yesterday that part of the appeal of the BlackBerry platform was that it was more easily secured than competing Windows products through the use of encryption – on both the mail server and the product itself.

Mr Nairn said the BlackBerry deal reflected part of wider push by the government to increase flexibility in its workforce, in line with developments in the business sector and the community at large.

RIM said last month it had sold more than 8 million BlackBerry devices worldwide, including more than 1 million devices during the last quarter alone.