

Two jokes: How do you know if someone has an iPhone? They tell you. How do you know if someone has a BlackBerry? They haven't got time to talk to you.

And now BlackBerries are back on, so they still won't have time for you. The proposed ban was cancelled with less than a week to spare. Someone appears to have done a deal, or backed down, or just realised they weren't going to win anyhow; but it's not entirely clear who.

Maybe the winner is the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, which was going to pull the plug because BlackBerry mail is effectively served from outside the UAE and so is not amenable to government oversight. (Yes, the government can get at all the other email sent and received within the UAE). But that implies BlackBerry maker RIM is prepared to set up mail servers here, which is not impossible but seems unlikely.

Or maybe the TRA has got some other kind of deal with RIM to access some or all of the BlackBerry emails. This seems even more unlikely, basically because of the technology RIM uses.

Or maybe the TRA has come under a teensy amount of pressure from other folk – like the telecoms operators – to bend a bit and avoid chopping off what has become an essential tool for business. (And, in the form of BlackBerry Messenger, an essential tool for flirting.)

Or maybe someone has decided that this is one battle that can't be won, so a delicately worded strategic withdrawal seemed the most appropriate option – having taken it to the wire.

Certainly there are some clear winners. All the news and comment has focussed on what makes the BlackBerry different (super-secure email plus free BlackBerry-to-BlackBerry messaging) and that's exactly the kind of publicity you couldn't buy. So RIM gets the chance to add to the half a million UAE users of its phone and associated services, handily just about the time its PlayBook iPad alternative and its Torch touchscreen-plus-keyboard iPhone alternative are both nudging into the market (not the UAE market, of course – we seem to be well down the list for new-technology launches).

Etisalat and du get to add more subscribers and more chargeable traffic in a handy boost for the end-of-year figures, because apparently there's pent-up demand from people waiting for a resolution to the dispute.

And I now find myself with one less excuse for staying out of the BlackBerry orbit. They may be irritating, the apps may be primitive, the screen fonts and web handling may be primitive, but in the end the BlackBerry is just so useful. Darn it.

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