FUTURE FOCUS 2025

Technologies, trends, and transformation

Actionable insight for IT decision makers to drive business success today and tomorrow

ITPro.

FUTURE B2B

Contents

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Welcome to Future Focus 2025

Helping decision-makers navigate a successful path forward

A new year brings with it lots of promise and potential but with the highs some lows are also inevitable. That said, it's possible, with the right attitude and resources, to turn adversity into opportunity.

That sentiment is borne out in *ITPro*'s latest Future Focus research findings. There is optimism about emerging and established technologies and their potential for driving increased business value and positive change. That said, there is a healthy dose of realism about some hurdles that may need to be overcome along the way.

Many technologies that feature high on the agenda – particularly AI, analytics, and cybersecurity – are united by the need for high-quality data, which ITDMs should bear in mind for the rest of this year and beyond.

In this report, we've tried to show IT decision makers (ITDMs) their peers' thoughts, feelings, and behavior so they can feel united in their view and/or set themselves apart from the competition.

We look briefly back on 2024, as it's hard to plot a course forward without knowing where you have been and why. However, we focus much more on what's important right now and what comes next.

Ultimately, we aim to give ITDMs an accurate and data-driven view of the technology and industry landscape so they can make decisions and take action now to ensure they are set up for success today, tomorrow, and beyond.

We hope you find the report and associated commentary insightful and useful.

— Maggie Holland, Global Content Director, B2B IT

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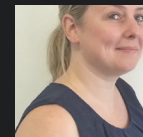
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Maggie has been a journalist for more than 20 years. She covers a range of subjects, with a particular interest in AI, cloud, management and C-level issues, the business value of technology, green and environmental issues, and careers to name but a few. Maggie is also a keen follower of the IT channel and the role the partner ecosystem can play in setting businesses up for success.

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Big tech bets

What are the biggest focuses for IT leaders in 2025 – and how will budgets be divided?

As ITDMs finalize their plans for 2025, the delicate balance between risk and opportunity has never been more apparent.

On the one hand, evolving technologies such as AI have unlocked great enterprise potential, with more and more businesses introducing AI tools and assistants in the workplace to boost productivity.

On the other hand, they have also emboldened threat actors and allowed them to launch more personalized, stealthy, and damaging attacks than ever. As a result, IT teams are grappling with a complex landscape. This is also true for the cloud, where major migration and consolidation work is expected to be a significant focus for ITDMs.

> As ITDMs finalize their plans for 2025, the delicate balance between risk and opportunity has never been more apparent.

Respondents who listed AI as a top-three area of focus and investment

41%
2024

78%
2025
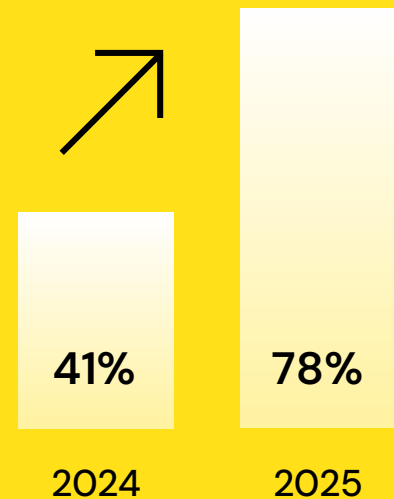
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AI ROLLOUT CONTINUES AT PACE

AI is set to be an even keener area of focus for ITDMs this year than in 2024, as IT teams zero in on how generative AI can drive increased value. While 41% of the 736 respondents to *ITPro*'s research in the US, Canada, and EMEA said AI had been a top-three area of focus and investment in 2024, more than three-quarters (78%) said it would be in 2025.

The majority (75%) of respondents also indicated that AI readiness or understanding would be more important this year, with nearly a third (30%) saying it would be much more important than in 2024.

AI is a key priority for investment in 2025, with IT teams across all sectors eager to make the most of new technologies like generative AI to present compelling business use cases.

Businesses are backing these ambitions with significant investment. Just under one-quarter of respondents (24%) intend to spend 21–30% of their entire IT budget on AI in 2025, with a further 22% saying they will dedicate 11–20% of tech spend. This is slightly lower than last year's report, with 28% of respondents falling in the 21–30% category.

There's some evidence that this is because a small number of ITDMs are making even higher levels of investment. The percentages of those intending to spend 41–50% and more than 50% of their overall IT budgets on AI in 2025 have risen slightly to 11% and 8% respectively.

Even as IT departments open their wallets for AI and look to make the most of these benefits, they still need to grapple with the challenges associated with implementing necessary systems.

"The most difficulty we've encountered as a team is the effective integration of AI technology into our daily activities," said one respondent, pointing towards the great step up businesses face when it comes to moving AI from a proof of concept to a daily driver of productivity.

"Many software companies don't have significant in-house know-how to be able to develop AI functionalities without external partners," added another, underlining the importance of collaboration and the IT channel when it comes to making budgets go further in 2025. While this is especially true for complex and emerging fields like AI, it's also a solid strategy for other important areas, such as cybersecurity.

75%

The combined total of respondents who said AI readiness was slightly more important, more important, or much more important in 2025 than in 2024.

30%

said AI readiness would be much more important than in the previous year.

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SHORING UP CYBERSECURITY

Ransomware, data breaches, and sophisticated phishing attacks can all be catastrophic for businesses and IT departments know this very well. Attackers' tactics evolve almost as fast as security teams can create innovative defenses, leading to a cat-and-mouse game that demands constant investment to stay ahead.

A combined 74% across all surveyed regions stated that cybersecurity investment would be more important in 2025 than it had been in 2024, with over a quarter (27%) stating it would be much more important.

This is in line with the expectations of analyst firm Gartner, which has projected that information security spending will grow 15% year-on-year across 2025. This is in response to more advanced cybersecurity threats driven by technologies such as generative AI, along with more cloud security spending as enterprises continue to invest in this area.

Despite these concerns, some 40% of *ITPro* respondents in the US, Canada, and EMEA still expect to spend 20% or less of their overall IT budget on cybersecurity in 2025. The apparent disconnect between the perceived seriousness of cybersecurity problems and the resources given to security workers to fix them looks set to continue into 2025, even as ITDMs register their mounting cyber distress.

⚠️ **ITDMs are facing rising cyberattacks from ransomware gangs and advanced phishing operators, but ambition for cyber spending hasn't translated to more money in department coffers.**

"Ransomware attacks were particularly concerning, impacting not just businesses but also personal data," said one respondent. "I found it challenging to keep up with the latest security measures and best practices, especially as remote work continued to be the norm for many."

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"With the increasing sophistication of cyberattacks, it felt like there was always a new vulnerability to address," said one respondent.

There's some hope in the sector that AI could also help secure businesses, feeding into a cycle in which both attackers and defenders rush to invest in security and AI to stay on top.

SECURE DATA, BETTER INSIGHTS

Investing in cloud services has been a consistent priority for IT leaders since the 2010s. But as firms have embraced dispersed workforces and adopted an increasingly complex mix of tools and services in the cloud and on-premises, cloud management and spending have come under great scrutiny.
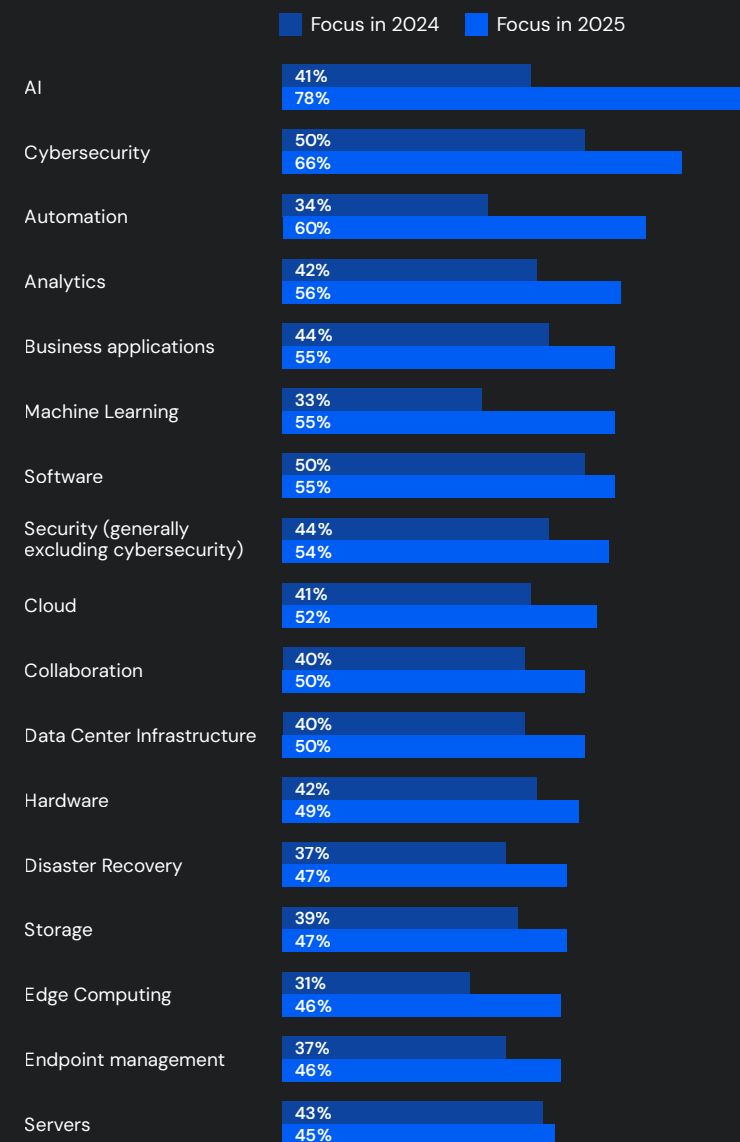
Nearly two-thirds of all respondents (64%) stated that cloud migration was a more important focus for their business in 2025 than in 2024. This focus on the cloud is reflected in where organizations plan to invest in the coming year. Just over half (52%) of respondents put cloud – public, private, or hybrid – in their top three areas for investment in 2025, compared to 41% in 2024.

An ISG report released in July 2024 suggested UK enterprises are increasingly turning to managed hosting providers to bolster their hybrid cloud strategies. This approach can also help businesses keep up with rapidly changing data protection regulations, lower costs, and give access to newer forms of technology, such as serverless architecture or data center as a service.

Once again, this feeds back into AI demands, as firms look to diversify their cloud for better workload flexibility and scalability. It also puts water between sensitive data that can and can't be used for AI training and inference. Growing examples include proprietary code, which may be used for personalized AI code generation within a private cloud environment, compared to non-sensitive data handled in their public cloud environments.

If you compare your 2024 focus to your 2025 plans, which technologies would you say got/will get the largest amount of investment and attention?
(Please choose the three biggest areas for each year)

■ Focus in 2024　■ Focus in 2025

Technology	Focus in 2024	Focus in 2025
AI	41%	78%
Cybersecurity	50%	66%
Automation	34%	60%
Analytics	42%	56%
Business applications	44%	55%
Machine Learning	33%	55%
Software	50%	55%
Security (generally excluding cybersecurity)	44%	54%
Cloud	41%	52%
Collaboration	40%	50%
Data Center Infrastructure	40%	50%
Hardware	42%	49%
Disaster Recovery	37%	47%
Storage	39%	47%
Edge Computing	31%	46%
Endpoint management	37%	46%
Servers	43%	45%

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Paired with cloud management software and a single pane of visibility, a hybrid cloud can help ITDMs unlock more value from their data. ITDMs can use the scalability and flexibility of hybrid cloud storage, as well as its unique benefits compared to other cloud models, to support other technologies our respondents have identified as key.

As organizations increasingly look to the cloud as a core part of their overall IT strategy, being able to access this data readily and make sense of it through analytics becomes ever more important. This is further demonstrated by the fact that some 56% of respondents cited analytics as one of the top three important areas for focus or investment in 2025, versus 42% saying this was a key focus last year.

"I see the biggest tech opportunity in 2025 as leveraging cloud and edge computing to enhance data processing and analytics, driving efficiency and growth," said one respondent.

Taken in its entirety, the data for 2025 is promising. Though the risks are arguably greater than ever, there's ample opportunity for those who can channel their budgets into multi-functional technologies such as AI to address multiple areas of concern.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ITDMs?

As we enter 2025, ITDMs will have to stretch their budgets like never before. Though AI demands a hefty fee to get up and running, the right approach to implementation can pay off in the long run through improved productivity and complementary effects to other areas of concern.

IT teams with the right priorities can chart a calmer course through the year and even reach 2026 having made the most of burgeoning opportunities. This will mean getting oversight of your security and cloud, alongside targeted investment in emerging technologies to get an edge over competitors and would-be attackers.

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Talking tech: The biggest technology trends of 2025

We detail how ITDMs are planning to invest in new and emerging technologies to solve business challenges in 2025

It can be daunting to determine which business problems to address first, and which technologies are best suited to rising to said challenges. But it is a task that can neither be ignored nor underestimated.

In the next 12 months, businesses will embark on digital transformation and IT projects focused on all kinds of technologies, with the common theme being setting their organization up for success now and in the future.

ITPro's Future Focus research found that the top ten focus areas for 2025 are: AI (78%), cybersecurity (66%), automation (60%), analytics (56%), business apps (55%), software (55%), machine learning (55%), general security (54%), cloud (52%), and collaboration (50%).

We've taken a deeper dive into the top five of these technology focus areas.

> *ITPro*'s Future Focus research found that some of the biggest technology trends are AI, cybersecurity, automation, analytics, and business apps.

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AI

It's been impossible to miss the rise of AI as a genuine opportunity for businesses in 2024; the technology has swiftly moved from a lofty concept to something embedded in the heart of Windows and Apple laptops, for instance, within the space of a few months.

Looking ahead, businesses expect to boost spending on AI by 5.7% in 2025, according to ISG research. This chimes with the findings of *ITPro*'s Future Focus research, with AI being the number-one priority for ITDMs. While respondents said they were planning to invest in AI for many use cases, the majority highlighted increasing efficiencies and optimizing costs as the primary expected benefit.

"Businesses that adopt AI-driven automation can improve productivity, reduce human error, and respond more quickly to changing market conditions," said one respondent.

"For industries like manufacturing, finance, and healthcare, automation also opens doors to smarter resource allocation and predictive analytics."

AI IN ACTION IN BUSINESS

AI can be used to create footage for marketing presentations, one respondent said, while another highlighted its potential in generating product designs. There are plenty of great AI use cases out there.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

AI investment can lead to cost optimizations and efficiency programs that can improve customer experiences, according to ISG principal analyst Michael Dornan.
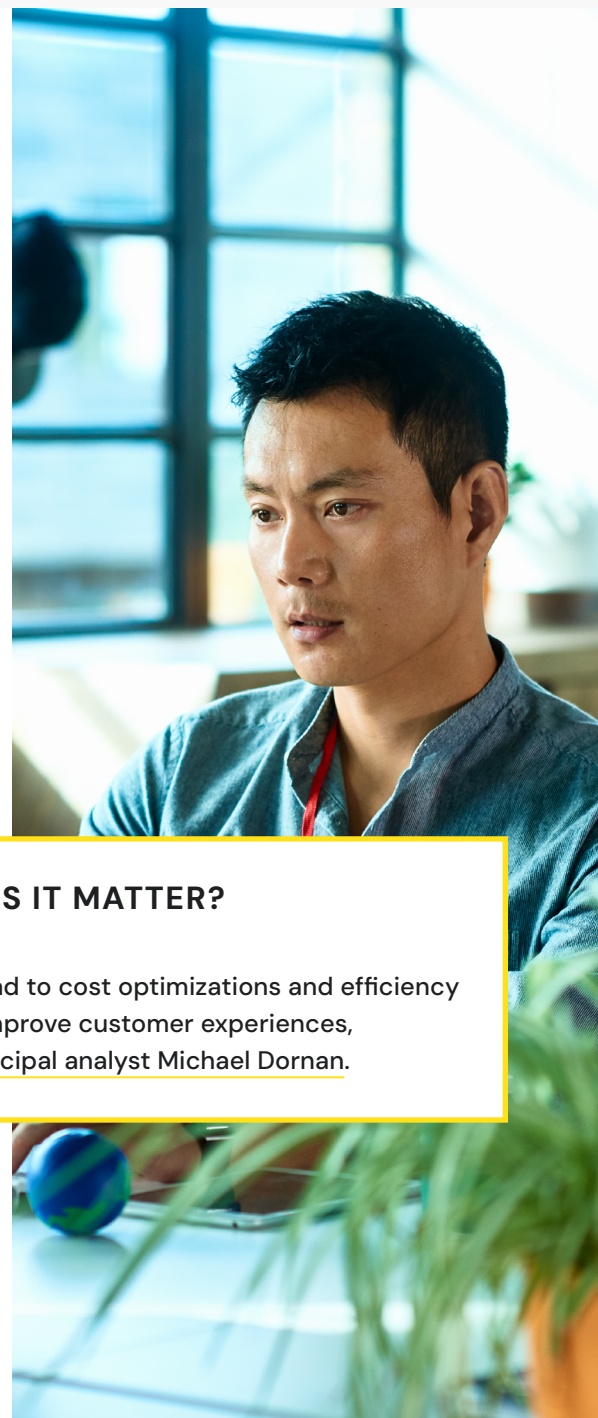
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CYBERSECURITY

Security remains one of the premier challenges for businesses, but it also represents an opportunity to add enhanced capabilities and technologies to ensure networks and endpoints are kept secure.

ITPro's research shows that the threats organizations prioritize right now are phishing, followed by malware and password attacks. Of the least concern are man-in-the-middle attacks and physical security breaches. Security also features heavily when respondents highlighted key challenges they face, with ITDMs planning on leveraging technologies like AI and automation, particularly when it comes to threat detection and incident response.

CYBERSECURITY IN ACTION IN BUSINESS

Introducing new cybersecurity tools may range from adding endpoint security to API security. Most respondents to *ITPro*'s Future Focus outsource these tools – including 33% investing in cybersecurity insurance and 24% in infrastructure and network security.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Investing in maintaining a healthy security posture is becoming harder each year. Not only are there new and emerging cyber risks, but there is an almost dizzying amount of new tools and services on the market to choose from - all claiming they can improve efficiency and optimize workflows.

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AUTOMATION

Automation will also be a major focus for ITDMs in 2025. Related to and reliant on AI technologies, automation focuses on raising efficiency levels by applying machine power to laborious, manual tasks. The benefits of investing in automation stretch beyond simply cost-savings and begin to impact the way the organization itself frames its challenges.

It's a key priority for 60% of IT leaders in 2025 compared with just 34% in 2024, according to *ITPro*'s Future Focus research. Anecdotally, respondents highlighted that it would chiefly feature alongside drives to incorporate added analytics workflows into an organization to promote data-driven decision-making.

This is reinforced by IDC research that found 69% of businesses deemed 'digital leaders' – the most digitally literate organizations – adopted extensive automation, orchestration, and dynamic workload management. This figure was just 22% for companies in the 'digital mainstream' and 4% for 'digital followers'.

AUTOMATION IN ACTION IN BUSINESS

One respondent highlighted how businesses will use automation to tackle workforce productivity in hybrid work environments. This will be done by improving collaboration and task management.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

"Automation is really not about cutting costs. It does that as a byproduct but the real value of automation and the automation projects that I've worked with and seen succeed focus on quality, predictability, scalability, resilience, and speed," says Andrew Buss, senior research director at IDC.
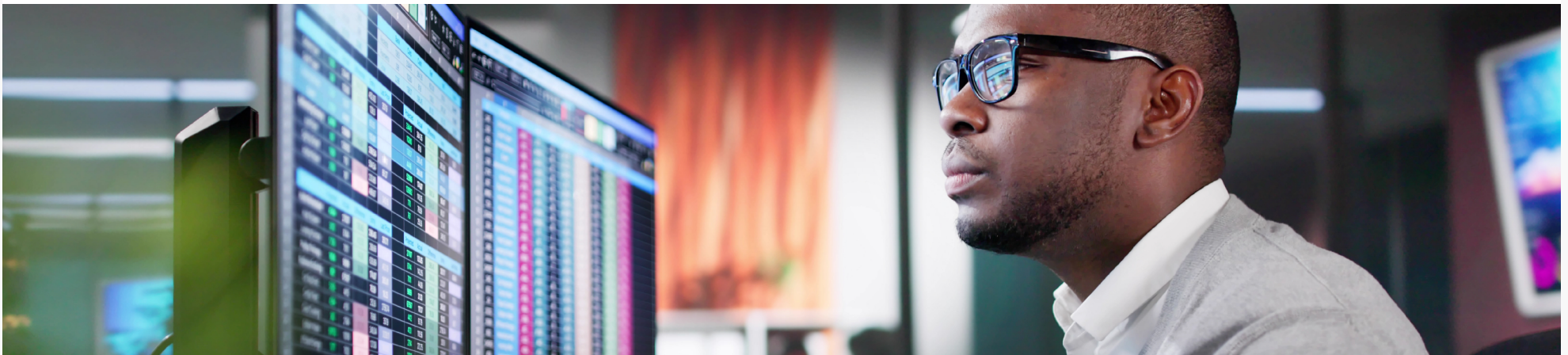
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ANALYTICS

Analytics has multiple use cases throughout the business world. For the respondents to *ITPro*'s Future Focus research, the biggest areas of interest are customer satisfaction, strategic business decision-making, and supply chain management.

According to the research, the importance of analytics in business has grown by 13% between 2024 and 2025. Some 56% of respondents said it's a top-three area of investment this year, whereas only 42% said that was the case last year.

As with so many areas, analytics and AI are inextricably linked, particularly as generative AI has made it much easier to analyze 'unstructured data' – those things that don't fit neatly into a table or chart.

According to one respondent, "AI analytical tools will be used to discern and proffer possible solutions [to customer feedback] within the company's reach". Another believes that "Data analytics and AI will drive personalized customer experiences, enhancing loyalty and retention".
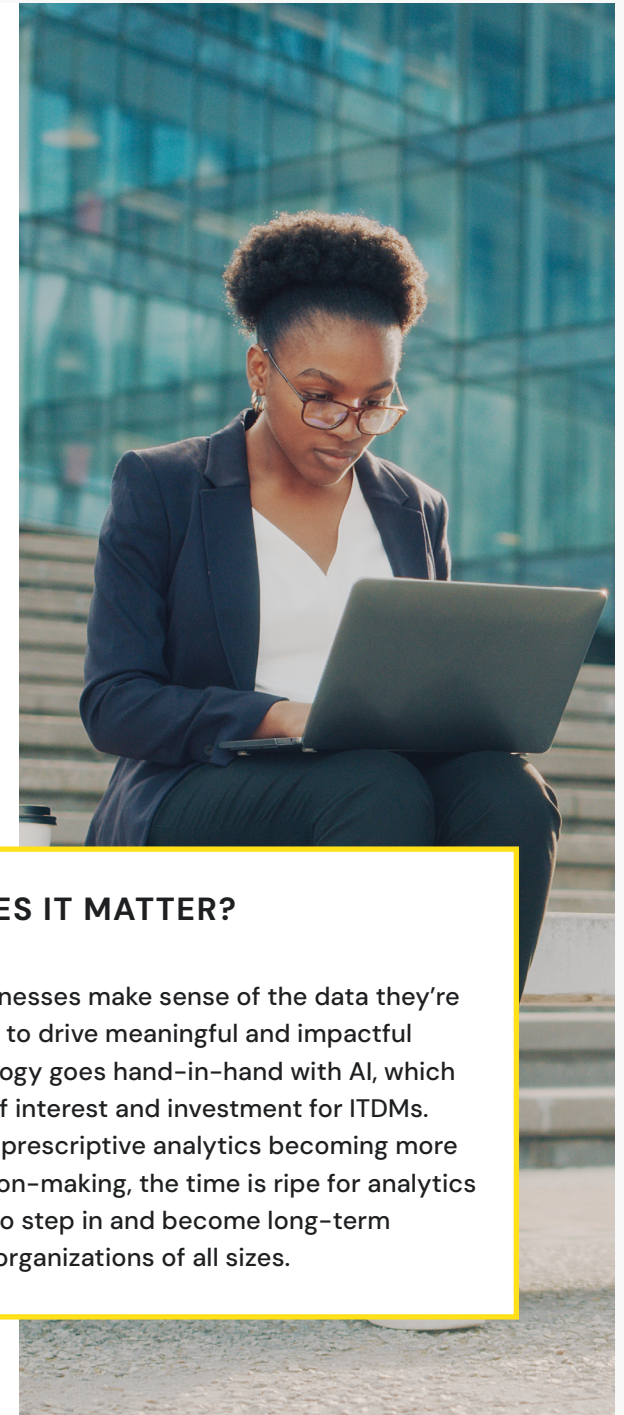
ANALYTICS IN ACTION IN BUSINESS

While data analytics technology has been around for some time – be that in the form of big data or other trends – it's still producing new solutions that excite ITDMs. Global Data recently highlighted the emergence of prescriptive analytics as an "advanced innovation" that can help guide business decisions.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Analytics helps businesses make sense of the data they're collecting and use it to drive meaningful and impactful change. The technology goes hand-in-hand with AI, which is the biggest area of interest and investment for ITDMs. With predictive and prescriptive analytics becoming more important for decision-making, the time is ripe for analytics software providers to step in and become long-term trusted partners to organizations of all sizes.

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BUSINESS APPS

Perhaps one of the biggest lessons from this year's Future Focus research is that technology doesn't have to be new to warrant investment. This is certainly the case for business applications. According to the research, 55% of respondents listed business applications as a top three area of investment in 2025 – 11% more than those who said it was an area of focus in 2024.

Interest is, once again, fuelled at least in part by AI.

"During our integration of AI, we will have the opportunity to purchase new hardware and business applications for support," said one respondent. "It will be necessary for our IT group to be fully educated and knowledgeable in these resources," they added.

Another respondent identified integrating new applications across the business as a key IT opportunity for their organization this year.

Business applications can also help underpin day-to-day operations, increasing efficiency and improving decision-making.

> **55% of respondents listed business applications as a top three area of investment in 2025 – 11% more than those who said it was an area of focus in 2024.**

BUSINESS APPS IN ACTION

Analyst firm Forrester Research sees business applications as so critical it has produced a "vision report" on them. According to Kate Leggett, vice president and principal analyst, four key elements of business applications this year and beyond are being AI-infused, composable, cloud-native, and ecosystem-driven.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Business applications are an area where ITDMs have considerable influence. According to *ITPro*'s research, 55% of respondents have significant involvement in the purchasing decision-making process in this area, which is second only to data center infrastructure.

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As we look to 2025 and beyond, it's easy to see how all these technologies – and others – connect and intersect. Indeed, AI is one of the key drivers for interoperability between cloud and edge computing as well as agentic AI.

The need for more automation and even natural language in cybersecurity, too, is connected to the advancements in generative AI tools, while the sheer amount of data processing required taps into the rise in popularity of cloud and edge computing.

Going forward ITDMs will want to take on a handful of IT projects in these areas, *ITPro*'s research shows, to help them ease bottlenecks and meet various business challenges.

💡 *ITPRO* ANALYST TAKE: HOW CAN YOU MAXIMIZE THE VALUE OF YOUR INVESTMENTS?

Maximize your IT investments by prioritizing people and operations first with an understanding of security as the overarching umbrella. Leverage technology solutions with AI and automation as the enabler to bridge gaps to enhance efficiency, scalability, and security.

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In focus: How will 2025 play out for IT professionals?

Getting data prepared for AI is now a must, not a nice-to-have – and ITDMs will have to balance this with increasing cybersecurity and ESG pressures

With the new year ahead, ITDMs have a difficult path to take advantage of the technologies at their disposal and navigate the pitfalls of a rapidly evolving tech landscape.

The worrying fact is not everyone will make the right choices. Whether it's the cyberattacks already guaranteed to happen in the coming year, or the certainty that some will benefit from AI and others will lose out, there's a real weight to the decisions tech leaders will have to make this year to ensure their business comes out on top.

READYING DATA FOR AI

There's no time like the present to clean up your data, particularly if you're chasing more AI use cases or data-driven decision-making in 2025. In the past year, the sector has marked increasing data maturity, as leaders seek to shore up AI investments with suitably robust and accessible datasets.

"As businesses increasingly look for ways to automate processes and extract actionable insights from large data sets, AI and ML will become essential. IT consultants can offer expertise in implementing AI solutions that optimize operations, improve customer experience, and drive innovation," said one respondent.

As AI uptake has increased, so, too, has scrutiny of business data. Put simply, without good data you can't get good results with AI, which means leaders need to jump to it on sanitizing their data for AI use. If done right, this can be the first step in a beneficial cycle in which good quality data enables useful enterprise AI, which can help businesses obtain insights they would otherwise have missed.

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The majority (60%) of respondents to *ITPro*'s research said that data-led projects would be slightly more, more, or much more important to their business in 2025 than they were in 2024. This complements the 75% of respondents who indicated that AI readiness would be more important for their business in 2025 than in 2024.

A vital part of changing one's data architectures to get the most out of AI includes assessing the risk that AI poses to your data and how to store and process it properly. Whether it's establishing a hybrid cloud approach to separate sensitive data unsuitable for AI training from more general data, or setting up a sovereign cloud to meet local law on data use, businesses have a range of options ahead of them.

> **As businesses increasingly look for ways to automate processes and extract actionable insights from large data sets, AI and ML will become essential.**

"In the search for improved predictability and profitability in 2025, boards may put their organizations at risk of breaches and regulation noncompliance if they don't enforce measures to safeguard their data," says Chris Gaebler, chief marketing officer at Protegrity.

"This means implementing robust security frameworks that allow them to leverage AI and maintain stringent security, which is also key to building customer trust and protecting their reputations," he adds.

Top ITDM cybersecurity concerns in 2025

1 Phishing attacks

2 Malware

3 Password attacks

4 Ransomware

5 Social engineering

CYBERSECURITY WORRIES

While the threat of cyberattacks is a perennial issue, leaders must deal with increasingly sophisticated attacks. The past year has seen rapid advances in personalized cyber attacks, as cyber gangs made use of technologies like AI to create targeted lures for individuals and massively expand the scope of malicious campaigns.

A combined 74% across all surveyed regions stated that cybersecurity investment would be more important in 2025 than it had been in 2024. This is in direct response to the changing threat landscape, with phishing identified as the number one cybersecurity priority for ITDMs across all surveyed regions.

In May 2024, Gartner identified AI-enhanced attacks such as phishing as a major area of concern for enterprises. The analyst firm noted that attackers have increasingly obtained AI tools and, in subsequent research, added that AI could be an element in 17% of all cyberattacks by 2027. Large language models (LLMs) and deepfake technology allow attackers to launch attacks in more complex forms than ever before such as via direct messages on LinkedIn or even over video calls.

"AI-generated social engineering attacks will evolve far beyond LinkedIn scams in 2025. As threat actors leverage more sophisticated AI, expect to see realistic AI-generated Zoom meetings used to deceive and exploit targets," says Steve Cobb, CISO of SecurityScorecard.

"These immersive attacks will bypass traditional security controls, creating a new wave of trust-based breaches. Companies relying on outdated defenses will be caught off guard as AI moves into more interactive environments, fostering deception on an unprecedented scale," he adds.
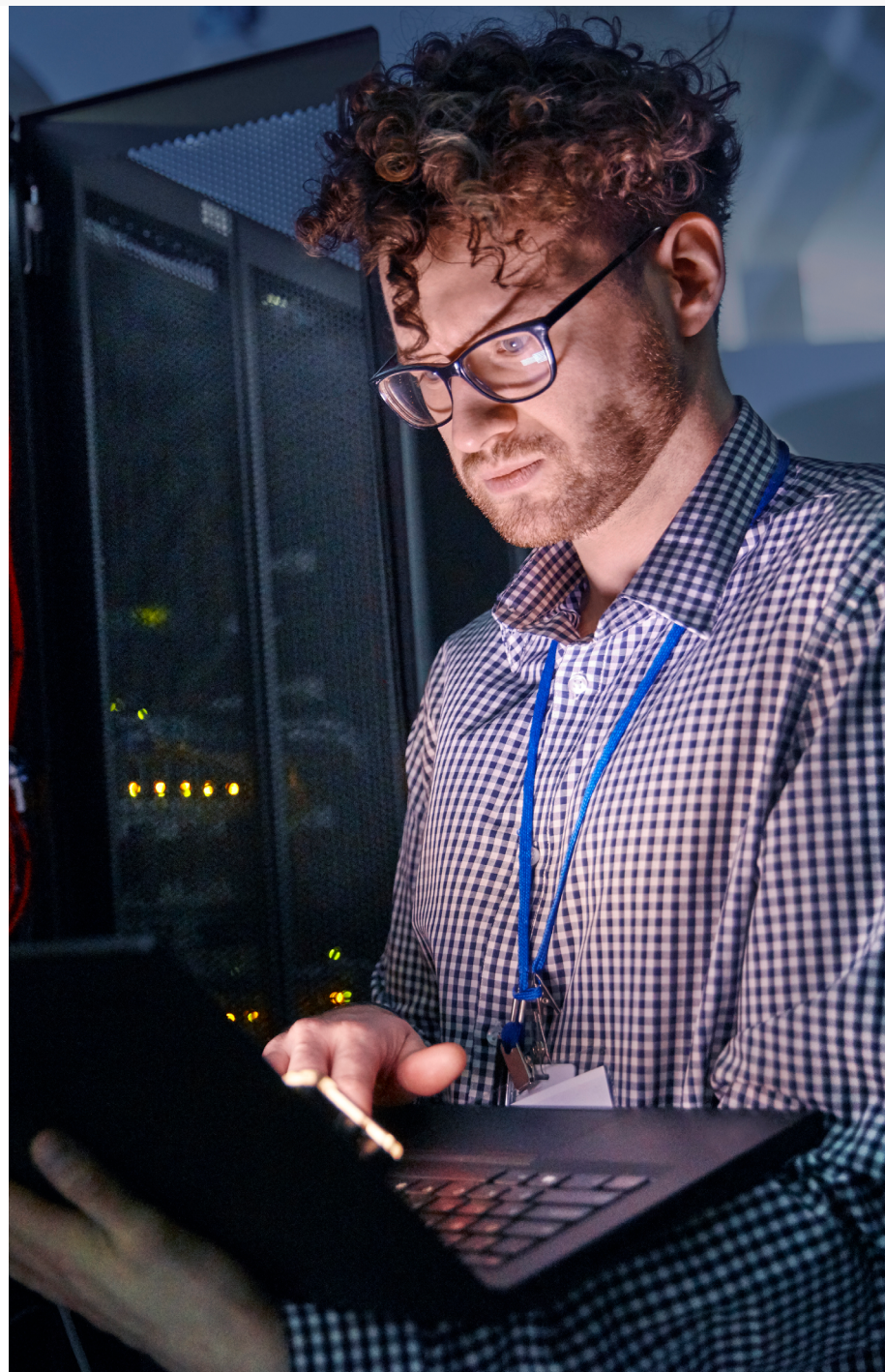
SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS

Something of a dark horse among the responses to *ITPro*'s research has been the rising interest in meeting sustainability goals through the IT department in 2025. Some 65% of respondents suggested that sustainability initiatives will be more important to their business in 2025 versus the year gone by.

There are a number of reasons for this. Outside the tech sphere, concerns around the pace and severity of climate change have become normalized, and legislation in areas such as the EU has set out strict requirements for enterprises operating in the region.

This doesn't go all the way to explaining why sustainability will be a key concern for ITDMs in 2025, though, nor does it consider one of the biggest drivers for renewed interest in sustainability: the detrimental effect of leading-edge technologies.

The elephant in the room here is AI. Having captured the imagination of tech executives the world over, the practicalities of generative AI mean building lots more compute infrastructure – primarily in the form of data centers. These are power-hungry sites, running energy-intensive AI workloads that are still largely met by ramping up fossil fuel energy output. In this way, the AI boom is driving businesses off course for sustainability goals.

IDC projects the compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of AI data centers to hit 40.5% between now and 2027 and both Microsoft and Google have already reported emissions increases linked to AI. This is a massive challenge that customers and vendors alike will have to tackle in 2025 – especially as businesses factor in scope 1-3 emissions in their reports.

Like everything else on the list, however, there's also a real opportunity here for ITDMs. By holding suppliers accountable and investing in hardware and software to help them track their direct emissions, businesses can make 2025 the year that the tech sector gets a proper handle on climate change.

"With increasing consumer demand for sustainable practices, businesses can differentiate themselves by adopting eco-friendly technologies," said one respondent. "This not only meets regulatory requirements but also appeals to environmentally conscious consumers, driving brand loyalty."

Smart tech such as edge sensors also has a role to play here: "IoT can provide real-time monitoring of energy consumption, waste management, and resource allocation," suggested another respondent. "Combining IoT with green technologies will help reduce the carbon footprint, optimize energy use, and support sustainability goals, all while ensuring business continuity."

While there's plenty to keep ITDMs awake at night, it's clear that with the right focus and investment, businesses can leave 2025 far stronger than they entered it. Beyond purely playing the defensive, firms will have to consider how they can be truly innovative in the months and years to come.

> **With increasing consumer demand for sustainable practices, businesses can differentiate themselves by adopting eco-friendly technologies.**

Winning hearts and minds: Engaging in the purchase lifecycle in 2025

Hundreds of ITDMs reveal how they will consider making purchasing decisions in the coming months – with security and AI at the heart of their thinking

From cybersecurity solutions to the best business laptops, ITDMs will be looking to purchase various solutions from vendors of all stripes throughout 2025. But how can suppliers best engage with these individuals to ensure that they create positive relationships? What's more, how can they ensure they are reaching out to the right person, at the right time, in the right way?

In this latest Future Focus report, *ITPro* surveyed hundreds of ITDMs to garner views on the best foot forward when it comes to key enterprise tech purchasing decisions in 2025.

Respondents have shared critical information on the kinds of budgets they work with, what they factor into their purchasing decisions, and – most importantly – what makes ITDMs tick when making crucial purchasing choices for their business.

How can suppliers best engage with these individuals to ensure that they create positive relationships?

WHO MAKES BUYING DECISIONS – AND WHEN ARE THEY MADE?

There are only a handful of opportunities each year to engage with potential customers planning an IT project. Almost half (48%) of respondents in *ITPro*'s research said their organization normally only works on up to a maximum of three projects a year. A further 9% stated they would only work on one, on average.

ITPRO ANALYST TAKE: LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR PROJECT SUCCESS RATHER THAN FAILURE

Ultimately, when it comes to successful IT decision-making, purchasing, and implementation, it all starts with a clear understanding of the bigger picture. What does the business need not just today, but also in the future? And who are the key people, processes, and technologies involved?

A collaborative approach is required with all stakeholders playing active roles. There also needs to be a strong commitment to iterative improvement. Once the budget is approved, ITDMs should prioritize engaging vendors who demonstrate secure solutions and measurable outcomes. Investing in trusted partnerships rather than just products often distinguishes successful implementations from failures.

How many employees are involved in making IT decisions within the below budgets in your organization?

	1-2 people	3-5 people	6-9 people	10-14 people	15-19 people	20 people or more

<£10K

22%	14%	14%	14%	18%	18%

£10k–£49k

18%	21%	17%	19%	9%	16%

£50k–£99k

14%	23%	24%	18%	10%	12%

£100k–£199k

15%	20%	19%	19%	11%	15%

£200k+

30%	13%	14%	13%	10%	21%

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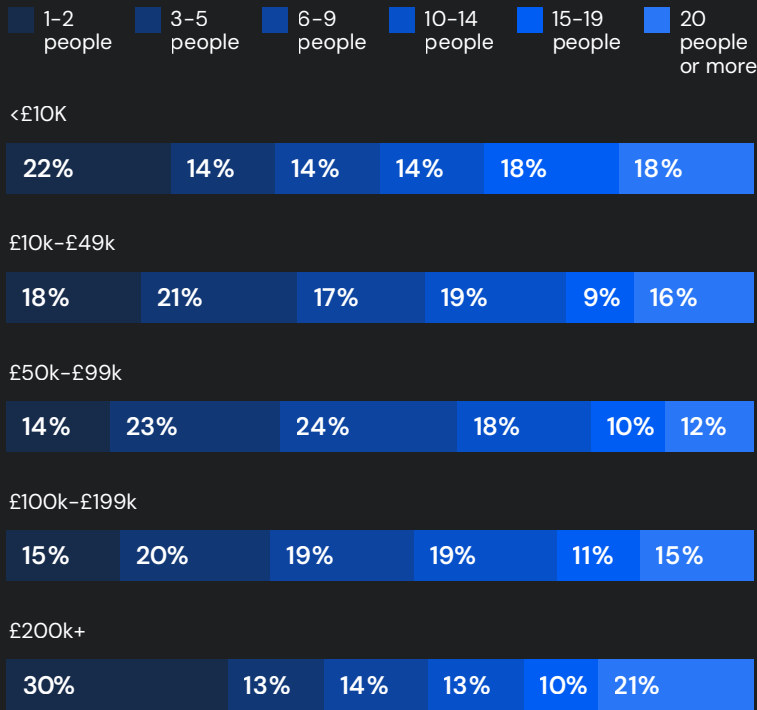
Once a project has been green-lit for exploration, different stakeholders will be most involved at different points in the process. The original brief, for example, sits in most cases with the IT manager or IT director and remains in their domain during the research phase and in creating a vendor shortlist. Signing off on the vendor, however, is often split equally between the CEO or the IT director (and in some cases, the IT manager). For nearly half of businesses (43%), budget sign-off sits with the CEO before implementation, and day-to-day collaboration with the vendor is knocked back to IT.

Who makes the 'final call' very much depends on the business. In most organizations – 37% – it's IT management, with a further 33% of respondents saying it's the CEO or CFO that makes the final decision. This makes sense, given the scale and often the finances involved in such decisions – with the clout of the C-suite or the expertise of IT management taking the reins.

The process of starting a project and signing the contract to go live can vary, *ITPro*'s research shows. Nearly one-third (30%) said this takes three to six months, while 27% revealed this process lasts between six and nine months. In some cases (15%), this can last up to 12 months.

Just one in 20 businesses budget 30 days prior – so short-term investments are usually out of the question. It's far more common to expect a business to budget between three and six months out (24%) or – most commonly – six to 12 months (43%). This means for projects beginning in 2025, it's likely the budgets were set in the summer or before.

WHAT DO ITDMs FACTOR INTO PURCHASING DECISIONS?

With threats rising across the board, it's no surprise that mitigating them and reducing exposure weighs heavily on the minds of ITDMs when choosing to engage in a new solution purchase.

Why a particular business opts to go in one direction or another depends on their specific need, but more decision-makers (36%) are proactively reducing risk than any other single reason. Also, a priority for 15% of decision-makers is meeting cybersecurity insurance requirements. Almost one in five (18%), meanwhile, are keen to replace outdated technology with modernized equipment or systems.

When it comes to the final decision, who does it sit with?

IT management
37%

CEO/CFO
33%

Security management
10%

CTO
9%

CISO
7%

Purchasing / Procurement
3%

Other
2%

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> **"Vendors should behave as partners and diffuse well within the team. Ultimately, it should be one team, who are single-mindedly focused on moving the big needle."**
>
> JEFFREY RAJAMANI, SENIOR FORRESTER RESEARCH ANALYST

When it comes to choosing which vendors to consider, the product itself matters most. It's more important than pricing – which is third on the list – as well as whether there has been sufficient risk assessment (second place). Vendor reputation is less important than these three factors, which may be music to the ears of smaller, less established vendors hoping to win some new business with organizations. But vendors should also consider how they approach a potential relationship, senior Forrester Research analyst Jeffrey Rajamani tells *ITPro*.

"Vendors should behave as partners and diffuse well within the team. Ultimately, it should be one team, who are single-mindedly focused on moving the big needle. If vendors engage with their ITDMs in such a manner, they are sure to be favored for future projects," says Rajamani.

Once a vendor enters the picture and a project is ready to go, how closely a business wants to work with them depends on the scope and nature of the project. Some 41% of respondents indicated how hands-on they are with vendors is a case-by-case decision. Slightly fewer (36%) prefer direct collaboration with the vendor to implement and manage the technology, while almost one-quarter (22%) would engage with the vendor using a trusted partner as a medium.

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## TACKLING BUSINESS CHALLENGES WITH TECHNOLOGY IN 2025

Respondents tell *ITPro* they will be using various new technologies to tackle business challenges in the coming year, from AI to cloud solutions. Anecdotally, AI is one of the hottest topics for business decision-makers by far, as is data analytics and automation.

"Looking forward, tech service providers are projecting a faster growth in 2025 fuelled by core transformations and investments in AI," Forrester's Rajamani adds. "Bookings are up, which can be attributed to enterprise clients' commitment to core transformations.

"Secondly, automation is creeping in and there are claims of automation at scale, which we obviously consume with more than a pinch of salt. After nearly two decades of tech expansion, enterprises are entering an era of tech absorption. What I mean by this is that enterprises are digesting what they have bought and are increasing spend for the applications they need to 'scale'."

Ultimately, despite the promise of cutting-edge AI tools, plenty of businesses are still focusing on ensuring they have solid foundations in place to reduce risk and embark on key projects in 2025.

How many IT projects do you undertake, on average, each year?

- Six or more — 13%
- One — 9%
- Between one and three — 48%
- Three to five — 30%
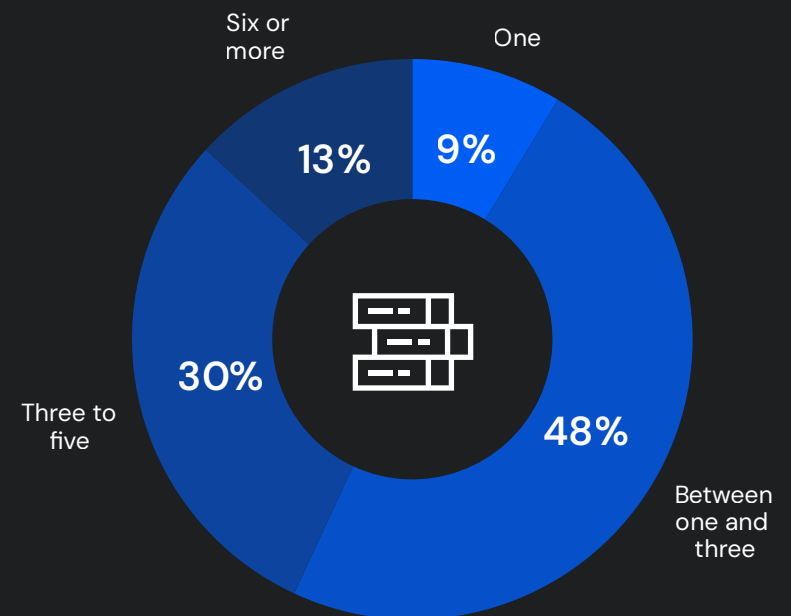
The path forward: what's next?

Undoubtedly AI will dominate IT budgets for the coming year – but is that AI for progress or AI for protection?

AUTHOR

Bobby Hellard,
Reviews Editor, *ITPro*

AI is everywhere. On our streets, in our homes, running through our businesses, and – sadly – also powering up our biggest threats.

Indeed, while AI tools are undoubtedly transforming our world and helping organizations, they are simultaneously being used to disrupt and destroy many parts of our lives. For every business keen to adopt generative AI, many more are thinking about what it will do to their endpoints and networks in the hands of malicious actors.

This is one of the main takeaways from the *ITPro* Future Focus report, which highlights the priorities for 2025 for businesses around the world.

Where AI is helping businesses achieve more of their goals faster, it's also doing the same for malicious actors. Here security concerns are advancing just as fast as the adoption of generative AI or NPU-powered hardware – creating almost a race between attackers and defenders, with the latter constantly having to update their systems and strategies to stay ahead.

> **While AI tools are undoubtedly transforming our world and helping organizations, they are simultaneously being used to disrupt and destroy many parts of our lives.**

One survey respondent said: "In 2024, one of the biggest tech challenges was managing the increasing complexity of cybersecurity threats. As cyberattacks grew more sophisticated, especially with the rise of AI-driven threats, keeping up with the evolving landscape of vulnerabilities became a major issue."

We can extrapolate that things will be even more intense from an attack landscape as a result.

Businesses feel further exposed to new vulnerabilities with the current state of hybrid work, particularly as employees now access company data from potentially less secure home networks. As such, there is a growing demand for more dynamic cybersecurity solutions that combine real-time threat detection with automated responses.

BUDGETING FOR THE FUTURE

In the global report, when asked what the primary motivators for engaging in new products were, 36% said it was to proactively reduce risk, while 18% said it was due to outdated technology. Some 7% said it was to cover a gap in their security coverage. It's also worth noting that many were compelled by cybersecurity insurance requirements (15%).

AI focus, readiness, and spend will increase in 2025 when compared to the year gone by. But while that will hog the limelight, other important elements like cloud and security will not be ignored. And with good reason. While the cloud remains a priority, it's rapidly being dwarfed by AI, which in turn, is creating more innovative and challenging security threats.

THE MODERN THREAT LANDSCAPE

Worried about the effect AI will have across the cybersecurity landscape? You're not alone; one major challenge cited repeatedly in the report was the increasing volume and complexity of cyber threats. Here, however, AI-driven solutions can significantly reduce the burden on security teams, allowing them to focus on more complex incidents.

- By embracing technologies like AI, organizations believe they can effectively address the challenges of 2025.

- IT management still holds the biggest influence within their businesses – 37% make the final decision on IT purchases.

- However, CEOs and CFOs are also driving procurement with 33% making the final call, according to the Future Focus report.

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When it comes to purchasing decisions, the buck stops with the IT manager, with 37% of respondents suggesting it was IT management who made the final decision. A combination of the CEO and CFO was also cited by a third of respondents.

What's clear from the data is AI will be taking up a large portion of IT budgets for 2025 and beyond. Though businesses will face challenges integrating and implementing AI strategies with financial limits, there is also a lot to be said about the training and skill requirements involved. That said, for all the pain points, there are many more benefits.

The major challenge is cybersecurity in a world of rapidly evolving AI. The techniques and tools used to breach and disrupt our businesses only get more sophisticated as time passes. And while many will have ideas about where their budget can be used for in-house AI, more cautious IT heads will be looking at where they can use AI for protection. In summary, while the budgets of 2025 will be dominated by AI, it's an open question as to whether it's for growth or protection.

With AI being used by the enemy, so to speak, it forces the hand of the ITDM. They must look at where their weak spots are, what defenses can be enhanced, and how well their current services and staff can implement them.

The likelihood is that an AI-based service will tackle both of those final questions, so the key is attributing enough budget for the right service and ensuring all stakeholders who sign off on that spend are fully clued up and on board.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bobby Hellard is *ITPro*'s Reviews Editor and has worked at the title since 2018. In his tenure, Bobby has covered stories for all the major technology companies, such as Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Microsoft, and more. He regularly attends industry-leading events such as AWS Re:Invent and Google Cloud Next.

Bobby mainly covers hardware reviews, but you will also recognize him as the face of many of our video reviews of laptops and smartphones.

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Appendix

Where are you currently based?

USA
39%

UK
21%

Spain
13%

Italy
11%

France
8%

Germany
7%

Canada
1%

In which of the following areas do you have SIGNIFICANT involvement in the purchase process for your company?*

(Select all that apply)

Data center infrastructure (storage, servers, networking, etc.)
58%

Business applications
55%

Cybersecurity/information security
54%

Endpoint/mobile devices (e.g., desktop, laptop PCs, mobile devices, VDI/DaaS, etc.)
48%

Public cloud services
45%

Virtualization/private cloud
43%

None of the above
5%

*For easier reading, we have rounded up/down percentages to the nearest integer. In certain charts the total percentage might go slightly over 100%

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What size is your organization?*

1 person
2%

2-9
6%

10-49
5%

50-99
6%

100-499
12%

500-999
12%

1,000-4,999
12%

5,000+ people
8%

Not sure/prefer not to say
38%

*For easier reading, we have rounded up/down percentages to the nearest integer.
In certain charts the total percentage might go slightly over 100%

What is your typical decision criteria when selecting vendors?

(Rank highest to lowest)

1 Product/service features

2 Risk assessment

3 Pricing

4 Vendor reputation

5 Support and licensing

6 Third-party reviews or recommendations

7 Stakeholder recommendations

8 Supplier relationship

9 Sustainability and ethics

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Comparing the year ahead to the year gone by – will the following areas be more or less important to your business in 2025 than they were in 2024?*

Legend: Much less important | Less important | Slightly less important | No change | Slightly more important | More important | Much more important

Area	Much less important	Less important	Slightly less important	No change	Slightly more important	More important	Much more important
Security	1%	1%	1%	21%	22%	25%	28%
AI readiness or understanding	4%	2%	4%	16%	18%	27%	30%
Cybersecurity investment	2%	1%	1%	22%	21%	26%	27%
Cost reduction/efficiency	2%	1%	3%	21%	24%	26%	23%
Innovation	1%	1%	3%	24%	23%	24%	23%
Training	1%	1%	2%	31%	23%	24%	17%
Digital Transformation	1%	2%	3%	29%	22%	24%	19%
Sustainability	2%	2%	2%	29%	24%	21%	20%
Cloud migration	1%	2%	3%	30%	23%	22%	19%
Business continuity/DR	1%	2%	3%	32%	20%	26%	16%

*For easier reading, we have rounded up/down percentages to the nearest integer. In certain charts the total percentage might go slightly over 100%

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How much of your overall IT budget will be spent on AI in 2025?

Less than 10%
19%

11%–20%
22%

21%–30%
24%

31%–40%
15%

41%–50%
11%

More than 50%
8%
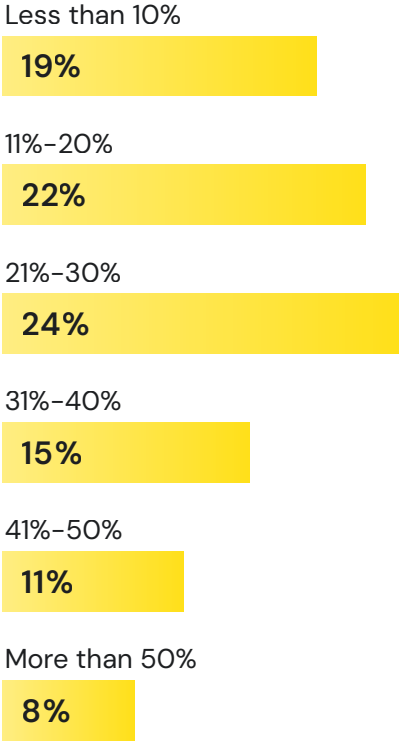
How much of your overall IT budget will be spent on cloud in 2025?*

Less than 10%
18%

11%–20%
26%

21%–30%
27%

31%–40%
13%

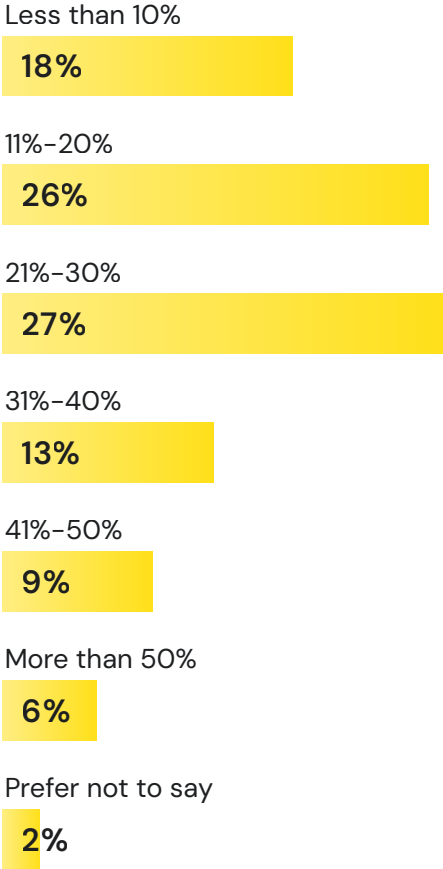41%–50%
9%

More than 50%
6%

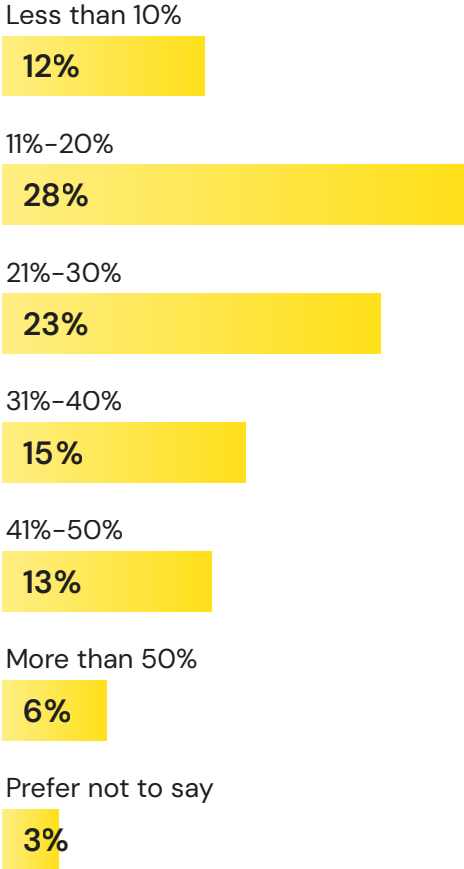Prefer not to say
2%

For easier reading, we have rounded up/down percentages to the nearest integer. In certain charts the total percentage might go slightly over 100%

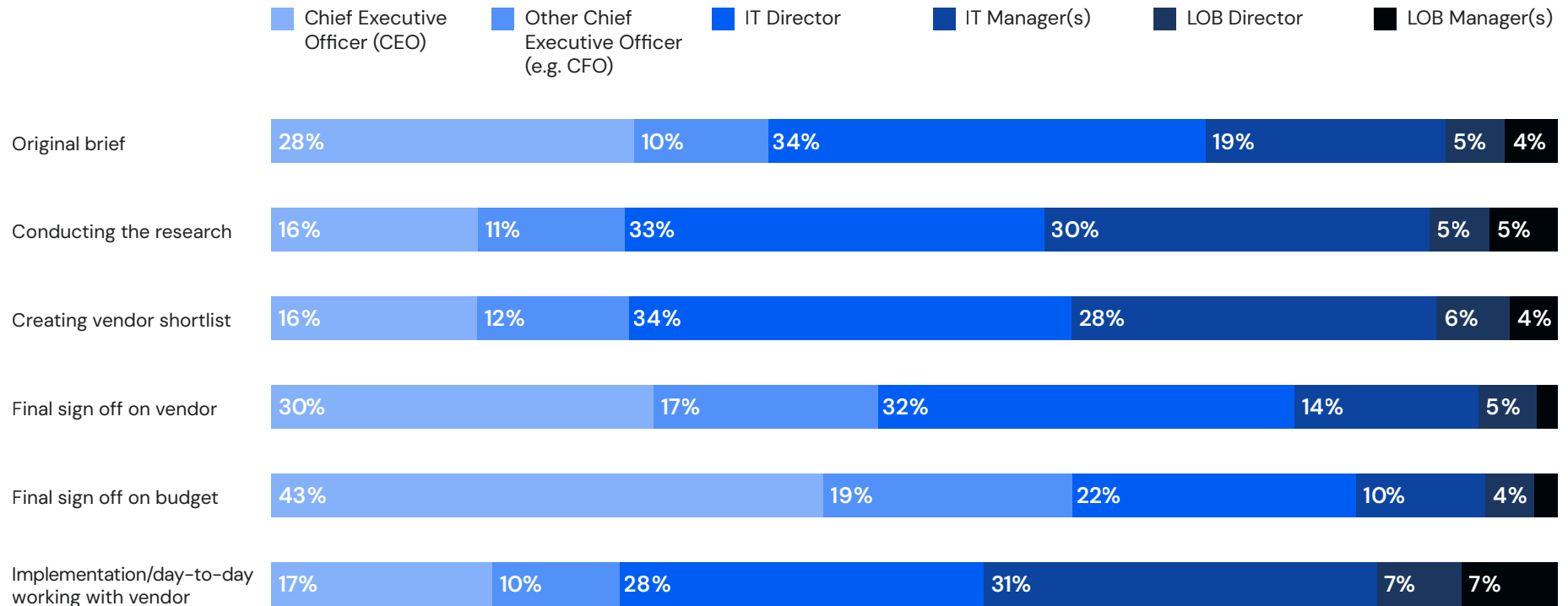## How much of your overall IT budget will be spent on security in 2025?

Less than 10%
12%

11%–20%
28%

21%–30%
23%

31%–40%
15%

41%–50%
13%

More than 50%
6%

Prefer not to say
3%

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Who is usually involved in your digital transformation / IT projects at the below stages?

*LOB = Line of Business. It includes departments like Operations, HR, Marketing, Sales or Finance

Legend: Chief Executive Officer (CEO) · Other Chief Executive Officer (e.g. CFO) · IT Director · IT Manager(s) · LOB Director · LOB Manager(s)

Stage	CEO	Other CEO (e.g. CFO)	IT Director	IT Manager(s)	LOB Director	LOB Manager(s)
Original brief	28%	10%	34%	19%	5%	4%
Conducting the research	16%	11%	33%	30%	5%	5%
Creating vendor shortlist	16%	12%	34%	28%	6%	4%
Final sign off on vendor	30%	17%	32%	14%	5%	
Final sign off on budget	43%	19%	22%	10%	4%	
Implementation/day-to-day working with vendor	17%	10%	28%	31%	7%	7%

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Which online publications or newsletters do you trust to deliver accurate information on technological trends and IT-related news?

(Select all that apply)

Publication	%
Forbes	45%
ITPro	37%
Computer World	34%
TechRadar Pro	29%
PC Mag	28%
Computer Weekly/TechTarget	27%
ZDNet	18%
CIO.com	18%
The Stack	17%
Techfinitive	16%
The Register	15%
Other	13%
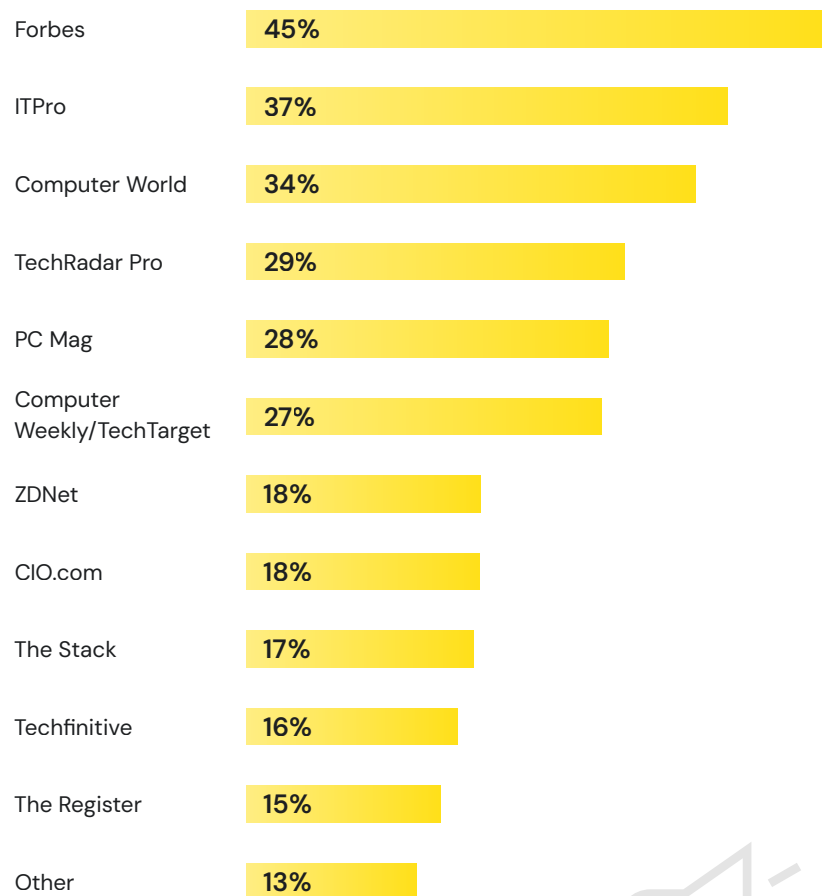
Where do you typically like to learn about new cybersecurity solutions?

(Rank by most important)

1 Analyst reports

2 Recommendations from industry friends

3 Webinars

4 Trade shows

5 Social media

6 Podcasts

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