ANALYST BRIEF
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It's not enough to have robust infrastructure. How organizations manage, operate, secure, and optimize their increasingly complex environments with intelligence and agility is just as critical in the AI era.

Implementing AI and Intelligent Technical Support to Drive Business Success

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Introduction

IDC's research shows most C-suite executives are actively preparing their organizations for the era of AI, emphasizing relevant use cases and redefining operating models to support the digital business. While enterprises have relied on their IT organizations to enable business users for many years, the pivot to AI solutions only increases the importance of efficient and resilient IT infrastructure that can provide secure and reliable IT service delivery.

As more CIOs focus on delivering quantifiable business results from AI investments, maximizing the value and performance of the network and other IT assets across the environment is a critical requirement. IT organizations are tasked with adopting and integrating innovative AI technologies while maintaining critical existing infrastructure with minimal disruption to business users. This tricky balancing act is challenging for even the most sophisticated IT organizations. AI adoption will require a comprehensive analysis of operational readiness across the IT and OT infrastructure. CIOs will need to examine:

- Implementing the best services to proactively support and operate AI infrastructure complexity
- Making upgrades to hardware components like servers, networks, and storage systems
- Reinforcing critical support systems like power and cooling mechanisms
- Ensuring the network has the capacity to handle the large data sets required by AI solutions
- Implementing detailed security measures to protect sensitive data across the business

AT A GLANCE

KEY STATS

- IDC's December 2024 *Enterprise Support Services — Customer Satisfaction and Value Survey* found that 58% of respondents identified "providing a portal for system health and proactive suggestions to improve system health" as the number 1 attribute in choosing a vendor services organization.
- The top 2 benefits companies look for when acquiring support services from vendors are better KPIs (46%) and service-level agreements (42%).

KEY TAKEAWAY

Work with a vendor or partner that has invested in proactive and predictive techniques through AI initiatives to better support the entire IT landscape.

Organizations must quickly adapt to managing complex AI infrastructure or risk falling behind. Technological advancements in the different AI technologies (predictive, interpretive, generative and agentic AI) increase the pressure on IT teams and amplify the gaps in technical skills. Ensuring that IT practitioners can continually update their expertise is essential for operational resilience and agility in the AI era. All these factors have heightened the economic consequences of downtime, security incidents, and operational inefficiencies. The ability to manage complexity, maintain resilience, and foster innovation is now a defining factor for success. The AI era will increase the need for IT management strategies that prioritize increased automation, improved risk mitigation, and delivering desired business outcomes cost effectively and efficiently.

Improve IT Operations to Prepare for AI Adoption

The C-suite is prioritizing strategies that can meet changing market requirements, introduce new products and services, increase employee productivity, and improve the overall customer experience. For enterprises, modernizing operations across the IT environment is critical to ensuring the resiliency and flexibility necessary to meet the needs of business managers, whose requirements are evolving at the same pace as emerging technologies. In recent IDC research, enterprises have identified a few obstacles to optimizing IT operations, including:

- Managing complex and hybrid infrastructures in a multicloud world to deliver peak performance and resiliency
- Ensuring adequate security across multiple generations of networks and systems to adhere to strict service-level agreements and regulatory compliance
- Integrating data sets and adopting technologies that deliver data-driven insights to improve real-time decision-making for business users
- Adopting intelligent automation across the IT stack to realize operational efficiencies, improve compliance, increase agility, and reduce overall risk

CIOs are looking for providers that can help improve IT operations and maximize the value of critical infrastructure in support of AI.

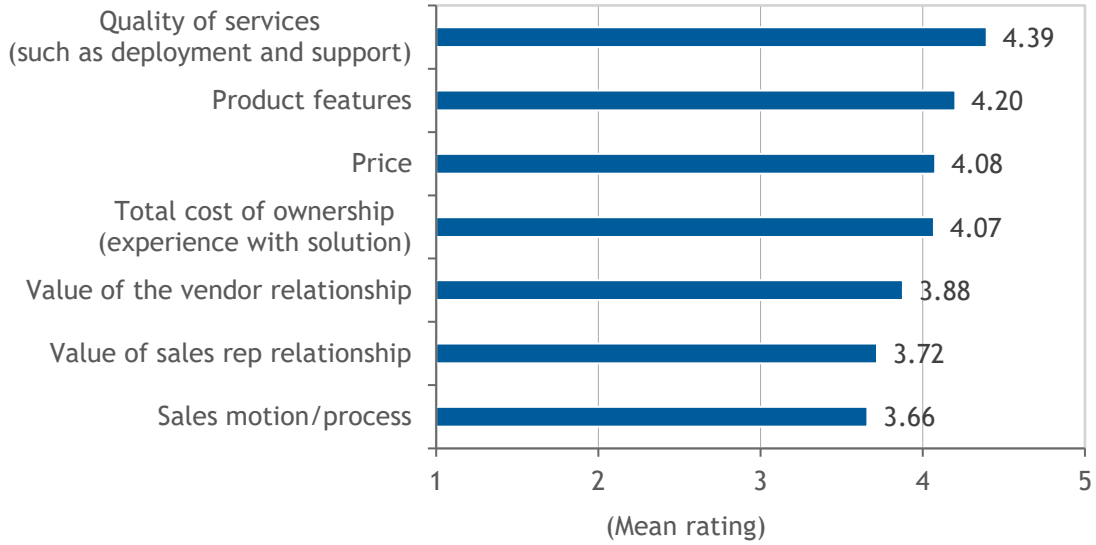
In addition, CIOs and IT managers often lack the resources to fully address the complex process change necessary to streamline multicloud operations and adopt automation and AI solutions. For example, when respondents were asked what the limiting factors were for GenAI, among the top answers was a "lack of GenAI skills or expertise within the organization" (source: IDC's *Future Enterprise Resiliency and Spending Survey, Wave 6,* July 2025).

It is also crucial to monitor metrics related to innovative technologies to ensure they deliver critical insights to business managers who need to achieve desired outcomes. When evaluating a vendor services organization, respondents said the number 1 attribute was a "portal for system health (security, patching, and performance) and proactive suggestions to improve system health for vendor's equipment."

Figure 1 shows that organizations understand the importance of services and rank them above product features when choosing a vendor.

FIGURE 1: ***Services Becoming More Important than Product Features***

Q Assuming your organization is down to the final two vendors for a particular solution, rank the following attributes in terms of how much weight they play in influencing your final decision?



Source: IDC's PC and Datacenter Deployment Services Survey, May 2025

Key Solution Tenets

While infrastructure upgrades — such as modernizing datacenters, interconnects, networking (campus and branch), security, observability and assurance, and edge environments — are critical to supporting advanced AI and agentic AI workloads, they are only part of the solution. Managing the exponential complexity of these environments requires a new operational approach that includes:

- **Proactive and predictive management:** IT operations must shift from reactive troubleshooting to proactive prevention, anticipating, identifying, and resolving issues before they impact business outcomes.
- **Operational simplicity:** Automating workflows and implementing intelligent tools are both essential to reducing the "human" element (defined by automating more mundane tasks), addressing skills gaps, and empowering IT teams to focus on innovation rather than maintenance.
- **Skills enhancement:** Access to AI-driven training through a knowledge base and adaptive learning paths ensure teams remain equipped to handle fast-evolving technology and engineers have access to the training they need when they need it.
- **Unified portal experience:** IDC's research shows this is the number 1 feature organizations look for when working with a vendor or partner. Reducing/unifying the number of portals for greater efficiency and simplicity can enable personalized insights and streamline planning, deployment, monitoring, and optimization, providing end-to-end visibility and control, with alerts that can prioritize what needs to be done immediately versus what can be

implemented over time. These "vendor" portals should have the APIs to integrate with an organization's other tool sets if needed.

- **Security, resilience, and agility:** Combining automation, predictive analytics, and expert support enables organizations to minimize downtime, mitigate risks, enhance security, and adapt rapidly to new demands.

In summary, the differentiator is not just robust infrastructure but how organizations manage, operate, secure, and optimize their increasingly complex environments with intelligence and agility.

Considerations

Organizations should keep the following considerations in mind when seeking a vendor services organization: Look for providers with a history of innovation (especially around their own well-curated data and AI modeling), a commitment to customer satisfaction, and standing as a leader in the IT industry. Also important is effective use of AI and other advanced technologies and a dedication to security and sustainability, services that underpin infrastructure products. Other features to look for include:

- **Mission-critical support:** When it comes to AI — including agentic AI — all managed support should be designed to maximize uptime and provide best-in-class user experiences, resiliency, and performance across mission-critical operations.
- **Human + AI expertise:** Advanced AI works in concert with the vendor's human experts to ensure operational simplicity and agility in the face of rapid change, providing regular support tailored to the enterprise's infrastructure with contextualized recommendations and guidance that evolve with that infrastructure. These should be provided on a regular basis through QBRs, other "in person" engagements, or an on-demand digital channel.
- **Issue detection automation:** The proactive prevention of possible threats and problems through AI should identify issues before they disrupt operations, avoiding risk, performance degradation, and downtime by delivering personalized visibility, actionable insights, and intelligent automation.
- **Investment in technology:** Vendors and services providers will need to invest in all AI technologies (predictive, interpretive, generative and agentic AI) to streamline troubleshooting, automate routine tasks, and surface actionable insights while providing a highly secure infrastructure to help minimize risk to the enterprise. One way to do this is by investing in "portals" that allow APIs to integrate with existing systems and workflows and also provide deployment flexibility for data privacy and sovereignty.
- **Closing the skills gap:** IDC's research finds this to be a top issue for enterprises. Vendors should offer access to resources and learning aids as well as certification processes to hone the technical skills necessary for operating,

adapting to, and evolving an IT environment. These training tools should be highly personalized and served up to technicians based on the technical requirements of the enterprise IT environment.

- **Sustainability:** Seek vendors or partners that have the same goals as the organizations when it comes to sustainability and operational efficiencies as well as a keen understanding of critical environments, especially in power-hungry AI systems.

Conclusion

As enterprises transition to an AI-first world, the need for proactive, predictive, and personalized support is paramount. Upgrading infrastructure is necessary, but operational excellence — enabled by AI-powered support and unified digital experiences — will be the true differentiator. A vendor or partner's approach should empower organizations to stay ahead of complexity, minimize operational risks, and unlock the full potential of AI-driven transformation.

About the Analyst

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Rob Brothers is a program vice president for IDC's Datacenter and Support Services program, as well as a regular contributor to the Infrastructure Services and Financial Strategies programs. He focuses on worldwide support and deployment services for hardware and software and provides expert insight and intelligence on how enterprises should be addressing key areas for datacenter transformation and edge deployment and management strategies.

MESSAGE FROM THE SPONSOR

Increasingly complex IT environments make operational excellence crucial in the AI era. Organizations need AI-powered support to reduce risks and maximize IT infrastructure investment value. Success depends on adopting solutions that deliver greater resilience, simplicity, and speed—achieved through unified visibility, intelligent automation, and empowering IT teams with advanced skills to navigate evolving demands.

Cisco understands these challenges and has revolutionized how technology is deployed, adopted, and operated in the AI era. Our modern AI-powered support, now including Cisco IQ, is engineered to cut through complexity, drive resilience, and accelerate your time-to-value. We deliver intelligent, intuitive engagement that integrates seamlessly into your environment, providing proactive, personalized, and predictive support tailored to your needs. With award-winning AI innovation and human expertise, Cisco helps you stay ahead of disruption and unlock the full potential of your AI-driven transformation.

Discover how Cisco's Modern AI-powered Support can help your organization thrive in the era of AI. Learn more at cisco.com/go/exploresupport or by connecting with one of our experts today.

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