

Market Guide for Microsoft Product Support Services

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Initiatives: Technologies and Markets

Microsoft products often represent a major share of an organization's software and SaaS infrastructure, and Unified Enterprise is often the default support offering. Sourcing, procurement and vendor management leaders can use this guide to evaluate alternative support solutions to optimize value.

Overview

Key Findings

- The cost of Microsoft's Unified Enterprise (formerly Unified Support) increases annually in response to increases in licensing spend, and many customers struggle to justify and/or afford it.
- As part of that justification, Microsoft does not require organizations to purchase support for security fixes, product updates or maintenance.
- SPVM leaders are often unsure of the options available, the evaluation criteria and the ramifications of using a third-party provider for Microsoft support.

Recommendations

SPVM leaders responsible for contracting Microsoft support services should:

- Examine the features and pricing of Microsoft's support offerings, and then work with Microsoft to obtain transparent and predictable pricing.
- Evaluate third-party support offerings (and their references) proactively to identify credible alternative providers that could save your organization 30% to 60% versus Microsoft direct support.

- Use Gartner's five-step process for evaluating third-party Microsoft support service providers. Verify the viability of third-party support (including delays that could occur when escalation to Microsoft is required) against direct Microsoft support.

Strategic Planning Assumption

By year-end 2028, market share for third-party providers of Microsoft support will be 25%, up from 15% in 2023.

Market Definition

Gartner defines Microsoft product support services as support for Microsoft products, delivered either directly from Microsoft or indirectly from an alternative support provider. Technical support services for Microsoft products help customers in medium to large organizations resolve operational problems. (Smaller organizations likely use free support.) Gartner considers any provider of support services for Microsoft products — including Microsoft itself — to be part of the market for Microsoft product support services.

The typical customer looking at alternatives to Microsoft support is doing so to mitigate the high cost of Microsoft's Unified Support, potentially saving 30% to 60%. The market for alternative Microsoft support providers began to see increased interest in 2017 when Microsoft replaced Premier Support with Unified Support, which in many cases was a far more expensive support offering. Unified Support is priced as a percentage of product purchases. The percentage applies to the entire direct Microsoft licensing estate and starts at:

- 7.5% for products in the user category
- 10% for products in the Azure or server category

Unified Support replaced Microsoft's Premier Support offering, which allowed organizations to buy a number of hours of support that they could ration and use during the year for proactive or reactive services. While many organizations complained that it was difficult to properly estimate the number of hours they would consume with Premier Support, many of those same organizations now lament the high cost of Unified Support.

Third-party support providers typically offer other value-added services, such as support for products from other vendors, including IBM, Oracle or SAP. As a result, customers can simplify operations by consolidating on a single provider for multivendor support. While Microsoft will work with other vendors to resolve issues with Microsoft products, it does not support other vendors' products.

Standard Capabilities

The standard capabilities for this market include:

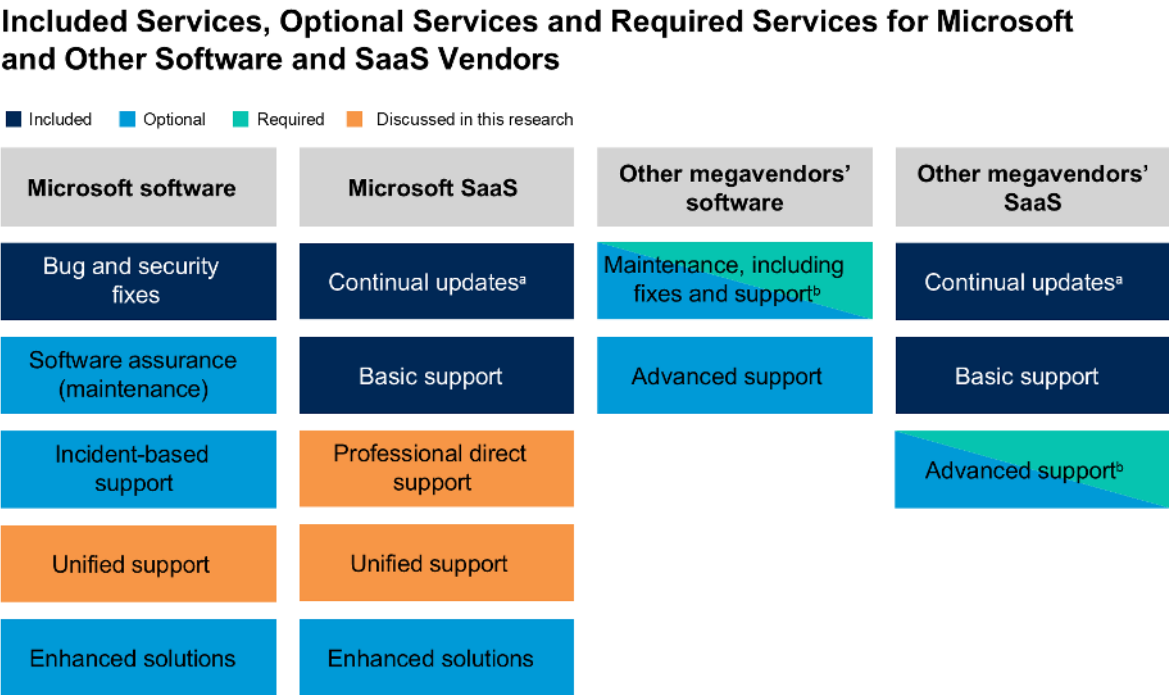
- Microsoft product support services provided by skilled technicians
- Proactive support (engineering services, workshops and trainings) and reactive support
- Product installations
- Bug finds and fixes
- Performance tuning

Market Description

Microsoft is the natural vendor to provide support for its own products and has thousands of support customers. But sometimes, Microsoft does not meet customer expectations for the level of support, speed of response and resolution, or price, thus driving interest in an alternative provider. In 2025, approximately 80% of recent Gartner inquiries on Microsoft support indicated dissatisfaction due to support quality, price or both. ¹

Microsoft differs from most software and service providers in one important aspect: While many providers offer bundled packages that include maintenance, support, as well as bug and security fixes, Microsoft sells maintenance and support separately. For on-premises software, bug and security fixes are generally included for the purchased version during its supported life cycle, while access to new versions typically requires Software Assurance. For online services, such as Microsoft 365, bug fixes, security updates and feature updates are included as part of the service. For online service support, Microsoft's approach aligns more closely with that of other vendors.

Figure 1: Included Services, Optional Services and Required Services for Microsoft and Other Software and SaaS Vendors



Source: Gartner
^a Continual updates also include bug and security fixes.
^b The policy varies by the vendor.
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For example, because bug and security fixes are included in Microsoft product purchases, customers can source advanced product support from other providers.

What You Need to Know

With the transition from Premier Support to Unified Support (now Unified Enterprise) and the restructuring of Microsoft’s support pricing model, many organizations reported significant cost increases. Based on Gartner client inquiries received during the retirement of Premier Support and migration to Unified Support, some organizations experienced support cost increases of 200% or more, resulting in budget shortfalls ranging from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

This becomes particularly relevant as organizations transition to cloud services, increase their Microsoft Azure expenditure, incorporate M365 Copilot, and upgrade from lower-cost Microsoft Office or Microsoft 365 (M365) bundles to more expensive ones. ²

Since the introduction of Unified Support, Gartner has observed a gradual increase in the adoption of third-party Microsoft support providers. Gartner estimates that only 5% to 10% of medium and large Microsoft customers used third-party support in the years immediately following Unified Support's launch. Today, that figure is approximately 15% to 20%, and Gartner forecasts it will reach about 25% by year-end 2028. This trend reflects growing customer interest in alternatives to Unified Enterprise, which continues to serve the majority of medium and large Microsoft customers.³ Smaller customers (those with a licensing spend that would cause a Unified Enterprise agreement to be under US\$50,000) are more likely to use free support or get their support from a consultant or system integrator.

Market Direction

Since Microsoft's 2017 launch of Unified Support (now Unified Enterprise), the volume of inquiries to Gartner regarding support services for Microsoft software products has increased by 50%.

This rise in interest was driven by an upward pressure on the price of Microsoft's Unified Enterprise due to:

- Increased spending on Microsoft products and online services, especially Azure, Copilot, and upgrades to the M365 Bundles (E3 to E5, E5 to E7).
- Decreases in Microsoft discounts on Unified Enterprise.
- The loss in the Software Assurance 24x7 Problem Resolution Support benefits (SABs) that Microsoft awarded to customers based on spending, culminating in their elimination in February 2023 (customers in longer-term agreements may still have SABs).
- Microsoft's pricing policies for Unified and the lack of a transparent breakdown of the fees.
- True-ups or other large software purchases, which can create spikes in Unified Support costs (see [Reduce Microsoft Unified Costs: Negotiate or Use Third Parties](#)).

Gartner finds that most organizations that remain on Unified Enterprise do so based on discounts, credits or ongoing projects.³ However, these organizations get more serious about considering alternative providers in each successive renewal as the prices increase and discounts decrease.

This dynamic will lead to significant growth for third-party support, which could result in changes to how Microsoft prices Unified.

Market Analysis

Gartner's 2026 IT Key Metrics Data reveals that software, SaaS and cloud solutions, areas where Microsoft is heavily represented, account for 36% of IT spending across industry software portfolios (see [IT Key Metrics Data 2026: Industry Measures – Executive Summary](#)). For organizations with a major megavendor presence, such as Microsoft, adopting lower-cost third-party support can effectively offset a substantial portion of the annual maintenance and support cost increases typically imposed by these large vendors.

According to the [IT Key Metrics Data 2026: Applications Measures – Analysis](#), 17% of application spending in 2025 was on external services, with 43% of that being on support. Customers dissatisfied with Microsoft seek better quality support, but thus far, there is no proven track record of third parties providing better support than Microsoft. It can be difficult, but not impossible, for a third party to provide better support than the manufacturer.

Some of this may happen because much of Microsoft's front lines of support has been outsourced, and during inquiry calls with Gartner, many criticize the escalation process as taking too long. A third party that increases skills, closes on first call and streamlines escalation processes could be an improvement over the current Microsoft support. Of course, most third-party providers must escalate incidents to Microsoft when they cannot resolve them. At that point, the customer's experience will be similar to having support directly from Microsoft, if not slightly worse (for example, due to a delay in getting to Microsoft or having the third party involved in Microsoft remediation processes).

When third-party support is a feasible alternative, the significant opportunity to reduce costs for software maintenance and support can be a "quick win." For organizations challenged to meet cost-saving goals and initiatives, third-party support can help keep budgets flat by mitigating the often 20% to 40% inflation of Microsoft product support services.

Gartner sees three primary types of third-party support vendors competing in this market:

- **Service providers:** These providers sell value-added services but not necessarily products. They may be a Microsoft partner or an independent service provider (for more information on this difference, see [Market Guide for Independent Third-Party Software Support for Megavendors](#)). Support is often their entire business model, aiming to offer comprehensive Microsoft support across the whole stack, which allows a client to replace Unified Enterprise. Options are also offered a la carte, such as buying Enhanced Designated Engineers instead of adding that service onto the Unified Enterprise agreement with Microsoft.
- **Software resellers:** Most organizations purchase their hardware and software through a software reseller. Squeezed by lower margins on hardware and software, resellers have long looked to provide more profitable services to boost their bottom line. However, selling support for Microsoft products puts resellers in the uncomfortable position of competing with their biggest partner for support business. This support may not be as robust as that offered by a service provider due to competing resources with the reseller side of the house. This results in tickets being escalated to Microsoft instead of handled in-house.
- **Microsoft's Cloud Solution Provider partners:** CSP partners, many of which are also software resellers, must provide support for the Microsoft products they sell through the CSP program. This positions them well to leverage their support capabilities to also provide support for the Microsoft products they do not sell through CSP.

Although each of these types of vendors offers Microsoft support, they should not necessarily be considered a full replacement for Unified Enterprise. The decision to obtain support from a service provider or a software reseller comes down to what their support offering actually entails: a full Unified Enterprise replacement or pieces of it sold as value-added services.

Service Scope

Microsoft has a broad catalog of products, and it supports them based on its published support life cycle.⁴ Third parties may not support every Microsoft product, and organizations using more niche products should ensure that potential providers support all their products that require support.

Conversely, third-party providers sometimes provide support for products that are end of life and no longer supported by Microsoft, so organizations that require support for these types of products (not including fixes or updates) may look to third parties. Most offer additional services similar to Microsoft's, including services similar to Designated Support Engineering, workshops and training sessions.

However, some add-ons, such as Value Acceleration Services, Azure Rapid Response and Support for Mission-Critical, are not available from third-party support providers. Further, the scope of some providers' services extends beyond Microsoft to other vendors. Organizations looking for a single provider to support multiple vendors should consider third parties.

Industry Adoption

Organizations that have mission-critical requirements (like financial services, healthcare and government) are less likely to use third-party support because they lack access to Microsoft-only add-ons such as Azure Rapid Response or Support for Mission-Critical. These Microsoft services include escalation to Microsoft product engineers, which cannot be replicated by a third party.

Pricing

Pricing for Unified Enterprise starts at 7.5% to 10% of an organization's purchases from Microsoft. Most third-party providers of Microsoft support services sell their services by the hour, by the seat, by product or per server. Hourly support is usually less expensive, but it has the same rationing issue as Premier Support had. These hours can be used for either proactive or reactive support and are valid for 12 months from purchase. Hourly rates typically range from \$250 to \$700, but higher rates may include account management time.

Seat-, product- or server-based pricing may be more expensive than hourly support, but it has fewer limitations, and the vendor is taking the risk of heavy use by the customer. Most customers expect to save 30% to 60% by going with a third-party provider instead of Microsoft direct support. In fact, many customers will not take the risk of using a third-party provider unless they can achieve savings in the 50% range. ²

See Table 1 for an overview of pricing differences between Microsoft's Unified and third-party support.

Table 1: Microsoft Unified vs. Third-Party Support

Aspect	Microsoft Unified Enterprise	Third-party support
Pricing model	Percentage of annual licensing spend (7.5% to 10%)	Hourly, per seat, per product or per server
Cost range	Starts at \$50,000 minimum contract price	\$250 to \$700 per hour
Annual increases	20% to 50% year-over-year increases due to licensing increases	Can increase rates, but typically still 30% to 60% savings compared with Microsoft

Source: Gartner

Representative Vendors

The vendors listed in this Market Guide do not imply an exhaustive list. This section is intended to provide more understanding of the market and its offerings.

Market Introduction

Gartner considers any provider of support services for Microsoft products — including Microsoft itself — to be part of the market for Microsoft product support services. Table 2 includes a representative sample of Microsoft support vendors and their Microsoft support service offerings.

Table 2: Representative Vendors of Microsoft Support Services

(Enlarged table in Appendix)

Vendor	Headquarters	Type of vendor
Bluesource	London, England, U.K.	Service provider and reseller
CDW	Vernon Hills, Illinois, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
Definity First	San Diego, California, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
enVista	Chicago, Illinois, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
IBM	Armonk, New York, U.S.	Service provider
IncWorx Consulting	Schaumburg, Illinois, U.S.	Service provider
Insight	Chandler, Arizona, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
Microsoft	Redmond, Washington, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
Park Place	Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
Quisitive	Dallas, Texas, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
Rimini Street	Las Vegas, Nevada, U.S.	Service provider
Sentinel Technologies	Downers Grove, Illinois, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
SHI	Somerset, New Jersey, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
SoftwareOne	Stans, Switzerland	Service provider and reseller
Trusted Tech	Irvine, California, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
US Cloud	St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.	Service provider and reseller

Source: Gartner

Vendor Identification Tool for Microsoft Product Support Services

When to Use

Enterprise buyers and sourcing teams should use this Tool along with this Market Guide because it provides additional data for each vendor.

Technical support services for Microsoft products target Level 2 and Level 3 engineers and architects working in medium to large organizations (including government and education organizations). Such services help resolve problems with configuration and operation of Microsoft products and solutions.

Vendor Identification Tool

Directions for Use

Enterprise buyers and sourcing teams should use this Tool when embarking on a vendor evaluation process. Generate a list of suitable candidates, and then gauge the ability of each candidate to address your unique business problems and technical concerns.

Market Recommendations

Those looking to evaluate Microsoft support offerings and engage with these providers should take the following steps to verify the viability of third-party support (compared with support directly from Microsoft) and to conduct a risk-benefit assessment:

- **Step 1: Affirm that you need an annual contract for support.** How many incidents per year require support from a provider to resolve? How long have they taken to resolve without a support provider? What is the cost of not having a support provider?
- **Step 2: Evaluate whether Microsoft support is essential or if a third-party provider can meet your needs.** While third parties may resolve issues at similar speeds, escalations to Microsoft can introduce delays and may not match the capabilities of services like Azure Rapid Response. However, third-party providers may offer unique benefits, such as support for end-of-life products no longer covered by Microsoft.
- **Step 3: Send RFPs to support providers.** Request service, SLAs (including SLAs for escalation to Microsoft) and price lists that match your specific requirements for Microsoft product support. In addition, request references from customers whose main product support requirements resemble yours.
- **Step 4: If you decide to try third-party support, run a proof of concept.** For comparison, evaluate the services by purchasing a small block of hours, preferably while your Microsoft support contract is still in effect.
- **Step 5: Negotiate with both Microsoft and third-party providers to ensure your desired proactive and reactive services are included.** The proposals don't need to be equivalent — Microsoft may bundle services you don't need in its Unified Enterprise contract. Consider alternatives like Professional Direct (which is available for limited quantities of M365 and Dynamics 365), which may offer sufficient support at a lower cost.

Evidence

¹ Based on inquiries about Unified Support taken between January 2025 and December 2025; approximately 80% of Gartner clients express dissatisfaction with the quality and/or price of Microsoft Unified Support.

² Based on Gartner client inquiries about Microsoft product support taken between September 2023 and September 2025.

³ Based on Gartner client inquiries and discussions with third parties and Microsoft during 2025.

⁴ [Microsoft Lifecycle Policy](#), Microsoft.

Note 1: Gartner's Initial Market Coverage

This Market Guide provides Gartner's initial coverage of the market and focuses on the market definition, rationale for the market and market dynamics.

Document Revision History

[Market Guide for Microsoft Product Support Services - 4 June 2025](#)

[Market Guide for Microsoft Product Support Services - 31 January 2024](#)

[Market Guide for Microsoft Product Support Services, Worldwide - 3 August 2022](#)

Recommended by the Authors

Some documents may not be available as part of your current Gartner subscription.

[3 Steps to Strategic Negotiation With Microsoft](#)

[How to Negotiate a Microsoft Unified Support Agreement](#)

[Market Guide for Independent Third-Party Software Support for Megavendors](#)

[Magic Quadrant for Outsourced Digital Workplace Services](#)

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IBM	Armonk, New York, U.S.	Service provider
IncWorx Consulting	Schaumburg, Illinois, U.S.	Service provider
Insight	Chandler, Arizona, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
Microsoft	Redmond, Washington, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
Park Place	Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
Quisitive	Dallas, Texas, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
Rimini Street	Las Vegas, Nevada, U.S.	Service provider
Sentinel Technologies	Downers Grove, Illinois, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
SHI	Somerset, New Jersey, U.S.	Service provider and reseller
SoftwareOne	Stans, Switzerland	Service provider and reseller
Trusted Tech	Irvine, California, U.S.	Service provider and reseller

US Cloud

St. Louis, Missouri, U.S.

Service provider and reseller

Source: Gartner