WHITEPAPER

Strategic IT Priorities for CIOs, CTOs and IT Leaders in 2025 and Beyond

Expert insights for IT leaders to reduce risk, optimise spend and drive tech value for their business.

The Strategic Role of IT is Growing But So is the Pressure

Today's CIOs, CTOs and IT leaders are expected to play a central role in driving business performance, managing risk and supporting long-term growth. Yet, this shift is not without its challenges. More than 40% of enterprise systems are now beyond end-of-life support, creating a growing burden of technical debt on IT teams, and creating pressure.

At the same time, business expectations are rising. Deloitte reports that over 60% of technology leaders now report directly to the CEO, underscoring their strategic importance in setting the tech strategy. As IT budgets are rising, so is the scrutiny, especially as leaders seek to control cloud costs, improve ROI and manage risk.

This whitepaper explores the key strategic priorities that matter most to IT decision-makers in 2025:

- The critical priorities for IT leaders dealing with ageing systems and evolving security risks

- How AI is transforming every phase of IT delivery, from code to infrastructure

- Where IT leaders are finding the greatest value in emerging technologies

- The growing complexity of the IT buying process newer generation of decision-makers

- The role of managed services in extending capacity and bridging skill gaps

Whether you're refining strategy, overhauling infrastructure or rethinking governance, this report offers practical insights to help CIOs, CTOs and IT leaders navigate the top technology trends shaping 2025 and beyond.

1. The New Mandate for IT Leadership

IT as a Business Driver, Not a Back-Office Function

The perception of IT as a support service has shifted decisively. In 2025, IT leaders must align tech investment with strategic outcomes and deliver measurable business impact. In fact, 68% of IT decision-makers say brand awareness among stakeholders makes it easier to gain internal buy-in, showing how visibility and credibility within the IT function now influence strategic traction.

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Why CTOs and CIOs Are Under Pressure in 2025

47% of IT admins cite managing too many point solutions as a top challenge, with 26% still relying on 11 or more tools to meet user needs, reports Jumpcloud. At the same time, 72% have experienced or anticipate layoffs, further stretching capacity. The complexity is mounting, but expectations remain high: to lead securely, efficiently and at speed.

Budgets Are Up, Expectations Are Higher

64% of businesses are planning to increase their IT budgets in 2025 but so is the scrutiny around how those funds are spent. For CIOs and CTOs, it means more than just managing the budget. It means proving value and aligning every purchase with strategic outcomes.

IT Operations Leaders of 2025

CIOs and CTOs' roles have evolved from maintaining systems to leading digital transformation and driving change across the business. Reports find that 85% of IT professionals now want unified systems to simplify operations and reduce complexity. IT leaders are now expected to shape procurement decisions, support cross-functional alignment and ensure that technology investments contribute directly to business growth.

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2. Infrastructure at a Tipping Point

Legacy Burdens and Digital Transformation Readiness

While the businesses call for agility and speed, core infrastructure is falling behind. Deloitte reports that 74% of UK businesses consider digital transformation their most important investment, yet 30% still lack a transformation strategy, and nearly a third lack understanding of emerging technologies. This gap is only widening due to ageing servers and increasingly complex hybrid environments.

Cloud-First Becomes Cloud-Fractured

Multi-cloud, hybrid, co-location, edge, the options are endless, but so is the complexity. Cloud infrastructure services alone are projected to contribute over £106 billion to the global managed services market by 2032. But with growth comes fragmentation. Reports suggest that 43% of enterprise projects stall during the product evaluation stage, often due to infrastructure uncertainty or mismatched requirements.

74%

of UK businesses believe that digital transformation is the single most important investment they can make for their business.

Modernisation Demands More than Tech Upgrades

Upgrading infrastructure today is not just about faster servers or cloud-native platforms. It means rethinking architecture, automating processes, embedding security and scaling without waste. 39% of IT leaders now spend between 26%-50% of their IT budgets on licensing fees, revealing how tech sprawl eats into budgets and stalls progress.

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What Comes Next: Infrastructure That Manages Itself

Looking ahead, the focus is shifting to self-healing systems, AI-enabled monitoring and infrastructure as code (IaC). Gartner highlights autonomous operations as a key trend for 2025. IT leaders who invest in these capabilities now will be better positioned to absorb change, scale quickly and redirect teams to higher-value strategic work.

3. AI Transformation at Scale

Turning AI into Operational Advantage

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is used by 40% of businesses today, with an additional 22% planning to adopt it within the two years. What began as pilot projects and proof of concept is now evolving into core infrastructure decisions. CIOs and CTOs are increasingly responsible for identifying not only the right AI tools, but also the right use cases that deliver measurable value.

40%

of businesses currently use AI, with an additional 22% planning to adopt it within the next two years.

Where AI Is Delivering Value for IT Leaders

For tech leaders, AI transformation touches every part of the stack. 42% of businesses plan to invest in AI-related IT tools within six months, but success isn't just about adopting new tech; it depends on strategically integrating AI across five key areas to unlock its full potential and drive meaningful business outcomes:

- **Engineering:** Automating testing, deployment and QA processes
- **Talent:** Reskilling teams for AI-aware roles in ops and development
- **Fin Ops:** Forecasting and optimising costs in AI-heavy workloads
- **Infrastructure:** Designing scalable environments for compute-intensive models
- **Cybersecurity:** Responding to the growing threat of AI-generated attacks

AI ROI: Who's Seeing Results?

Data shows 77% of businesses plan to implement AI initiatives within the next year. But only a subset are seeing strong returns. These are typically businesses that have clear governance in place, cross-functional ownership and tight integration between AI objectives and business goals. Teams that are prioritising AI into operations and aligning use cases with measurable outcomes are the ones seeing the most consistent results.

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4. Security, Compliance and Trust

Risk in Every Direction: Endpoint to Identity to Cloud

IT teams now face risks across devices, identities, networks and cloud environments; all intensified by remote work, AI adoption and tool proliferation. 60% of IT admins say security is their top challenge in 2025, with 33% having experienced AI-generated attacks. As systems decentralise, they become more vulnerable to security threats, leading to a greater need for visibility and control.

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From Afterthought to Boardroom Priority

Security and compliance are now board-level priorities with implications on reputation, operations and revenue. Only 21% of SMEs have a comprehensive disaster recovery plan, and 34% of IT teams report failing or struggling with compliance audits. Regulatory frameworks are tightening, placing even greater pressure on CIOs and CTOs to lead the charge.

Zero Trust and the Rise of Security Platforms

Point solutions are being phased out in favour of unified security platforms. Gartner reports a strong shift towards architectures such as Zero Trust, Secure Access Service Edge (SASE) and Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) to strengthen resilience. But adoption alone isn't enough. Only 30% of IT admins apply critical patches within hours of release (43% say days), leaving critical systems vulnerable.

What High-Performing IT Teams Do Differently

Businesses that get security right don't just invest in tools; they build a culture of security. They simplify the stack, prioritise staff training and invest in automation to respond faster. Increasingly, they also lean on specialist partners to fill skills gaps and provide 24/7 coverage. Managed services are playing a growing role here, with 63% of businesses wanting their managed service provider (MSP) to manage business security.

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of businesses wanting their MSP to manage business security, providing 24/7 coverage.

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5. Changing the Way IT Gets Bought and Backed

Complex Purchases, Bigger Committees

The IT buying process has grown longer and more layered. Today's tech purchase takes 6 months on average, with 28 people involved in shaping the decision. This reflects broader stakeholder interest, but also introduces risk: too many inputs can stall progress. For CIOs and CTOs, it means being both technical experts and internal evangelists, able to align business priorities with IT outcomes.

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of IT admins cite managing too many disconnected point solutions as a top challenge.

The Generational Shift in Tech Buying Behaviour (Hello Gen Z!)

A new generation of IT decision-makers is emerging, and they're changing how technology gets evaluated and adopted. Gen Z buyers rely less on traditional channels. In fact, 54% use YouTube to stay informed, preferring short, visual content over long reports. This means success now depends on delivering insights in formats that connect with younger, digital-first stakeholders.

The MSP Value Case: Beyond Cost-Saving

Managed services model is no longer just about cutting costs. MSPs are now seen as strategic enablers. 76% of businesses plan to increase investment in MSPs this year, because of better security coverage, cloud performance and 24/7 monitoring. Great MSPs don't just plug gaps; they extend capability and bring clarity to complex environments.

What to Look for in a Strategic Partner

Businesses are increasingly looking for partners who can support hybrid infrastructure, manage security and offer tailored solutions for their business needs. 63% of IT leaders want MSPs to take on cybersecurity, while 53% also want help with SaaS management. The ability to scale services, adapt quickly and integrate with internal teams has become a key part of the decision-making.

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63% of IT leaders want MSPs to take on cybersecurity.

72% of IT admins have experienced or expect layoffs in 2025

CIOs and CTOs: Strategic IT Priorities for the Next 12 Months

80% of CIOs have expanded their role, with 18% leading non-IT functions, reports Gartner. This shift reflects the increasing strategic influence of CIOs beyond traditional IT responsibilities. However, this expanded role comes with high expectations to drive both innovation and cost savings simultaneously.

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Here are the top priorities for CIOs, CTOs and IT leaders to deliver measurable impact in 2025:

- **Align IT with business goals:** Support faster, smarter decision-making.

- **Prove value, not just performance:** Link tech spend to growth and efficiency.

- **Modernise for AI readiness:** Replace legacy systems and boost cloud integration.

- **Link Streamline tech stack:** Consolidate tools to cut costs and reduce complexity.

- **Double down on proven AI:** Focus resources on initiatives that have proved ROI.

- **Strengthen AI foundations:** Prioritise governance, ownership and alignment.

- **Embed security by design:** Use Zero Trust and DevSecOps from the start.

- **Adapt to new buyers:** Engage younger, digital-first decision-makers.

- **Extend IT capacity with MSPs:** Fill skill gaps and scale with the right partner.

IT That Delivers More, Costs Less

Retail Assist has over 25 years of experience in helping businesses gain tighter control over their IT; strengthening performance, streamlining operations and enhancing security while ensuring every investment is strategic and scalable. Whether you're looking to reduce overheads, extend internal capacity or modernise your technology estate, our managed services are designed to deliver more value with less cost to your business.

What's Different About Retail Assist?

✅ Customer experience is at the core of everything we do

✅ Over 25 years of IT support experience across diverse sectors

✅ Access to specialist knowledge, skills and advice

✅ Proactive monitoring to prevent issues from occurring

What Can We Help You With?

Managed IT Services   **Strategic IT Consulting**   **Cloud Migration and UEM**

End-User Computing   **Security and Compliance**   **View all services**

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Whether you need expert consulting, end-user support or secure infrastructure management, we help you reduce costs and unlock long-term value from every tech decision.

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