

How Businesses Are Thinking About Technology in 2025

As we enter the second half of the decade, artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly permeating all aspects of consumer and business affairs. The adoption of AI, particularly generative AI (GenAI), has seen a remarkable surge. Sixty-five percent of organizations are regularly using GenAI in 2024, nearly doubling from the previous year¹. This trend is expected to continue, with 67% of businesses anticipating increased AI investments over the next three years.

The Al market is projected to grow at an impressive annual rate of 36.6% from 2023 to 2030, underscoring its expanding influence across industries². However, sentiments regarding Al adoption are mixed. Many company leaders feel they're spending money just to "keep up" with no real strategic plan. This lack of clear direction is creating uncertainty and anxiety among employees, who are concerned about the impact of Al on their jobs and the need for new skills.

Of particular concern are data privacy and ethical considerations. Although Al has become more integral to business operations, companies are grappling with the challenges of protecting sensitive information and ensuring responsible Al use. Additionally, the need for upskilling the workforce has emerged as a critical issue, with many employees feeling unprepared for the Al-driven future of work.

To understand how this AI revolution is impacting East Tennessee, we surveyed over 1,300 professionals across more than a dozen industries. Our findings reveal a diverse range of perspectives and experiences with AI adoption. While some businesses are embracing AI technologies and reaping the benefits, others are struggling to find meaningful applications or justify the investment.

What stands out is the pressing need to clarify Al's role in business strategy and set clear, strategic goals. For example, some respondents expressed confusion about how to effectively integrate Al into their operations and measure its impact. This uncertainty is hindering the potential benefits of Al adoption and creating hesitation among decision-makers.

Through this report, we aim to help business leaders in East Tennessee identify and seize opportunities to thrive in this new technology landscape.

As AI continues to reshape the business landscape, those who can effectively leverage these technologies will be best positioned to drive innovation, enhance productivity, and maintain a competitive edge in their respective industries.

¹https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/quantumblack/our-insights/the-state-of-ai

²https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/ai-statistics/

Key Findings

56.7%

IT professionals who list resource constraints as a top operational challenge.

C-level executives who say their company's success in 2025 will be dependent on their IT partner's capabilities.

82.7%

97.6%

Respondents in all industries who interact with Al systems at least once per week. 30% use Al systems every day.

Organizations with company-wide Al use policies.

75%



5/10 companies that describe communication gaps between IT and business professionals in their organizations.

Four out of five company executives confidently believe their 2025 business success will be closely tied to their IT partner's capabilities. A staggering 98.4% of executives predict they will need to increase IT staffing in 2025, either through in-house professionals, outside vendors, or a combination.

But how are business leaders approaching these hiring decisions? Even with increased spending on technology initiatives, more than half of IT professionals still view resource constraints as an operational challenge. Additionally, the rapid pace of development of AI tools and other software solutions creates knowledge gaps that can become communication gaps between IT leaders and key business decision-makers.

Our survey report explores not only how companies are thinking about their technology goals but also how they're aligning existing resources and new investments to maintain a competitive edge. From internal upskilling to vendor selection, we cover the technology trends driving business strategy in 2025.

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How Company Leaders Describe Their Technology Goals

Every company is a technology company.

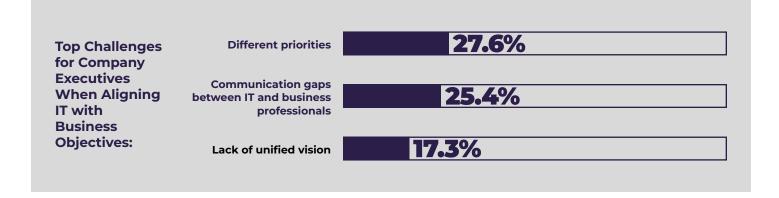
Whether they run a multinational enterprise or a small-town shop, business leaders are increasingly confronted with technology decisions. From internal communication tools and point-of-sale systems to cloud storage and large-scale automation, it's a given that technology is a core component of business operations. What's less clear, however, is how company leaders think about technology in relation to their business goals.

Seventy-five percent of company executives we surveyed agreed that information technology (IT) is a core component of their organization's success, with 44% of all executives saying IT is the underlying enabler and driver of their business. Executives were twice as likely as contractors or entry-level employees to describe IT as a core component of driving new revenue streams, building customer loyalty, and creating a competitive advantage.

This suggests that company leaders with a big-picture view of corporate strategy and financials are more likely to make decisions about technology in the workplace, and they are generally more inclined to view technology-driven initiatives favorably.

Our survey results indicate that most company leaders think highly of their internal IT professionals, with 83% agreeing that IT workers understand business objectives and strategies.

Yet when asked to describe their IT departments, 41% of all company executives said IT workers were separate from other business units, and 76% agreed that IT workers sometimes or often "talk over their heads" with technical terminology and jargon. Miscommunication and conflicting priorities were top frustrations for business leaders when working with their IT staff. Meanwhile, 55% of executives described skilled employee retention as one of their biggest challenges in 2025.



This indicates a disconnect.

On one hand, company leaders describe technology as central to their operations and goals. At the same time, however, the day-to-day experience of technology initiatives is full of confusion, isolation, and concern.

Perhaps it's a question of definitions—business executives say their leadership teams are aligned on technology goals, but what does aligned mean? Is it a surface-level knowledge of the names of technology vendors and softwares? Or, is it a deep understanding of how revenue is generated in the company and which business levers exhibit the strongest correlations to long-term success?

The definition of success and being on the cutting edge can vary significantly from one business to another. You may be doing well compared to peers, but if you're in an industry that's far behind it might not be enough to ensure long-term success. The real question isn't how you compare to others in your industry, but whether you're leveraging technology to its fullest potential to innovate, adapt, and drive growth.

- Aaron Sherrill, TenHats CTO

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Broadly, it seems many companies say they prioritize IT because that seems like that is the "right" answer to give in 2025. Yet for many business leaders, the more they look around, the more they recognize their gaps in IT knowledge and strategic implementation. More precisely than just saying IT is a core component of their organization's success, 83% of executives agree or strongly agree that their success will be significantly dependent on IT partners.



For executives at companies of all sizes, IT challenges are commonly addressed with a combination of in-house capabilities and external solutions. Leaders must strike a balance between robust internal training and standard operating procedures and the strategic selection of highly qualified third-party providers. At many organizations, this process begins by making a clear evaluation of employee skills and sentiments.

Employee Sentiments:

The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of a Tech-Driven Workplace

Across all industries, survey respondents generally view workplace technology as beneficial to their lives — provided they understand how it works.

When asked to describe the IT departments at their companies, executives were nearly twice as likely as employees and contractors to use the words "collaborative" and "innovative." This indicated to us that lower-level employees either have fewer interactions with IT workers or a more frustrating experience when they do cross paths, compared to the views of company executives. This may also reflect how business leaders are more aspirational, while lower-level employees are more realistic about what's actually happening. Still, fewer than 48% of executives consider their IT teams "collaborative."

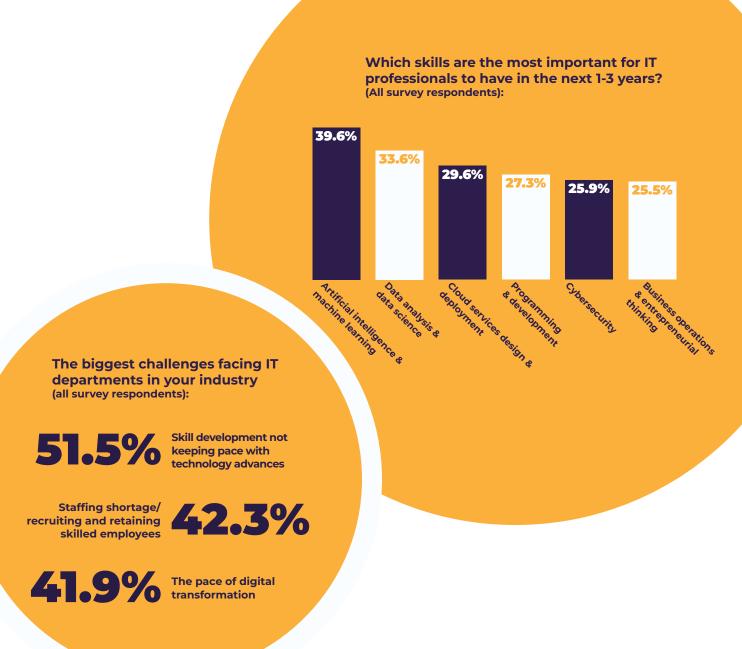
Perhaps core to this disconnect is a growing sense of technological independence. When everything exists on a user-friendly app, how necessary is an IT department? Among all industries, 43% of employees working in customer service reported that the IT function is becoming less important as modern business systems and staff empower non-IT staff to independently solve business challenges. Other departments agreed even more strongly, with 50% in human resources, 58% in engineering and product development, and 59% in finance and accounting, agreeing that the IT function is less important than it used to be.

Agreement with the statement, "My company's IT department is highly collaborative and innovative," sorted by company revenue.



Company revenue was not a significant differentiator in considering how organizations view opportunities to collaborate with their IT departments.

Critically, however, skill development not keeping pace with technology advances was the most widely cited IT concern among employees of all departments, followed closely by the recruitment and retention of skilled employees and the pace of digital transformation. This is the paradox of the modern workplace: Technology is simple to learn, but it changes too quickly.



For small businesses, this conundrum often manifests as a financial resource constraint. Is it worth the money to invest in a new system? Will the expected returns offset the cost? At large enterprises, the problem is often a question of time: If rolling out a new technology takes months, will it still be the best solution by the time everything's migrated to the new system?

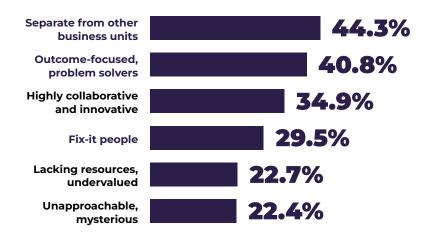
Eighty-three percent of company leaders agreed or strongly agreed that while technology expenses can be high, they are relatively small compared to their potential to boost the competitiveness of the business. This mindset will likely result in an increased drive to invest in technology initiatives in 2025 — but

experience tells us that many companies will choose other organizational priorities as the year goes on, pushing technology investments to the back burner.

When coupled with concerns about staffing and the pace of transformation, this influx of IT investment could result in a significant gap in employee training. When asked about the most important skills for IT professionals to possess in the next 1-3 years, only 20% of survey respondents indicated training and education, compared to 40% saying artificial intelligence and machine learning.

Many of these responses, including data analysis and business operations, invite interdepartmental collaboration. IT departments can no longer be siloed and hard to reach at highly functioning enterprises. The business technology landscape of 2025 requires a reframing of the IT role.

Which of these phrases describes the IT department at your company? (All survey respondents)



Reframing the IT Role

With the rapidly changing technological landscape, many companies have had to reframe the way they think about IT within their business. Although many corporations have resumed in-office work policies following the pandemic, hybrid and remote-first work environments are still prevalent across industries ranging from technology and finance to healthcare and education.

Particularly with remote work and digital transformation, more companies have had to invest in advanced technologies and collaboration tools to maintain productivity and stay competitive. This shift requires moving away from seeing IT as a support function to recognizing IT as a core enabler of every aspect of their business.

While 32% of all survey respondents stated that IT is the core enabler and driver of their business, 44% indicated that their company still views IT as separate from other business units. In many cases, these views are true simultaneously.

IT teams are expected to drive business value, but IT priorities aren't considered in other company departments. This creates a disconnect when IT initiatives are not aligned with broader business goals, resulting in miscommunication, inefficiencies, and missed opportunities for collaboration that could otherwise propel the organization forward.

As the technology landscape continues to evolve, it's increasingly important for executive leadership to view IT as an integral part of the business because it drives innovation, enhances operational efficiency, and enables the organization to adapt quickly to market changes.

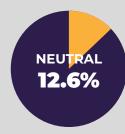
Companies that align IT with their overall strategy will be better positioned to innovate and stay competitive. With 55% of our survey respondents agreeing that their executive leadership views IT as a core component of the business and understands how to measure its success, this reflects a positive shift toward a more strategic integration of technology.

Rate your agreement with this statement:

The executive leadership at my company views IT as an integral part of the business and understands how to measure IT success.











Rate your agreement with this statement:

The executive leadership at my company views IT as an integral part of the business and understands how to measure IT success.

Creating new revenue streams - 43% positive impact

Positioning our organization for the future digital world – 55% positive impact

Giving our organization a competitive advantage - 52% positive impact

Technology Investments:

Strategy or Survival?

Technology is no longer just a tool of operational efficiency—it's a critical investment that drives business growth and transformation. From cloud computing to artificial intelligence, organizations are leveraging technology to unlock new opportunities, streamline processes, and enhance customer experience. Businesses that view technology as a long-term investment, rather than a short-term expense, are better equipped to innovate, remain competitive, and adapt to changing market demands.

When asked about the impact of their IT department and technology investments, 43% responded that IT has a positive impact in creating new revenue streams, and 55% said it plays a critical role in positioning their organization for the future digital world.

These findings are important because they highlight IT's expanding role beyond operational support, demonstrating its direct contribution to business

growth and long-term competitiveness. By driving innovation and preparing companies for the demands of the digital future, IT is becoming a key enabler of strategic initiatives.

Regarding IT budgets, 55% of respondents indicated that their company is continuing to increase its investment in IT to exceed the expectations of employees, customers, and partners, as well as to enhance revenue generation, reduce costs, and mitigate risks. While this trend appears promising, 56% of IT professionals identified resource constraints as the primary challenge they face in aligning IT with broader business objectives.

Business leaders face a challenge: How can they align their company's objectives with the realities of staffing and resource constraints?

This requires a new internal alignment.

Aligning Business Objectives with IT Realities

As businesses increasingly rely on digital tools and systems to innovate, streamline operations, and enhance customer experiences, the role of IT has expanded beyond support to become a strategic partner. For companies to thrive, IT must be integrated into the core business strategy, ensuring that technology investments directly support key objectives, drive growth, and improve overall performance in an ever-changing marketplace.

While 55% of our survey respondents agree that their executive leadership views IT as a core component of business, 49% of IT professionals highlighted communication gaps between IT and business teams as one of the biggest challenges in aligning IT with broader business objectives. This discrepancy suggests that while leadership may recognize the strategic importance of IT, a lack of clear, consistent communication between technical and non-technical teams can hinder the effective integration of IT into overall business strategies.

Although many IT professionals cited communication gaps as a major challenge, the most significant issue

they face is resource constraints, with 56% identifying it as their biggest hurdle. This lack of resources only deepens the disconnect between IT and business leaders, making it harder for IT teams to meet business objectives and further complicating efforts to align technology strategies with overall organizational goals.

This disconnect arises because many respondents indicate that their business views IT as important, likely because it aligns with what they feel is the expected answer. However, when we hear directly from IT professionals, it's evident that resource constraints are a major challenge, highlighting a gap between leadership's perception of IT's strategic role and the practical limitations IT teams face in achieving business objectives.

- Aaron Sherrill, TenHats CTO

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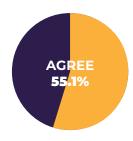
To answer this need for more resources, many companies are looking for third-party support.

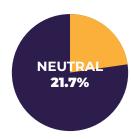
What challenges do you experience as an IT professional in aligning IT with business objectives and strategies?



Rate your agreement with this statement:
Our company's success in 2025 will be significantly dependent on our IT team's abilities and capabilities.











Sourcing IT Support

For businesses to adapt and thrive in today's fast-paced environment, embracing the ever-evolving landscape of IT is essential. As technology becomes more central to business strategy, companies that invest in strengthening their IT capabilities will be better prepared to meet new challenges and capitalize on emerging opportunities.

It's no surprise, then, that 73% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their company's success will significantly depend on the abilities and capabilities of their IT teams.

Staying competitive often requires specialized expertise and advanced resources that can be difficult for in-house teams to maintain alone. Reflecting this trend, 56% of respondents agreed that their business would need to outsource some IT work, highlighting the growing role of external partnerships in tackling complex digital needs.

Technology is evolving too quickly for a small IT team to meet all an organization's needs effectively, regardless of its size. Some companies hesitate to partner with third parties, fearing it could impact internal IT jobs, but outsourcing isn't about replacing staff — it's about relieving them of routine, commoditized tasks or supplementing them with niche, hard-to-find expertise. This approach allows in-house teams to concentrate on high-priority projects that align with the organization's strategic goals. Outsourcing enables IT teams to work more efficiently, innovate faster, and address complex challenges without being bogged

- Aaron Sherrill, TenHats CTO

down by routine or highly specialized tasks

beyond their core expertise.

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One of the top strategic areas for IT providers is, of course, artificial intelligence. To understand how companies are thinking about AI in 2025, we first need a common definition.

Rate your agreement with this statement:
Our organization will increasingly need to
partner with third parties to tackle IT
challenges and leverage modern
technologies to optimize our business.

STRONGLY AGREE 20.5%

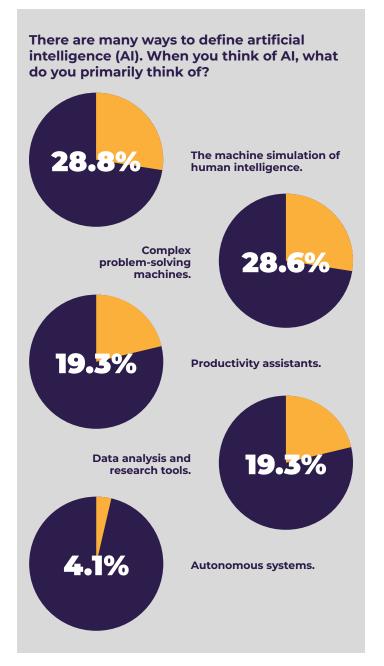
AGREE 56.4%

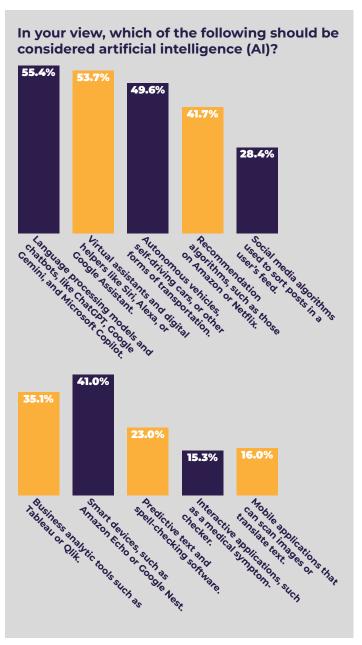
NEUTRAL 19.0%

(Re)defining Al

Artificial intelligence (AI) encompasses a broad range of definitions and applications, reflecting its diverse capabilities and impact across various sectors. Across all survey respondents, 29% envision AI as a complex problem-solving machine while 29% see it as the machine simulation of human intelligence. Nineteen percent associate AI with productivity assistants, although it's equally thought of as a data analysis and research tool.

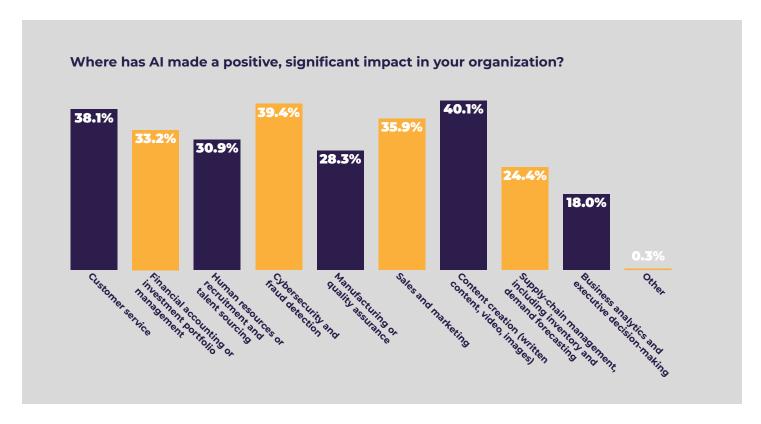
Our survey also explored what technologies are considered AI by respondents, with language processing models and chatbots like ChatGPT, Google Gemini, and Microsoft Copilot being recognized by 55% of respondents. Fifty-four percent acknowledged virtual assistants such as Siri, Alexa, or Google Assistant, while 50% identified autonomous vehicles. Other notable mentions include recommendation algorithms (42%) and smart devices like Amazon Echo or Google Nest (41%).





Al's influence is evident in various organizational areas, with content creation seeing the most significant positive impact at 40%. Cybersecurity and fraud detection (39%) and customer service (38%) also benefit from Al integration. Additionally, 36% of respondents said that Al plays a crucial role in sales and marketing while another 31% cited financial accounting or investment portfolio management.

These insights highlight Al's multifaceted nature, illustrating its potential to revolutionize industries through diverse applications that enhance efficiency, decision-making, and customer engagement. An IT-managed service provider helps to make the most of that investment.



Al Use Cases and Hesitations

Al adoption is on the rise, with organizations increasingly recognizing its transformative potential across various functions. However, significant challenges and hesitations remain that hinder full-scale implementation.

Key Use Cases for AI

Al systems are becoming increasingly integrated into daily work routines across various organizations. Nearly half of employees interact with Al several times per week, while almost a third engage with Al multiple times daily. This frequent interaction suggests that Al is being utilized in a wide range of use cases, from automating routine tasks to assisting with complex decision-making processes.

The high frequency of AI interaction also indicates that these systems are becoming essential tools for improving efficiency, productivity, and decision-making in many job roles. As AI continues to evolve, we can expect its presence in the workplace to grow, potentially expanding into more specialized and sophisticated applications across different industries.

The most trusted AI use cases according to respondents were answering basic customer service questions at 54% and analyzing complex data sets at 53%.

There's moderate confidence in AI for quality assurance testing (33%), candidate screening (33%), and creating performance reviews (30%). Healthcare applications like disease diagnosis and medication recommendations show growing trust at 27% and 25%.

Confidence in AI decreases for sensitive tasks like handling public relations (23%), generating medical or financial content (19%), and making moral judgments (12%). This pattern suggests that while AI is widely accepted for data-driven tasks, human oversight is still preferred for more nuanced, ethical, or high-stakes decisions.

Trust decreases significantly to 11% for tasks involving moral judgments and 14% for sensitive content generation. This highlights areas where human oversight remains crucial.

Hesitations

Organizations face multiple barriers to fully embracing Al technology. Privacy and security concerns top the list, with 49% of respondents citing this as a major issue. Closely following are quality and accuracy concerns, mentioned by 48% of participants. These two factors highlight the critical need for reliable and trustworthy Al systems.

How often do you directly interact with Al systems in your job role?









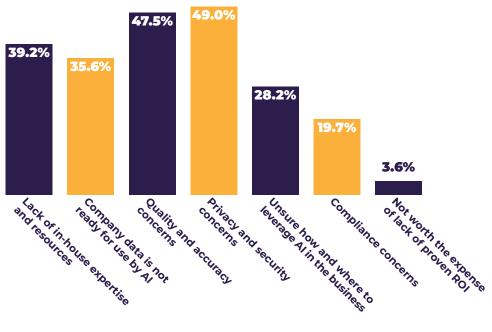


A significant portion (39%) pointed to a lack of in-house expertise or resources as a hindrance, while 36% reported that their company data isn't ready for Al use. This underscores the importance of both skilled personnel and proper data infrastructure in Al adoption.

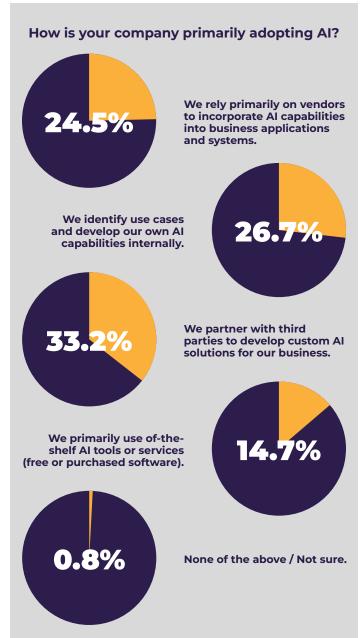
Many organizations (28%) are unsure how to effectively leverage AI in their business, indicating a need for clearer strategies and use cases. Compliance concerns were cited by 20%, reflecting the complex regulatory landscape surrounding AI. Interestingly, only a small fraction (4%) believe AI lacks ROI, suggesting that most organizations recognize its potential value despite the challenges.

IT MSPs can play a crucial role in addressing the challenges of Al adoption. With their expertise in data management, cybersecurity, and technology integration, MSPs can help organizations navigate the complexities of Al implementation. They can provide the necessary infrastructure, ensure data readiness, implement robust security measures, and offer ongoing support and training. By partnering with an MSP, businesses can accelerate their Al adoption journey while mitigating risks and maximizing the benefits of this transformative technology.





Data Governance and Al Regulation



Our survey results found valuable insights into how companies are adopting Al usage. Organizations are adopting Al through various strategies, with 33% partnering with third parties for custom solutions, 27% developing capabilities internally, 25% relying on vendors for integration, and 15% using off-the-shelf tools. This diversity reflects the adaptability of Al across different business needs and resources.

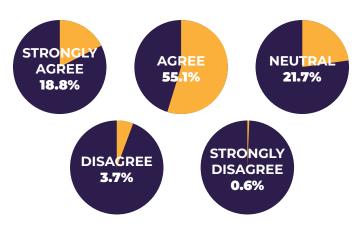
Having a company-wide AI policy is another critical factor for understanding how organizations are regulating AI. Our survey results found that an impressive 75% of respondents indicated that their organizations have established company-wide guidelines. This high percentage demonstrates that businesses recognize the importance of clear frameworks to ensure responsible AI implementation and usage.

Does your organization have a company-wide Al use policy?

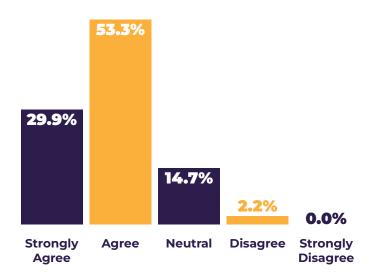


These findings highlight the critical need for robust data governance and AI regulation. IT MSPs can help organizations increasingly integrate AI into their operations, striking a balance between innovation and responsible use, ensuring that AI systems are transparent, accountable, and aligned with ethical standards.

Rate your agreement with this statement:
Our company's success in 2025 will be significantly dependent on our IT team's abilities and capabilities.



Technology expenses can be high, but they are relatively small compared with their potential to boost the operating performance and competitiveness of our business.



Trends To Watch in 2025

As we look ahead to 2025, several key IT trends are emerging that will shape the technology landscape and impact businesses across industries. These trends highlight the growing importance of IT in driving business success and the need for organizations to adapt their strategies accordingly.

A significant majority of companies (73.9%) recognize that success in 2025 will heavily rely on their IT team's abilities and capabilities. This underscores the critical role that technology plays in modern business operations and strategy. It means that organizations are increasingly viewing IT not just as a support function, but as a core driver of innovation and competitive advantage.

Despite the recognized importance of IT, many organizations still face challenges in aligning IT with business objectives. Different priorities and communication gaps between IT and business professionals made up a little over half of our survey's results. Similarly, resource constraints and a lack of unified vision made up another 34% combined. To address these challenges, companies should establish a unified vision, focus on fostering better communication channels, and ensure IT has a strong presence at the leadership level.

As companies prepare for growth in 2025, they are adopting diverse approaches to meet their IT staffing needs. A significant portion of organizations (43.24%) are looking to hire outside vendors or consultants for IT functions, while others (29.73%) plan to bring in new in-house IT professionals. Many are opting for a hybrid model (25.41%), combining full-time staff with external expertise. This trend reflects the need for flexibility and specialized skills in the rapidly evolving tech landscape.

44.32% strongly agree and 38.38% agree that the success of businesses in 2025 will depend on internal IT capabilities as well as the abilities of IT partners. This highlights the growing importance of strategic partnerships and collaborations in the tech sector. Companies are recognizing that they may not have all the necessary expertise in-house and are increasingly open to leveraging external resources to stay competitive.

Despite the high costs associated with technology, 83.3% of companies overwhelmingly agree that these expenses are relatively small compared to their potential to boost operating performance and competitiveness. This sentiment indicates a willingness to invest in IT infrastructure and solutions that can drive business growth and efficiency.

Artificial intelligence is becoming another key focus for many organizations, with diverse approaches to adoption. A significant number of companies (33.20%) are partnering with third parties to develop custom Al solutions. Others are building internal capabilities (26.72%) or relying on vendors to incorporate Al into their systems (24.53%). This trend underscores the growing importance of Al in business operations and the various strategies companies are employing to harness its potential.

As we approach 2025, these IT trends highlight the need for third-party IT solutions. They help businesses prioritize technology investments, foster strong partnerships, and develop flexible staffing strategies to remain competitive in an increasingly digital world.

About the Report

The TenHats Business and Technology Survey Report is derived from data collected through an online survey conducted in the fall of 2024. The survey participants (n=1,366) primarily represent companies operating in the Southeastern United States. Most organizations reported a minimum of \$1 million in annual revenue, while the largest participants indicated revenues exceeding \$1 billion.

About TenHats

TenHats is an IT service provider and colocation data center in Knoxville, Tennessee. Our dedicated team collaborates with enterprises of all sizes and across diverse industries, offering a spectrum of IT services designed to enhance efficiency, resilience, and overall business performance. From robust network infrastructure solutions to cutting-edge cloud services, cybersecurity measures, and disaster recovery plans, TenHats provides tailored solutions to meet the unique needs of each client. We are dedicated to helping you harness the power of technology for sustained success.

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